

# **Report on the CMEC Forum on Adult Literacy**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2006 Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Adult Literacy Forum, *Investing in Our Potential: Towards Quality Adult Literacy Programs in Canada*, was the second of two CMEC-sponsored national consultations conducted as part of its Literacy Action Plan. An earlier forum held in 2005 examined school age-literacy and numeracy. By bringing together a broad section of stakeholders and responsible agencies in the forums, CMEC sought to “better understand the challenges of literacy and identify the strategies to increase literacy significantly,” with the aim of helping “Canadians acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world.”

Both forums were undertaken at a time, and in a context, in which Canada faces a future shaped by the confluence of two realities. First, those nations best prepared for success in the emergent knowledge-based global economy and society are those that have highly literate workforces and populations. Second, Canada as a complex, multicultural society will in the future increasingly rely on the literacy and learning capacities of its citizens to achieve greater social cohesion, more active participation in civil society, attainment of equity and social justice goals, savings in social welfare safety net and health care expenditures, and the maintenance of a high quality of life.

However, recent international literacy survey results have revealed that over the last decade there has been no reduction in the large proportion of Canadian adults whose levels of literacy are below those necessary for full participation in society and the workplace. Currently forty per cent of Canadians, or nine million adults, have literacy and numeracy difficulties, and Canada remains in the middle of the list of nations who constitute our economic competitors.

Two threads, Canada’s global economic competitiveness and national quality of life, were woven into virtually every forum panel and workshop presentation – and were issues underscored by keynote speakers. The forum commenced with a panel of three experts who compared Canada’s performance with that of other countries on two international surveys, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD & Statistics Canada, 1995) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) (Murray, Clermont & Binkley, 2006). Canada’s results in particular were contrasted with those of the Nordic countries, whose populations demonstrate the highest levels of literacy internationally.

Speakers voiced a consensus that advanced nations were not waiting for Canada to catch up. Other countries have national policies and programs in place to improve their current standings. Further, developing nations such as India and China are making strong literacy improvements that will shortly enable their workforces to match the productivity and efficiency of those in developed countries. A sense of evidence-based urgency permeated this panel’s argument that Canadians cannot afford to be complacent about our future national literacy requirements.

The second panel spoke of the need for innovative, coherent, long-term, and whole-of-government efforts to strengthen adult literacy provision at the community level. They spotlighted three exemplary Canadian initiatives. British Columbia's Literacy Now project has focused on building partnerships through a community-development approach aimed at embedding literacy within learning communities of place across BC. Saskatchewan's new Literacy Commission has a strategy to establish an integrated, comprehensive, community-level, and e-learning access system to extend literacy learning opportunities throughout the province. Finally, the need for comprehensive government–community collaboration was emphasized as the daily challenges of an urban, community-based literacy provider in Ontario were outlined. The need for sustainable, whole-of-government support for community-level initiatives and the futility of “drive-by funding” were among the lessons learned and expressed by the panellists.

The third panel provided macro- and micro-economic evidence of the many positive effects of adult literacy. One recent C.D. Howe Institute report (Coulombe & Tremblay, 2005) that emphasized the direct and indirect effects of high adult literacy levels, chiefly in terms of gains in economic productivity, was a touchstone for this panel. Also cited were recent studies confirming that important social returns were obtained from investments in literacy, including social cohesion, participation in civil society, and reduced reliance on social safety nets. Finally, the means of identifying the key cost elements of a pan-Canadian adult literacy initiative were discussed, and, in view of the ubiquitous distribution of benefits from literacy throughout society, the recommendation was made that governments assume the costs.

Panellists called for federal-provincial/territorial collaboration to develop a Canadian adult literacy strategy. Underlying much of the panel discussion were the research findings of the international surveys regarding the role of adult literacy in the development of both human and social capital. The analyses confirm the importance of quality adult literacy provision to the welfare of individuals, families, and communities in our knowledge-based economy and society. Literacy was confirmed to be crucial to the economic and social welfare of Canada.

The keynote speakers highlighted foundational aspects of adult literacy initiatives from their disciplinary, policy, and community experiences: from Canada, a recent human-social capital analysis linked to the impact of adult literacy; from the UK, an extensive national adult literacy strategy; and from Australia, a leading-edge learning city initiative that embeds literacy within a learning community of place. Thus, contemporary economic theory and practice from the field of political economy merged with current social learning theory to contribute key elements of a conceptual framework for future Canadian adult literacy initiatives.

A workshop on workplace literacy emphasized the need to build on successful experiences in several jurisdictions including Quebec and Manitoba. Further, effective tripartite, that is, labour, management, and public adult education agency collaborations must be employed to implement quality workplace literacy programs. Linking workplace

with family and community literacy approaches was identified as a future area of action research.

The workshop on quality adult literacy provision emphasized the need to tailor programs and services to learner needs and assets. A college president emphasized the need for adult-oriented curriculum and materials, used by professional instructors or community volunteers trained in adult education approaches, as a major step in quality provision. A First Nations practitioner illustrated how Indigenous values and learning practices are essential to effectively engage Aboriginal literacy learners. A college literacy instructor, who had once been an under-educated worker, provided a case study illuminating the benefits of adult literacy education to not only himself and his family but also his current students.

A third workshop focused on thorny issues related to measurement and evaluation of literacy program success. A leading Canadian university researcher argued that there is a clear lack of research funding and personnel in Canadian universities and proposed a multi-faceted research framework for the future. The executive director of the anglophone national literacy movement proposed consideration of a ten-year results-based action plan developed through a national consultation process that included francophone and Aboriginal organizations. A senior Quebec official outlined the development of a provincial system using literacy indicators that involved creation of a cluster of learner retention and achievement indicators and their integration into institutional achievement plans.

### **Specific Recommendations Voiced By Forum Participants**

The forum's panels, plenary sessions, workshops, and discussions generated many requests and recommendations for action by CMEC. There was a very clear wish and hope, if not an expectation, among the forum's panellists and discussants that CMEC actively consider, and be guided by, the following 18 recommendations, some of which overlap and replicate others to some degree.

Overall, in the opinions of the recorders, forum participants were in agreement on the following statements and recommendations that CMEC

1. Foster a whole-of-government approach to literacy policy and provision, by providing strong, cooperative, exemplary leadership in enabling collaboration at the national level among its member provinces and territories and
  - a) other ministerial bodies such as those responsible for labour markets, libraries, early childhood education, Aboriginal affairs, immigration, citizenship, and health
  - b) anglophone, francophone, and Aboriginal literacy NGOs that are already actively cooperating in the literacy field

2. Collaborate with the federal government, the Canadian Council on Learning, and other national stakeholders (universities, colleges, and foundations) concerned with development of a national literacy research strategy that will focus on improvement of policy and practice in this field
3. Convey to the federal and provincial/territorial governments the urgent need for coherent, sustained policies and programs “embedded” in multi-departmental strategies to meet Canadians’ long-term literacy learning needs in all areas of their daily living and career needs
4. Recognize the breadth and “downstream” benefits of literacy initiatives that accrue in society and enable literacy programming to be extended to programs with goals that include social cohesion, improved health and safety, increased workplace productivity and efficiency, civic/community participation, family and intergenerational literacy, English-as-a-second-language fluency, and community economic development
5. Set concrete targets for national and provincial/territorial improvements in, for example, literacy learning participation rates, qualification achievements, and functional-literacy-level improvements for the next decade
6. Establish local, regional, and national literacy improvement goals and ensure progress toward their achievement is regularly reviewed and made public
7. Acknowledge that literacy benefits accrue both narrowly to individuals and broadly to communities and accept that the benefits of literacy to a knowledge-based society and the economy are so clear and ubiquitous that the costs of adult literacy provision are best borne by the federal and provincial/territorial governments
8. Place emphasis on developing high-quality adult literacy programs through systematic planning for inclusion of previously ignored elements of quality programming for adults including professional development and training for professionals and volunteers; identification of quality indicators; program monitoring and evaluation for application at local, national, and international levels; instructional resources development; research at all levels, including support for practitioner-managed research-in-practice; and support for the aggregation and dissemination of best-practices research
9. Acknowledge that adult basic education and literacy courses are most effective and most likely to maintain learners’ motivation when taught by trained adult educators using adult-oriented materials within an adult education curriculum
10. Acknowledge the value of learner-centred programs and seek means to grant recognition to the prior informal and non-formal learning as well as broad life experiences of adults
11. Adopt the principle that literacy programs designed in direct response to learners’ immediate needs are most likely to be successful
12. Encourage labour and management and their regional counterparts to collaborate in developing and implementing not only workplace but also more comprehensive, community-based literacy strategies within the provinces and territories

13. Promote the active participation of all stakeholders and intergovernmental, interdepartmental, and intersectoral collaboration in literacy policy and program planning conducted by the provincial and territorial governments
14. Accept that Indigenous adult basic education programs are urgently required for urban and rural Aboriginal communities and that their planning and instruction must be responsive to Aboriginal learners' preferred cultural learning and participation practices
15. Address the special needs of learners with various forms of disability
16. Celebrate the historic learning traditions of various ethnic communities and mobilize around appropriate traditional literacy initiatives
17. Ensure that future policy and practice is grounded in the real-life needs and assets of learners by involving adult literacy learners in appropriate ways
18. Actively involve adult literacy learners in development and evaluation of customized literacy projects

## **A Contextual Framework for the Consideration of Recommendations**

In this final section of the executive summary, we present a conceptual grouping, or “roadmap,” of the recommendations to draw together the contexts and intentions behind the specific requests for actions and recommendations listed above. We think this reorganization of the recommendations presents them as a coherent argument, or framework, for focused action by CMEC.

The recommendations address directions, actions, and changes for the support of future adult literacy provision in Canada across jurisdictions, at a number of levels of program design and delivery and over a range of levels of specificity. Some recommendations focus on the need for collaboration to overcome jurisdictional barriers to the development of a national adult literacy strategy; others address policy issues at the provincial/territorial government and public institution levels; and others focus on issues of partnership and the engagement of stakeholders in program planning and implementation.

### ***Jurisdictional Issues***

While the provision of public education is the constitutional role and responsibility of the provinces and territories, the Government of Canada has historically played an important leadership role in adult education and manpower development through working arrangements with the provinces and territories to fund programs, build infrastructure, and respond to national and regional needs for human resource development. Further, the federal government has fostered literacy programs across Canada for many years by working in collaboration with agencies in civil society. These arrangements have not generated a national strategy for adult literacy education. Through several specific recommendations and many voiced concerns, forum participants clearly recommend that CMEC engage with the federal government and collaboratively develop the long-term, comprehensive, national strategy that all stakeholders agree is crucial.

### ***Rationale for Public Adult Literacy Education***

A Canadian strategy to achieve CMEC's Literacy Action Plan's goals "to increase literacy levels of all Canadians" and to "help Canada acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world" requires agreement on the broad, foundational principles underlying the value of literacy to Canadian society. Forum participants have expressed the view that literacy for Canadians is both a societal and an economic imperative in the emerging knowledge-based economy and society. The forum's discussions and recommendations to CMEC regarding the rationale for a national literacy strategy are that the strategy must seek to address pressing issues of social cohesion, inclusion, equity, and social justice in addition to the equally pressing issues of labour market and human resource development, economic efficiency and productivity, and Canada's competitiveness in the global marketplace.

### ***Political Will and Sustainability***

From optimistic keynote speakers and panellists to disappointed and jaded advocates, forum participants were unanimous in their assessments that changes in national literacy levels require a long-term, sustained commitment of political will and funding. Short-term projects with marginal funding have not been demonstrated in Canada, or in any other jurisdictions, to achieve important substantial changes in a population's literacy. A strong consensual recommendation from the forum is for CMEC to recognize in all its actions and planning that political will and firm long-term financial commitments are essential for the allocation of public funds in the amounts necessary, over the time required, to build and sustain a quality adult literacy system. It is recommended that in the global knowledge-based economy and society such well-resourced initiatives be clearly identified by CMEC as an investment strategy.

### ***Whole-of-Government Programming***

Many employed Canadians have been reported to be functioning at undesirably low levels of literacy, including public employees. The success of many government programs across many sectors of the community, business, and industry are dependent upon adults learning new skills and knowledge. The success of these programs is directly related to their target audiences' capacities to learn and their levels of literacy. Forum participants expressed the importance for all governments, from federal to municipal, to become model employers in the provision of workplace literacy education and recommend to CMEC that its members provide leadership and develop the workplace literacy education programs required across all their departments and agencies.

Participants further recommended that governments embed literacy initiatives across the government portfolios while ensuring coherent and collaborative ministry/department initiatives with various structures, ranging from creation of literacy commissions or secretariats, through to high-level interdepartmental standing committees.

### ***Partnerships***

Drawing on the findings of research, the lengthy experience of community-based adult education programming, and the shorter intensive experience of recent workplace education programming, many forum participants, including policy developers, program planners, instructors, and representatives of business and labour, confirmed that partnerships are essential to the success of workplace and community-based adult literacy education. Forum participants recommend to CMEC that all stakeholders in literacy education be included at all levels of planning, from policy analysis to program delivery and the evaluation of outcomes.

### ***Innovation***

In addition to calling for the sufficient and sustained funding of current successful adult literacy initiatives, forum participants supported innovative approaches that range from embedding literacy provision in learning communities of place (e.g., learning towns and regions) through to experimental approaches involving new technologies – often in concert with face-to-face learning opportunities. Forum participants recommend that CMEC support the development, assessment, and, when successful, dissemination of innovative practice.

### ***Research and Evaluation***

Many forum speakers and discussants made frequent references to the importance of research and evaluation. It was clear that consensus existed regarding the role of research as a foundation for training literacy practitioners, an important source for the identification of best practices, an essential element for needs analyses, and a necessary process in policy advocacy and design. Further, many spoke to the lack of commitment by program funders to program evaluation and research. The recommendations to CMEC that emerge from these statements and workshop presentations are that adult literacy research funding be expanded, that research findings be disseminated nationally and internationally, and that evaluation and monitoring of progress be included in the design and implementation of literacy programs.

### ***Program Planning***

In addition to the prior recommendations regarding adequacy of funding, the role of partners, and the need for monitoring and evaluation to be integral aspects of literacy programs, other aspects of program planning that they considered important for CMEC to act upon were frequently introduced by forum participants. On several occasions barriers to learning opportunities were identified that had their bases in, for example, policy, regulations, funding rules, and institutional self-interest. Participants were clear in their wish for CMEC to systematically address the needs to remove barriers to learning, ensure that all programs were learner-centred, use only adult instructional resources, and have instructors be trained adult educators. Further, forum participants recommended that all programs and credentials be “laddered” or articulated to support learners’ access to higher-level programs and certification in trades and employment.

### ***Equity and Outreach***

Indigenous education, immigrant language education, provision for the disabled, and women's numeracy needs were at times the focus of discussion, and forum participants acknowledged that several populations and groups of Canadians had particular needs that placed them at a great disadvantage when seeking full participation in Canadian society and the labour market. CMEC was requested through a number of presentations and recommendations to recognize, as a priority, the needs of groups for customized literacy programs and learner support.

### ***Direct and Indirect Learner Support***

Adult literacy learners live their daily lives challenged by the detrimental effects of their low literacy. Research confirms that the majority of Canadians with literacy levels I and II are among the unemployed and working poor. Often they lack access to convenient, affordable transportation, literacy materials, computers, affordable daycare, and many basic necessities that the more highly literate and employed simply take for granted. The enduring effects of their life experiences include a lack of self-confidence, social isolation, poor communications skills, and a lack of knowledge about available resources. While attendance in a literacy program is a valuable opportunity for life change, the learner's success is dependent upon regular attendance over an extended period of time, the continuing support of family members and significant others, and, not least, financial resources to bring social and economic stability to their lives.

Among the direct and indirect resources adult literacy learners may require are transportation; shelter, food, and clothing for themselves and their dependants; health and dental care; educational and career counselling; computer access; and learning support materials. Literacy providers require funds to meet some of these needs such as daycare and counselling services. However, learners must receive when necessary direct financial support that may be available through the Employment Insurance Commission (EIC), Workers Compensation Board (WCB), or a provincial/territorial ministry of social services, each agency having its own regulations and criteria for eligibility. The development of a national literacy strategy will require coordination, integration, and coherence of existing policies and programs to extend our social safety nets and ensure we do not waste public resources on literacy programs that are unable to foster learner retention or progress.

Forum participants affirmed the principles of universality, as, for example, in our national health programs, and it is recommended that CMEC provide leadership to ensure adult literacy learners across Canada have access to equitable support at the levels required to remove them from poverty for the duration of their full-time participation in the learning sector.

## FORUM BACKGROUND

In March 2005, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) adopted a Literacy Action Plan to increase literacy levels of all Canadians and to help Canada acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world. The plan recognizes that literacy is essential to the social and economic well-being of all Canadians and that even though youth tend to perform well on international literacy tests, some 40 per cent of adults lack the basic literacy skills required for successful participation in our modern economy and society. Significant challenges continue to face our attempts to build and enhance literacy skills for some regions, ethnic communities, and disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.

Two national forums have been held under the Literacy Action Plan. The first, in Toronto in November 2005, examined early school-age literacy and numeracy. This, the second, addressed adult literacy at a time when the results of the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) report were resonating across the country. The fact that there has been no marked reduction in the percentage of Canadian adults in the two lowest literacy levels in the recent period as compared to the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) results is justifiable cause for concern and self-assessment.

Almost 20 years ago – in February 1988 – CMEC published an assessment of adult literacy in Canada (Cairns, 1988). The author, John Cairns, cited federal and provincial publications that highlighted the major social and economic costs of illiteracy. He also surveyed the range of adult literacy provision in Canada and concluded that while effective response to illiteracy required inputs from all societal sectors, “[the] major response – policies, political will, most resources, standards, and organizational structures must come from governments.” Cairns saw that “illiteracy is one component in a package which includes – among other things – social marginalization, under-employment and poverty” and “the most effective and realistic response to illiteracy is one which takes account of those social, cultural, and economic issues with which illiteracy is inextricably associated.”

In March 1988, CMEC produced a statement that reiterated the continuing scope of the adult literacy challenge and proposed the sharing of information on literacy programs and identification of current and needed programs and databases on programs and materials. Further, the statement called for clarification of the roles of the federal government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) as partners in the literacy field and the convening of a national working group with representation from all three sectors. The statement called upon CMEC members to place emphasis on providing publicity and information on adult literacy, coordination at the provincial level, training for literacy workers, responding to the diversity of adult learner needs with a wider variety of programs, creating coherent and consistent programs and standards, and increasing funding for literacy instruction.

Today, three major related aspects of the emerging knowledge-based society are creating pressure for more effective CMEC actions than have been delivered in the past to ensure higher literacy for all Canadians: the globalization of markets, rapidly expanding information and communication technologies, and new knowledge, particularly in the sciences and technologies. This wave of change challenges even the best educated and is now a threat to individuals and jurisdictions that do not possess the literacies necessary to respond to and participate in a modern learning economy.

## FORUM PANELS

### **Panel 1: Adult Literacy: How Far Have We Come? Canadian and International Experiences in the Field with a Focus on Practical Advice and Recommendations**

#### **Purpose**

The objective of the panel was to present global and national pictures of adult literacy referring to international and national studies in determining the scale of need for adult literacy education. Speakers assessed results of a recent international adult literacy survey (ALLS), compared it with a survey conducted one decade earlier (IALS), and highlighted jurisdictions' performances and best practices. The panel members identified gaps and challenges shared across Canada and provided recommendations to bridge them.

#### ***European Approaches to Adult Literacy***

*Kjell Rubenson Professor, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC*

Professor Kjell Rubenson opened his presentation with a review of European countries' rates of participation in organized forms of adult learning. Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – reported approximately 50 per cent of their citizens engaged annually in adult learning, the UK, Switzerland, and the Netherlands had rates ranging from 35 per cent to almost 50 per cent; France, Germany, and Italy reported rates of 20 per cent to 35 per cent; Greece, Portugal, and Poland had rates below 20 per cent.

Rubenson's analysis of national approaches to adult literacy programming revealed a variety of objectives, forms of adult education, alternative means of financing, and agencies engaged in policy and program implementation. Where the objectives of literacy programs were intended to meet labour market skill demands, ministries/ departments of education were the main actors, relying on compulsory free public education. Literacy for competence development to ensure employment typically involved ministries/departments of labour, with special-needs programs supported by grants for those learners in greatest need. Where developing the workplace for learning was the priority, social affairs ministries/departments targeted immigrant groups and provided tax exemptions to subsidize program delivery. The main actors implementing equity literacy programs were local governments focusing on co-financed labour market training. Social integration through education involved social partners in policy and program development, often focusing on information technology (IT) literacy supported by study leave stipends. Individual learning routes engaged the voluntary sector in delivering non-vocational qualifications funded by municipal grants.

The final category of objectives, strengthening democracy and cultural and social values, saw a multitude of actors providing a great array of forms of adult education

including popular education, citizens' courses, and work-based learning courses supported by, among other means, government-established individual learning accounts, loans, and grants. European adult literacy programs are instruments of national and local government policy for the achievement of a great range of meta- and local-level economic and social goals.

Rubenson continued with a comparison of two approaches, the UK qualification and skills strategy (Skills for Life) and the Nordic human capital model. In the UK, national goals have been set for the achievement of numeracy and literacy skills certificates (1.7 million by 2007) by targeted groups including the unemployed, benefit claimants, marginalized youth, and adults in disadvantaged communities. To accelerate the participation of the under-educated and low-skilled, the strategy provides a combination of free tuition, learner grants, and opportunities to train during working hours. Skills for Life has the capacity to provide outreach courses, counselling services, and access to national testing services. The strategy introduced a national labour market qualifications framework with standards based on skills analyses, recognition of informal and non-formal learning, and a training program with required qualifications for adult education instructors. Among the challenges faced by the strategy are its high costs, achieving seamless integration of courses among providers, and achieving quality education and training with too few qualified instructors.

The Nordic model focuses on human capital and participation, with human capital development being an integral component of all policies; integration of general education and labour market training; and congruency between high skill rhetoric and lifelong learning policy. Central to the Nordic model is the established model of industrial relations and participation with its four core elements of open corporate structure, strong unions, strong employer associations, and a mix of centralization and decentralization. A second core component of the Nordic model is the region's established frame and culture of civil society, popular education and broad participation activated by social movements, individual and collective aspirations, and non-traditional learners. Funding for adult education in the Nordic model is typically public financing, earmarked for target groups and accompanied by broad criteria for assessing program success.

Rubenson observed that across Europe and North America there is now clear evidence of the relationship between economic inequality and inequality in the distribution of literacy. High literacy levels are associated with economic equity and low literacy with economic inequality. The Nordic countries cluster at the positive pole of the continuum, and Canada, the UK, and the USA occupy the negative pole. Professor Rubenson concluded by identifying the most important lessons to be learned from European nations' experiences with national literacy improvement strategies. According to Rubenson, for Canada to be successful, a long-term plan is needed with a sustained political commitment for its implementation, targeted funding, enhanced institutional infrastructure and capacity, and the combining of civil society, community, and workplace strategies for literacy development.

## ***The Literacy Challenge for Canada: Implications of Findings from ALL 2003***

*Satya Brink* Director, National Learning Policy Research, Learning Policy Directorate, HRSDC

Satya Brink, Director of National Learning Policy Research, HRSDC, presented forum participants with a national overview of the distribution of low literacy. Using the criteria of IALS levels one and two, Brink informed the forum that approximately nine million Canadians (42%), between ages 16 and 65, were estimated to have low levels of literacy. The populations of the Atlantic provinces (excluding Nova Scotia), the Northwest Territories (NWT), and Quebec have the highest proportions of low literate adults ranging from 50.4 to 42.4 per cent of their populations. While 42.2 per cent of Ontarians have low literacy, the prairie provinces, Nova Scotia, Yukon, and British Columbia have the smallest proportions of their populations with low literacy (between 33.0 per cent and 39.7 per cent). Nunavut, with 72 per cent, has the highest proportion of low-level literacy adults in Canada – a proportion equivalent to some Third World countries. In terms of numbers, rather than population proportions, 3.4 million people or approximately 38 per cent of Canada's low-literate population live in Ontario.

Canadians' numeracy scores on the IALS were lower than their literacy scores in every province and in nine provinces and the territories, the mean numeracy score was at level 2. The number of people with both levels 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy is approximately six million. Approximately one million persons have a combination of low literacy (level 2 and below) and higher numeracy (above level 2), and 2.5 million have higher literacy (above level 2) and low numeracy (level 2 and below).

Analysis of the IALS data confirms that low levels of formal education are strongly associated with low literacy. Between 47 per cent (Ontario) and 69 per cent (Newfoundland) of provincial low-level literacy adult populations have not completed high school. The proportions for NWT and Nunavut are 72 per cent and 78 per cent respectively. The data also confirm a strong relationship between age and literacy level 1. This finding can be explained by the fact that many older Canadians did not attend or complete high school in their youth. A large proportion of Canada's immigrants (60%), both recently arrived and established, have low levels of literacy in English and French. Among those with low levels of literacy in Ontario and British Columbia, approximately 30 per cent are immigrants. A substantial proportion (70%) of adults with low levels of literacy are employed, with the majority employed in five labour market sectors: manufacturing; trade, finance, insurance, real estate, and leasing; accommodation and food services; construction; and health care and social assistance. Brink observed that the data, from Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC's) perspective, confirms that a workplace learning strategy is the preferred means for literacy program delivery.

Brink drew five key messages for literacy policy and programming from HRSDC's analyses of the current literacy situation in Canada. First, low numeracy and literacy are major problems in every province and territory in Canada with numeracy being a

bigger challenge than literacy. Second, although older generations have larger proportions of low literacy, persons with low literacy can be found in every age group, and programming needs to be focused across generations. Third, HRSDC recognizes literacy to be a foundational skill, and a high proportion of those with low literacy have less than a high school education. Fourth, most Canadians with low literacy are working, and a high proportion of them can be trained in the workplace. Finally, better immigrant services are needed to improve immigrants' literacy in English and French.

### ***The Central Role of Literacy in the Health and Wealth of Provinces: Evidence from IALS, ALLS and PISA***

*T. Scott Murray Director, Learning Outcomes, UNESCO Institute for Statistics*

Scott Murray began his presentation with a review of the national policy issues that guide Statistics Canada's work on adult education, literacy, and skills assessment and insights into what is known about the effects of skills on economic, educational, social, and health program outcomes. He asserted that public policy makers have come to care about skills for three reasons. They worry that the level and distribution of skills are insufficient to sustain economic growth ("greed"). Policy makers are seeking to limit the growth of social inequality, particularly labour market related, as inequalities are unfair and reduce the incentive to work ("fairness"). They are also interested in possibilities for reducing the demand for and the costs of delivering health and education services through investments in education and skills and getting value for monies invested ("value").

Murray noted that international survey data show Canada's average skill level is relatively high in comparison to many other nations. However, we also have a very wide range of skills, an occurrence frequently associated with high levels of social and economic inequality and a possible indicator that we are not well placed for future economic competitiveness. Within Canada, low levels of literacy are unevenly distributed, suggesting internal inequalities. Murray concluded that governments need to think more carefully about investing in skill supply today because (a) changing demographics mean that fewer youth and young adults are entering the labour force; (b) increased opportunities to benefit from participation in the global marketplace demand more and higher skills from the existing workforce; (c) since multinational global outsourcing and threats to jobs are inevitable, job security will be dependent on continuing learning and training; (d) new information and communications technology in all market sectors is increasing demand for skills; (e) skill-based inequalities are increasing in the workforce; and (f) the developing world's skill base is increasing to make foreign nations more competitive and pressing the developed nations to acquire more skills to retain their advantage.

Murray led participants through analyses of Canadian data that revealed the large extent of literacy's impact on individuals' average duration of employment and earnings and on wage differences between immigrants and native-born workers. Many occupations now require computer literacy and, as might be expected, literacy has an

impact on the likelihood of persons becoming high-intensity computer users. Estimates of high income and computer utilization reveal that high-level literacy workers will enjoy well-paid, stable employment and contribute to growing wage inequality in Canada. Again, as might be anticipated, postsecondary education attendance is positively associated with high literacy. Research also provides new evidence of the positive effects of literacy on the health of individuals. Canada's most literate populations enjoy the best physical health.

He observed that literacy data can now also explain a significant proportion of the differences in macro-economic outcomes between Canadian provinces, as well as between Canada and other countries. Average skill levels explain 55 per cent of the differences in the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) between 1960 and 1995. Assuming that past relationships still hold, a 1 per cent rise in average literacy will contribute a 1.5 per cent increase in GDP per capita and a 2.5 per cent increase in labour productivity. While increasing the literacy levels of the most literate does not translate into GDP growth, improvements in literacy at the lower levels can result in large differences. Low skill levels appear to retard GDP growth and inhibit rates of technical innovation and adoption of more productive work organization. Internally, interprovincial/territorial flows of skills have a strong positive effect on provincial GDP growth rates with skill increases leading growth. High skill labour also influences labour volume, with workers in more skilled countries taking some of the productivity benefits in time off and thereby perhaps earning an improvement in their quality of life.

Murray noted that the quality of Canada's skill flow from the secondary education system and through immigration has also been investigated to determine if labour market demand is being met. He observed that research results indicate that while Canada's average secondary school performance is world class, a significant proportion of grade 10 students in some provinces are not meeting the study's benchmark norms, which are the achievement levels of students in the BC public school system. In terms of immigration, while recent arrivals are more skilled than previous cohorts, they are less skilled than Canadians who have lower levels of education. Given the tight relationship between labour market success and literacy skill level, this is an unfair position for immigrants to be placed in as they are admitted to Canada with a recognizable barrier to their future success, and insufficient opportunities for language learning are provided after they arrive. While adult education and training can enable skill acquisition, Canadian participation rates are only average when compared to those of our key trading partners, and the majority of training by employers is provided to more skilled workers.

Murray also pointed out that changes in countries' average scores over the duration of the decade since the first international survey data have not been similar. For example, while German-Swiss prose and document literacy average scores increased by 11.2 and 8.9 respectively, US prose average scores declined by 5.1. In Canada there were no changes in the national average scores between the two surveys. Some of the

explanation is found in skill loss, the attrition of literacy skill over time. Those who previously had the lowest skill levels demonstrated gains in scores over time, while those who previously had higher-level scores experienced a decline. Adults from low socioeconomic backgrounds have lost literacy skills enough to offset any gains from other skill flows. Ironically, most of this skill loss is concentrated in adults who had access to postsecondary education, perhaps due to over-education, poor quality education, insufficient economic and social demand for skill use, or some combination of these effects. Skill loss varied greatly between Canadian provinces for as yet unknown reasons. Over the long term, differences in literacy skill levels between provinces and territories have been declining, and the range of average scores around the Canadian mean is now quite small.

In closing Murray concluded that there is an urgent need to reduce the numbers leaving secondary schools with low literacy skills; provide immigrants with the learning opportunities they require to improve their language skills in English or French and participate fully in Canada's economy and society; and increase investments in adult education that incorporates both literacy and the technical training needed to ensure Canada remains competitive in a global economy.

## **Panel 2: Adult Literacy: How Are Canadian Jurisdictions Responding?**

### **Purpose**

This panel showcased a variety of delivery systems for meeting the needs of adult literacy provision, including the use of information and communications technology. It sought to highlight an innovative adult literacy strategy and program in each of three jurisdictions across Canada.

### ***The Saskatchewan Literacy Council***

*Margaret Lipp Saskatchewan Learning, Regina, SK*

The Saskatchewan Government recently established a Literacy Commission to systematize and strengthen the province's capacity for literacy learning. Using a model of lifelong education, the commission will work to build on public confidence in the education system and existing infrastructure for literacy learning; extend access to literacy education through Community Net, the province's high speed Internet network; better utilize existing databases; build on a legacy of strong, community-based literacy programming; capitalize on the provincial culture of collaborative partnerships; and take advantage of the consensus among political parties to establish literacy as a core human and community value.

The commission broadly defines literacy to include information, communications, scientific and technological skills, numeracy, and personal/social functioning. A literate person is conceived holistically as someone who contributes successfully and participates equitably in the social and economic life of the family, community, and society. The commission conceptualizes programming within a lifelong and lifewide

model of learning, where individuals' literacy needs are intertwined with available social and educational supports throughout their life span and where individuals rely on different social and educational supports at different stages of life.

Provincial Commissioner Margaret Lipp stated that the commission's goals include raising literacy levels; establishing equitable access to literacy development opportunities; systematizing support for literacy providers; expanding public awareness of literacy needs and developing community capacity for literacy development; integrating literacy goals into all government department programs; and providing province-wide access to quality literacy programs in an e-learning environment.

Lipp concluded by identifying the six broad literacy programming areas that have been targeted as high priorities for action: early childhood, adult, ESL and first language, family, workplace, and Aboriginal.

### ***Literacy Now***

*Brenda LeClair Literacy Now, Vancouver, BC*

The Executive Director of Literacy Now, Brenda LeClair, told forum participants how each Olympic Games seeks to leave behind a heritage for the host community. Literacy Now is one of several provincial 2010 Winter Olympics Games heritage projects (see [www.2010LegaciesNow.com](http://www.2010LegaciesNow.com)). LeClair used a 10-minute DVD presentation, normally used in community group meetings, to introduce her audience to Literacy Now's mission.

In the video, persons in the street and literacy field workers spoke about their understanding of literacy and its importance in their lives. People defined literacy in their own words and identified the kinds of learning goals they had. In plain language, the DVD presented answers to the questions "What does literacy mean to people today?" "What value is literacy to the community?" and "Why focus on literacy at this time?"

The community context for the video was that of a small, rural, resource-based town where young and old, males and females, and employees and hobbyists talked about their learning needs and interests, and local literacy resource persons outlined the benefits of community-based literacy programs. Literacy and learning were declared to be lifelong pursuits, and future health, prosperity, and happiness for persons and communities were contingent upon the uses made of literacy. Strong emphasis was placed on cooperation and the opportunities that can be created when people work together to secure the resources to establish literacy programs in the community. In this respect Literacy Now is a catalyst for generating new ideas, energy, and support for community literacy.

Thirty grants, with a value of approximately \$10,000 each, have been awarded to assist approximately 85 BC communities working collaboratively to conduct needs analyses and plan for the implementation of literacy learning courses and projects.

One comment from a resource person featured on the DVD summed up the challenge Literacy Now makes to community groups: “It would be criminal, knowing what we now know about the connection between literacy and life chances, not to act on the knowledge we have.”

### ***Emerging Directions in Literacy Work***

*Nadine Sookermany Parkdale Project Read, Toronto, ON*

Nadine Sookermany began her presentation using guided visual imagery to engage the audience in a metaphorical understanding of literacy as water, “It goes everywhere ... underground ... you just can’t see it, but it’s flowing all the time” (Lefebvre 2006). Like water, literacy today is essential for survival, and, like water, it is needed for different uses at different times in a person’s life.

Referring to her own qualitative research Sookermany identified some of the important non-academic, social, and personal outcomes of literacy learning, including increased self-confidence, use of voice, and a capacity to build relationships. These outcomes become visible when a social practice definition of literacy is used to illuminate it as embedded within social, political, and cultural practices and personal circumstances. This view of literacy is congruent with UNESCO’s definition of literacy as “culturally specific and socially connected” (UNESCO, 2004).

Speaking to her work on the HRSDC Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills, Sookermany talked about how Canadian literacy jurisdictions must move beyond economic and labour market indicators of literacy learning outcomes to consider broader, quality-of-life indicators of under-served populations, including Aboriginals, immigrants, learners with disabilities, and those living in remote communities. Strategies to move literacy agencies, programs, and evaluation studies in these new directions, according to Sookermany, will require greater cooperation and coordination between ministries/departments, an end to the traditional silo-based planning and funding of programs, and greater flexibility for program decision making at the local level. Examples of these new approaches are emerging with the establishment of the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission and the Ontario Adult Education Policy Unit that reports to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. One particular Ontario program, One Stop, was described as a single framework service to address the multiple labour market needs of Ontarians.

Research practice in Ontario, according to Sookermany, also serves to demonstrate how Canadian jurisdictions are responding to changes in the adult literacy field. Recent studies have, for example, drawn attention to the value of literacy to adults beyond an improvement in their economic status and have brought new understanding of challenges faced by literacy learners. Examples of new understanding cited by

Sookermany include the importance of self-managed learning, the role of literacy in combating racism and exclusion in the community, and the negative effects of domestic violence and anxiety on women's capacity to engage in literacy learning. Practitioner research has also revealed major barriers learners face including childcare and transportation costs and availability. In closing, Sookermany stated that literacy workers, at all levels, must extend themselves beyond seeking consensus around issues such as program funding and management and commit themselves to the welfare of literacy learners and the realities of the programs they work in.

### **Panel 3: Economic Rationale for Investments in Literacy**

#### **Purpose**

The panel sought to determine what the latest research tells us about the macro and micro economic rationales for investing in adult literacy programs. On a broader economic level, studies were cited indicating that literacy skills contribute to higher productivity and lower demands on health systems – both valuable outcomes at a time when many governments are facing widespread challenges presented by an ageing population and the need for the vocational retraining of older workers.

#### ***Investing in Literacy: Challenges and Considerations***

*Yvon Laberge ExCEL Learning Concepts, Edmonton, AB*

From Yvon Laberge's view, implicit to the theme of economic rationales for literacy investment is the need to invest more in literacy programs. There has been a significant investment in literacy, yet we have no discernible gains in the population's literacy levels over the ten-year span between IALS (1994) and ALLS (2005). Laberge asked a series of questions about the efficacy of interventions, the amounts of money invested, the programs invested in, and changes in the literacy landscape.

Over the last decade, approximately \$300 million has been invested by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), but not for program delivery. It is impossible to obtain precise investment figures from provincial and territorial governments because each jurisdiction uses a different definition of literacy, and different costs are included in the figures reported by each. The proportion of the overall population in need of higher levels of literacy has not changed, but the population has increased. Since 1994 an additional one million people are estimated to be below literacy level 3. Had nothing been done, the current situation would have been worse, and now efforts are needed to both retain acquired skills and raise literacy levels. To proceed, Laberge argued, three fundamental questions must be answered: what would it cost to make a significant improvement in Canada's levels of literacy; what factors need to be considered in estimating the costs; and who should pay the costs?

To calculate the costs, all the usual direct and indirect program delivery expenditures need to be incorporated, including salaries, instructional materials, plant operations, evaluation, and partner support costs. Learner support costs ought to include

employment insurance and similar benefits, as well as financial incentives, child-care, travel, loans, and bursaries. The benefits of literacy accrue directly and indirectly to individuals, families, communities, and the nation in terms of improved economics, health, and quality of life. Therefore, everyone should participate in the investment for the population to acquire higher literacy. This will require actions across all ministries/departments and jurisdictions. Adult education is largely a provincial/territorial jurisdiction, yet historically there has been, and possibilities continue for, federal involvement. Possible areas for future federal involvement in literacy development include increased support to the NLS, increased investment in federal-provincial/territorial partnership programs, and development of national standards for literacy programming.

Laberge's closing recommendation was that, to achieve a fully literate Canada, all the stakeholders must work together. Literacy development is a collective challenge that requires a collective and coordinated response.

### ***Literacy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes***

*Craig Riddell Professor, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC*

Education is one of the best predictors of “who gets ahead.” Better-educated workers earn higher wages, have greater earnings progression over their lifetimes, experience less unemployment, and work longer. Higher education is also associated with longer life expectancy, better health, a lower proclivity to engage in criminal behaviours, and greater civic participation. The strong positive association between education and earnings is one of the best-established relationships in social science.

Most research on the determinants of labour market success uses relatively crude indicators of human capital such as educational attainment and years of work experience. However, individuals with the same education and years of experience may have substantially different skills. Education and experience are inputs into the production of human capital, not direct measures of the outcomes, such as a set of skills, competencies, and knowledge. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the relationship between direct measures of skills, competencies, and knowledge and labour market outcomes. To address this problem, Green and Riddell (2003) used the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) to investigate the relationship between education, skills, and earnings.

Conventional estimates of the returns to schooling and experience confound two effects. The first is the impact of education and experience on skill production – the relationship between human capital inputs and outputs such as literacy skills, or “skill production effect.” The second is the value placed on various skills in the labour market – the relationship between literacy skills and market earnings or “market valuation effect.” When skills are not directly observed, the best one can do is analyze the relationship between human capital inputs and labour market outcomes. Direct measurement of skills allows researchers to unpack these two effects, that is, to

estimate the skill production and market valuation effects.

Green and Riddell (2003) find that formal education exerts a substantial effect on the production of literacy skills in Canada. However, they conclude that labour market experience has essentially no net effect on literacy production. These results suggest that policies aimed at improving cognitive skills such as literacy should focus on formal schooling. Policies designed to increase work experience can lead to earnings growth but appear unlikely to enhance the cognitive skills of the workforce. The research results also imply that a significant amount of the return to education represents the combined effects of the contribution of schooling to producing literacy skills and the value placed on literacy in the labour market. Indeed, Green, and Riddell (2003) estimate that about one-quarter to one-third of the return to education is associated with these effects. The remaining three-quarters to two-thirds of the “return to education” reflects the impact of education on the production of skills other than literacy.

Several studies have found that the work experience and schooling of immigrants in their country of origin is valued much less than the experience and education of comparable Canadian-born persons. Using Ontario data, Ferrer, Green, and Riddell (2006) examined the impact of literacy on immigrant earnings. They concluded that immigrants and native-born Canadians receive similar returns to literacy skills, contrary to discrimination-based explanations of immigrant vs. native-born earnings differentials. Among the university-educated, literacy differences account for about one-half of the earnings gap between immigrants and the native born. However, low returns to foreign-acquired experience have a larger effect on the gap. Low literacy among immigrants contributes to earnings differences, but it is not the dominant explanation.

### ***Literacy and the Workplace***

*Michael McCracken Informetrica Limited, Ottawa, ON*

Michael McCracken acknowledged the contributions from the panel’s two prior speakers. Craig Riddell’s work had focused on literacy as a newly studied variable that explains workplace performance, along with education and experience. The benefit from literacy was often muddled with education, even though the evidence suggests that 25 per cent to 35 per cent of the total education effect is literacy, when other variables are controlled for. Yvon Laberge’s presentation had highlighted that little is being directly invested in literacy improvement. Society requires greater investment, and new budgeting models are needed to include non-program costs such as allowances for learners’ transportation and living costs. Curricula development investments are also important. With the benefits from literacy being shared among all people in society, it is appropriate that all participate in the investment process.

McCracken then addressed the literacy challenges in the workplace. In addition to improvements in employee productivity in the workplace, he argued that literacy is desirable for other reasons, including social inclusion and citizen engagement. To understand the workplace challenge, we need to recognize the stock-flow model

underlying the employment base. The stock of literate people at the end of a period is equal to the stock at the beginning of the period plus new entrants (e.g., immigrants, school graduates, and other labour market entrants) less those leaving employment (e.g., retirement, death, emigration). It can also be expected that some reduction in the stock will occur at the beginning of the period from atrophy of existing literacy skills. Even with relatively stronger graduates from schools and immigration, it has been difficult to see substantial improvements in literacy in Canada. This suggests that the deterioration is a non-trivial effect. Emphasis on “using it” so that you don't “lose it” should permeate the workplace.

A typical firm may adjust its requirements by bringing in new people from the pool of school graduates, immigrants, and new entrants at all ages with the skills necessary to cover the deficiencies, while laying off those without the skills. However, retraining existing staff may be a more cost-effective approach. Little training occurs in most firms. Is this because it is not cost-effective, or because we don't plan for it?

On the delivery of workplace training, McCracken thought that firms themselves need to develop teams within their organizations or hire other businesses to do the training for them. Universities and colleges may be able to tailor courses to meet firms' demands. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in literacy may not be well suited for delivering literacy training at the firm level for two reasons. NGOs can do other tasks much better, and literacy training is better delivered as part of cognitive skills development. In McCracken's opinion, the best roles for NGOs may be to help put in place measurement and evaluation systems, assess progress made by governments (federal, provincial, territorial), disseminate information, support programming innovation, mobilize volunteers from all communities, and advocate for literacy in civil society, community, and workplaces.

McCracken also thought that the development of new datasets provided independent measures of education, literacy, other skills, and experience that may help researchers unravel the contributions of each element in overall employee performance. Following the same people through time – longitudinal studies – can help unscramble the influences as well, particularly if specific training episodes are noted in the record.

In conclusion, McCracken referred to Professor Riddell's estimate that a 20-point increase in the IALS score resulting from an additional year of schooling at \$10,000 per annum would translate into a cost-per-literacy-point improvement of \$500. If literacy skills are developed as part of other cognitive skills training, then the costs of training can be spread across several accounts. Given the positive outcomes from literacy in society including higher productivity, improved citizen engagement, and increased social inclusion, strong federal and provincial investment roles should be emphasized.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

### **Keynote Address 1: Improving Literacy: An Economist's Perspective**

*Michael McCracken Informetrica, Ottawa, ON*

To orient forum participants to his perspectives as an economist, Michael McCracken presented the “boxes” within which he identified his units of analysis and variables for illumination and manipulation. From McCracken's perspective, a state can take the form of three boxes: society, marketplace, and workplace. People, family, culture, education, and the social world of participation are located within the society box, with quality of life and related variables including redistribution (e.g., transfer payments) and social safety nets. The marketplace box contains the goods and services bought and sold with all their related consumer and purchaser variables, distribution, networks, and infrastructure, including transportation and communications. The workplace box contains firms, unions, capital, technologies, resources, and variables related to management and the production of goods and services. In the society box, the units of analysis are the individual and groups; in the marketplace box, the units are transactions and markets; and in the workplace box, the units are typically workers or firms. The predominant objectives in each box are prosperity in the society box, competitiveness in the marketplace, and productivity in the workplace.

Productivity, in the workplace box can be induced through improved human resources, greater investment, adoption of new technologies, better infrastructure, and productivity “twists.” The policies that stimulate these changes are those that reduce inflation, promote macroeconomic performance, and establish frameworks to support greater efforts by firms. Other policies capable of enhancing production are those that support better education and training, the capacity for skill utilization, and effective organizational structures. The purposeful manipulation of workplace variables within the box can, for example, establish employee incentive schemes, reward innovation, derive greater returns from training, and secure more capital per worker. Competitiveness in the marketplace box can be stimulated by policies that improve the marketplace's efficiency and effectiveness, build better and more physical infrastructure, establish international markets, and ensure that the rules for the conduct of business (e.g., international trade agreements) are clear, fair, and enforced. Prosperity, the objective of the society box, is achieved through increases in real incomes, social safety nets, improvements in regional economies, active citizen participation, providing community amenities, a sustainable environment, and contributing to world economies through aid and development donations.

Workplaces are changing; there is greater emphasis being placed on productivity growth and international cost comparisons, increased state mandating of labour programs and regulation, and increased use of technology to have shorter production runs and enable the use of multiple plant locations and more general-purpose factories. There are more immigrants in the workplace, and greater attention is paid to equity and discrimination concerns. All these changes and the implementation of organizational

change to gain greater employee and management flexibility demand a more educated workforce.

Citing Charles Handy, McCracken also outlined future scenarios that may include large firms having three kinds of workers: a core group of highly motivated, intense knowledge workers; a group of part-time, high turnover workers for some jobs; and other workers and organizations hired on contract. The state may push responsibilities for training, health, and child care down to firms, and workers will seek greater involvement (empowerment) in the design and organization of their work. Marketplace changes are occurring through globalization processes that create more open and competitive markets and more demanding consumers, with more choices, who will seek higher quality. Societal changes are also occurring, with more special-interest groups seeking improvements in quality of life, equity goals, more open and responsive government, and greater recognition for seniors needs over youth and parents. Changes in demographics will continue as low fertility rates persist and immigration contributes most to population growth. The demand for more education and lifelong learning opportunities will continue to expand.

According to McCracken, the future benefits of higher literacy to the individual and society will include, among other things, higher earned incomes, greater inclusion in society, and greater mobility. At the societal level, governments will derive fiscal benefits from higher-income earners, reduced demand for health and social services, less crime, and greater citizen participation. Literacy will make direct contributions to productivity through skill acquisition, participation in training, more efficient learning, improved worker safety, and enhanced social cohesion in the workplace and community. Competitiveness will also experience direct effects from improved literacy as consumers will be capable of doing more “free work” (“some assembly is required”), making greater use of e-banking and e-purchasing. More literate consumers will also seek and benefit from more choices and quality options.

The new data on literacy, earnings, and productivity enable economists, for the first time, to estimate the benefits to society of improvements in literacy levels. An increase in the literacy mean (on the current tests) of 10 points will result in a per capita income increase of 7.3 per cent (Coulombe & Tremblay, 2006). The net benefit to the GDP in 2005 after deducting the costs of achieving the literacy improvements is estimated to be over \$49 billion.

McCracken presented the forum with a “simple message” – national improvements in literacy can now be demonstrated to pay off in higher productivity, improved competitiveness, and societal improvements, and the benefits greatly exceed the costs.

## **Keynote Address 2: Skills for Life and Work: The Journey from Policy Through Practice to Progress and Promise for All**

*Barry Brooks Director for Lifelong Learning, Tribal Group, Cambridge, UK*

In 2001, the British Prime Minister launched Skills for Life (SFL), a national strategy for improving adult literacy and language skills, to secure social justice and employability for all citizens. Barry Brooks presented a history of SFL from its implementation as a centrally planned program, with clear timelines and objectives to be measured by the Department for Education and Skills. The objectives included improving the basic skill levels of 2.25 million adults between 2001 and 2010 to ensure their employability and entry to higher levels of training. Program milestones included training 0.75 million adults by 2004 and 1.5 million by 2007.

A 2001 survey of youth and adults suggested that millions of working age people had problems with basic English and mathematics. In England, 5.2 million aged 16 to 65 had literacy levels below level 1 (skills expected of an average 13-year-old), 6.8 million had numeracy skills below entry level 3 (skills expected of an 11-year-old), and 15 million had numeracy skills below level 1. Treasury officials estimated that poor literacy and numeracy cost the country as much as £10 billion (\$22 billion) a year in lost revenue from taxes, lower productivity, and the burden on the welfare state. The priority groups targeted by the strategy included unemployment benefit claimants, prisoners and parolees, public sector employees, low-skilled employed, and groups at risk to social and labour market exclusion, including parents and those living in disadvantaged communities. Brooks also stated that low numeracy was a greater concern than other forms of literacy for women as it had a greater negative impact on their employment. The SFL strategy called for the delivery of high-quality programs, boosting public demand for learning, engaging all government agencies and employers to change the country's culture of learning, enhancing the capacity of the training sector to deliver programs, and removing barriers to learning.

Skills for Life commissioned an awareness-raising campaign to encourage adults to recognize their skills gaps and “get rid of their gremlins.” The Gremlins campaign sought to remove the stigma associated with low levels of literacy and to motivate adults to “not get by, but get on.” The campaign used a free phone line and call-in centre to provide advice and information. Some described the publicity as insulting and demeaning and others as “empowering, innovative, and refreshing.” Nearly half a million adults sought free information packs through the help line, and many others visited their local colleges, adult education centres, and libraries to join one of the Gremlin classes. In Brooks’ view, without the campaign, the BBC’s year-long reading and writing campaign (RAW) for adults would not have been possible. Worse, without the extensive public support generated by the campaign, SFL might have become just another passing government initiative.

Between 2001 and 2004, SFL tested and implemented a new teaching and learning infrastructure designed to be available across all learning contexts, create equality of opportunity, and remove access barriers experienced by previous generations. The infrastructure comprised national standards, core curricula, and a new adult-teacher

qualifications framework. The desire to replace the old with the new, and the rhetoric associated with the strategy's launch, alienated some members of the literacy field. However, the majority grasped the opportunities for greater funding and new professional development programs. By July 2005, over 3.7 million learners had engaged in at least one SFL learning opportunity. Prior to SFL, around 250,000 learners received literacy learning support annually.

In 2005, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), a cross-party committee of members of Parliament, whose role it was to monitor government's response to National Audit Office reports, reviewed SFL and concluded

...2.4 million people have participated in learning, and the first milestone of 750,000 adults achieving qualifications in literacy or numeracy by July 2004 was achieved. All the elements that support good-quality learning were either non-existent or underdeveloped before 2001, whereas the learning is now underpinned by national standards and curricula...

However, while the Chief Inspector of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) acknowledged some successes, he also stated that

...this essential outreach to the people with the most pressing needs is in its early days. It is not yet a decisive righting of wrongness, which was foreseen in 1999 by the Moser Report and subsequently by the Prime Minister. It is not yet the engine of world-class skills at work which the Confederation of British industry (CBI), among others has called for...

According to Brooks, the greatest challenge SFL faced was the consequence of its own success. Before SFL there was no national requirement for instructors to be certified. To raise the quality of instruction, adult education instructor qualifications and training programs were introduced. However, the disconnect between growth in the number of instructors and the availability of training programs resulted in many courses being taught by instructors with little or no prior experience with adult learners. Instead of instructional quality increasing, the inspectorate identified disappointing and occasionally deteriorating levels of instructor performance.

Initially, the majority of literacy learning took place in Department for Education and Skills generic programs. The strategy has since been extended to include non-generic, short-term learning programs, particularly for those with lower skill levels for whom skills acquisition is meaningful and motivational. Literacy learning opportunities now exist in a wide variety of contexts delivered by a great range of agencies, for example: Further Education (FE) delivers academic and vocational courses; University for Industry offers free e-based courses; Adult and Community Learning delivers traditional local authority day and evening courses; Train2Gain trains employed workers; Offenders Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) organizes courses for corrections populations; and the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centres organize programs for the unemployed. The main providers have been the colleges (FE) with 63 per cent of SFL learners; Work Based Learning with 17 per cent; and Offenders (OLSU) with 10 per cent. Expanding

the paths to learning remains a challenge, particularly when the goal is to include those with the lowest skill levels and the least positive experiences of prior formal education.

While by traditional outcome measures SFL is a success, there are differences between the experiences reported by learners, the learning process as interpreted by instructors, and the quality of teaching and learning reported by evaluators. There are no easy explanations for these differences in assessments. Brooks stated that once learners recognized the value of learning and their need for it, they engaged and succeeded. However, educators frequently believed they had the sole right to determine how best to prescribe and judge learning outcomes. Given the diverse range of learners, some instructors and program planners tended to forget they were dealing with capable and experienced adults, ignoring their strengths while focusing on their weaknesses. "Adults with entry-level literacy skills are not entry-level adults." Successful programs provide access and flexibility to meet learners' needs at a pace, in a place, in a format, and at a time that maximizes learner engagement and success. Research confirms that youth and adults who have previously failed to develop skills are leading challenging and demanding lives. Programs that fail to recognize this are doomed to fail.

Many language and entry-level literacy learners are not completing national tests to acquire skills qualifications. Research suggests that these learners need greater access to testing services, and better tests are needed to reflect their learning styles and capabilities. There remains a lack of confidence in, understanding of, and support for qualifications at this level among literacy teachers. The ability to communicate in English, according to Brooks, is not just a skills issue, it is also a human rights issue, and SFL has illuminated how years of isolation, underachievement, and a policy vacuum have resulted in disadvantaged groups in all major cities. It is here that the two key aims of the strategy, social justice and employability, have the potential to make the most impact but may also be the most problematic area in terms of program access, equity, and quality.

In 2002, the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) was established to develop a research base to inform practice and sustain the strategy. Key aspects of the strategy studied included testing the teaching and learning infrastructure; assessing ESOL learners' needs; engaging the voluntary and community sectors; assessing learning needs; identifying organizations' approaches to delivery and achievement; and studying ways of working with differently abled learners.

One of the key settings for skills development has been the workplace. Employers and employees have had to be persuaded of literacy's relevance. For employers, the focus has been on arguments that literacy will improve profitability; for employees, the focus has been on job security. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has been a key partner, and unions now play an essential role. For unions, time off for learning is now almost as important as pay bargaining. Train 2 Gain encourages employers to permit employees to access learning opportunities during work time. Financial incentives have been made available to sustain and support learners in courses designed to eliminate skill shortages and address skills gaps in the workforce.

Skills for Life is now “embedded” in the work of most government departments and agencies. Evidence shows a positive impact of embedded literacy with the determining factor for success being a team approach, with vocational specialists who recognize the importance of literacy and SFL literacy specialists able to support delivery in a vocational context. It is now an integral part of the Department for Education and Skills’ five-year strategy to build a competitive economy and inclusive society. The general aim to improve adult literacy is now interrelated with a range of policies and programs including transforming and improving the quality of all post-16 learning, establishing partnerships with employers and reducing skills gaps, and encouraging disadvantaged teenagers to avoid anti-social behaviour, crime, and drug-taking. These overarching policies and programs address five social policy goals for youth: health, safety, life satisfaction, participation, and work.

In Brooks’ view, embedding literacy programs across all departments and agencies works only when supported by people who fully understand the importance of skills to the workforce, how best to deliver and teach them, and, most important, how to give the skills meaning and value in a context that is relevant to the learner. Embedding a national literacy strategy introduced as an economic means to an end, without social understandings or sensitivities and detached from community cultural values, will result in failure. To succeed, SFL must remain focused on both social justice and economic outcomes.

In closing, Brooks stated that SFL has benefited from sustained political determination and substantial funding from the Labour government. In 2000, £241 million (\$518 million) was spent on literacy by the Department for Education and Employment, and, by 2002, £1.6 billion (\$3.4 billion) had been committed for the period 2003 to 2006. Fifty-five per cent of funding has been for entry-level courses. In 2003-04, 70 per cent of the budget was allocated for those aged 19 and older, although they accounted for less than half of all learners. Over 40 per cent of funding in 2003-04 was provided for language study where learners accounted for less than 25 per cent of enrollees.

Today, at a time when expectations for SFL are at their highest and the strategy’s momentum is at its greatest, a new political imperative to streamline the UK’s civil service and downsize all government departments is also gathering momentum. At the heart of government, those responsible for driving SFL forward and securing its future are becoming fewer in number. It remains to be seen if passing responsibility for the strategy to partners is a journey too far. The lessons of practice show embedding can only be done effectively and successfully by committed and experienced professionals who have access to resources and the political will necessary to argue the case, change the culture, and lead the learning.

## **Keynote Address 3: It May Take a Village to Educate a Community: The Hume Global Learning Village**

*Vanessa Little General Manager, Learning Community, Hume City Council*

The Hume Global Learning Village is a network of committed people and organizations from all sections of the City of Hume, Australia, working together to help transform Hume into a learning community. Their collective goal is to enhance the social, economic, and personal well-being of individuals and the community as a whole through lifelong and life-wide learning. The Village, supported by Hume City Council, is a driving force for learning opportunities that will cumulatively contribute to reducing disadvantage and promoting positive community-wide change. Vanessa Little, General Manager of the Hume Global Learning Village, introduced forum members to the purposes, history, and work of this unique Australian community innovation. Little outlined how the role of the Hume Global Learning Village is to be a catalyst, facilitator, leader, and driver of the Council's vision for Hume as a learning community. She also described the processes engaged toward that end to link persons and resources through cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, and vertical linkages to plan, resource, and implement strategies for learning – including adult literacy.

Little described the strategic vision of the network as a “learning community:”

For Hume to be a learning community, where people embrace learning as a way of life, for all their life, thereby creating a community that values learning as the key to strengthening individual and community well-being.

A learning strategy with eight themes has been implemented. Learning Together seeks to inspire lifelong learning; establish a two-year pre-school program; support the transition from school to work and higher education; enable teaching and learning in the community; enhance and expand language, literacy, and numeracy programs in the community; improve access to computers and information technology (IT); establish one-stop learning information centres; and create a village forum to share information and stimulate innovative learning projects.

A learner-centred, community-based model for change has been conceptualized to guide the network's program development and implementation. The model focuses on meeting learners' needs and supporting their participation in learning opportunities by focusing on issues of access, motivation to learn, and skills provision. Motivation issues are addressed by initiatives that create a supportive environment for learning such as ensuring the relevance, functionality, and content appropriateness of programs; providing learner supports that facilitate participation and overcome learners' fears and anxieties; and disseminating community-wide messages that popularize community education participation and establish awareness of the importance of lifelong learning.

Issues around access are addressed by ensuring that learning opportunities that are affordable, convenient to learners' homes, businesses, leisure sites, and public

transportation and that there is connectivity among programs, resources, equipment, and learning venues. Skills issues, the how and what to be learned issues have been considered, and programs supported for implementation through informal, non-formal, and formal education methods with readily accessible information and the identification of user-friendly pathways to learning.

Programs have been developed within each of the learning model's three areas of programming. Motivation programs have included, for example, a Festival of Learning: the publication of celebratory stories of learning, teaching, mentoring, and leadership. Access programs have established schools as IT hubs, provided volunteer development workshops, and promoted engagement through community arts projects. Skills programs have included a Passport to Work project, ESL programs, and Indigenous sport, and arts projects.

Strategic development of the Village network has been sustained by activities that support innovation and the exploration of ideas from other learning communities around the globe. The network has conducted a research seminar, held a State of Learning Conference, conducted learning surveys, and outlined a comprehensive evaluation strategy to monitor and assess its achievements. The roles of participants in the network have been examined and categorized to consider how each might be supported. Network participants commonly perform the following learning support roles: pathfinder (learning advocate); teacher, coach, or guide; service provider; planner; and learning community partner. Adult literacy programs and services are, like other learning initiatives, embedded in the learning city model and have gained the support of major local employers such as Ford. That firm, for example, has provided management trainees as literacy mentors for Aboriginal adults and has enabled most of the learners to move to immediate employment.

## WORKSHOPS

### **Workshop 1: Promoting Workplace Literacy**

Moderator: *Moura Quayle Deputy Minister, Advanced Education, BC*

#### **Purpose**

The workshop sought answers to the questions: What is being done in the field of workplace literacy education and essential skills training across the country? Who is taking the lead in promoting these initiatives, and who are the partners involved? What investments are required for these programs?

Participants were also encouraged to focus on the themes of

- Encouraging the private sector to invest in workplace literacy training
- The role of the public sector in modelling literacy and essential skills training
- Strategies for implementing essential skills training in the workplace

#### ***Labour's Perspective on Workplace Literacy***

*Barbara Byers Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress, Ottawa, ON*

Currently serving her third term as Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Barbara Byers' responsibilities include education, training, and literacy and related human resource portfolios. Byers opened her presentation to the forum by reminding participants that the "elephant in the room" at literacy meetings until quite recently has been workplace literacy. Historically, Canada's record has been worse than that of the United States in the delivery of workplace training. However, we now have experience and understanding of workplace literacy that enable us to design and implement effective programs.

We know today that employers, labour, and government must work together to establish worker-centred learning that is flexible and responsive. If workplace literacy programs are to be successful, they must be built around the principles of informal adult education practice and a citizenship approach that does not narrowly define literacy to current job skill needs and does not regard literacy as a remedy for all ills in the workplace. Labour as a key player in the workplace literacy education field wishes to see quality programs implemented in ways that maximize access and enable workers to see their participation as "safe." In other words, that an employee's voluntary acknowledgement of their learning needs does not place their job security at risk.

Byers stated that in the opinion of labour, learning is more effective when delivered to people who are employed because they immediately apply their new learning to actual occupational tasks rather than learning "in the abstract" as the unemployed must. Particular aspects of workplace literacy that merit closer attention are the development of Web site learning tools, programs for municipal workplaces, ensuring access for

particular occupational groups such as postal workers, and the promotion of plain language communications skills.

Byers summary recommendations to the forum were to seek a shared vision of workplace literacy education that is worker centred; secure long-term federal and provincial/territorial government commitments and the sustained political will to ensure collaborative goals are met; secure commitment of the level of resources required for quality programs; and develop a coordinated effort among all community, business, and government agency stakeholders.

### ***Strategic Partnerships for Workplace Literacy in Manitoba***

*Sandi Howell Ministry of Advanced Education and Training, Winnipeg, MB*

Sandi Howell spoke to the forum as a government “insider” with experience in workplace literacy from policy development, partnership building, program design, and implementation. According to Howell, maintaining program relevance by responding directly to the highest priority needs of business, labour, and individual workers has been one of the keys to the success of Manitoba’s workplace-based literacy strategy.

Manitoba Advanced Education and Training began to support workplace literacy education in the early 1990s with the provision of direct delivery programs, annual funding, and the appointment of a provincial steering committee and a training coordinator. The Workplace Manitoba Steering Committee comprised representatives from business, labour, and government. Its mandate was to provide strategic advice and guidance for the provincial program; obtain funding from the federal and provincial governments; identify training needs and priorities; develop unique models of program delivery; train literacy practitioners; and raise awareness around literacy issues within the stakeholder constituencies and the public.

By 2002, provincial recognition of skilled labour shortages and an increased emphasis on workforce development contributed additional momentum to the workplace literacy strategy. In 2004, an Essential Skills Framework, with a strategic vision and key performance objectives of Manitoba Advanced Education and Training, was introduced. The framework presented a cohesive statement to guide the coordination of training across all provincial training mandates. The Essential Skills Working Group was established to share information, plan coordinated activities, identify and target service delivery gaps, and develop a strategic work plan to achieve the framework’s objectives. Since the establishment of the framework, provincial investments in literacy programming have increased substantially.

Howell observed that, in the private sector, the term literacy was difficult to promote among all stakeholders. However, consensus has been built around the federal government’s essential skills approach and its key concepts. In particular, business stakeholders have adopted essential skills concepts and terminology because this approach to workplace literacy training focuses on skills needed by employees to do their jobs; uses authentic workplace materials for instruction; and distinguishes between

academic skills, often interpreted as grade level equivalents, workplace skills, defined as occupational competencies, and essential skills, which are seen as a response to the needs of all stakeholders business, labour, and the individual employee. Businesses have invested in essential skills programming, and the magnitude of their contributions in kind have at times outweighed the investments from government funding agencies. In-kind investments have also been made by labour, but on a smaller scale.

Howell identified three highly important elements of the strategy that will need to be nourished and sustained in order to maintain the success of the Manitoba program. First, the strategy's systemic approach to planning and focus on needs identification and prioritization must be maintained. Direct delivery funding in response to the highest priority workplace literacy needs is a second important element that must be preserved. Finally, the collaborative partnerships that have been established, with responsibilities ranging from policy advocacy to program implementation, have been an integral part of the formula for success and remain a key element for future programming. Partnership development in Howell's view is so important that it now needs to be included as a legitimate area of professional training for future literacy practitioners.

### ***Basic Training in the Workplace: A Story of Effectiveness***

*Jean-Denis Julien La Table des responsables de l'éducation des adultes et de la formation professionnelle des commissions scolaires du Québec (TREAQFP), Sherbrooke, QC*

Jean-Denis Julien identified four key factors that have contributed to the effectiveness of the training program developed by TREAQFP, a network of Quebec school board adult education and vocational training managers: political will, investments, shared expertise, and a common frame of reference.

The first factor, political will, is needed to develop government policy on adult education and training that makes clear the actions needed and goals to be attained by training and also to strengthen the culture of continuing education and training, enhancing the field's capacity to deliver programs. Quebec is faced with an ageing workforce and a declining birth rate that necessitate greater participation in lifelong learning to maintain and enhance the workforce's skills. More active participation in social, cultural, and economic life is necessary if Quebec's quality of life is to be sustained. Julien emphasized that the learning opportunities to be provided must be developed through a shared responsibility among stakeholders. Training is best delivered through a diverse range of venues and modes of learning. Government and partner agencies' roles are to provide more adult education programs, enhance and maintain employees' skill levels, grant official recognition to the value of training completed, eliminate access barriers, and reduce learner withdrawal rates to improve training program efficiency and effectiveness.

Investments, the second factor, have been available through the 1 per cent provincial manpower training fund (FNFMO) that requires a firm to contribute 1 per cent of its

payroll to a provincial training fund if the firms' annual training expenditures are less than 1 per cent of their payroll costs. In addition to Le Fond National de Formation de la Main-d'Oeuvre (FNFMO), funds have been available through regional initiatives and the Commission des Partenaires du Marche du Travail (CPMT). The CPMT has developed special funding programs and established benchmarks and criteria for program evaluation. With a number of different sources of investment in literacy training, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of the ministries/departments and agencies engaged in training be made clear and not be in conflict. Regional-level funds are required if regional training needs are to be met; funders must ensure that priority needs are met first, especially for basic training. These funding requirements are best achieved through direct, targeted grants to program partnerships. Other funding agencies that have responsibilities for the delivery of literacy training include the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sport, Employment Quebec, and joint federal-provincial agencies engaged in literacy work.

Describing the operations of TREAQFP, Julien outlined how, by establishing a training and continuing education network, 72 school board adult education managers have created a pool of adult basic education expertise that can be shared among network members to enable them to offer basic training in the workplace throughout Quebec. It is the sharing of expertise, the third factor in the network's success that has permitted Quebec's school districts to acquire expertise, resources, and the capacity to extend their traditional adult literacy programming role into the province's workplaces. The network's government and community partners include Employment Quebec, sectoral labour force committees, workers' associations, and community-based organizations. Through inter-agency cooperation and the sharing of a common frame of reference, the network has been able to deliver quality literacy programs in the workplace that meet both employers' and workers' needs. Employers' concerns are usually strategic and directly linked to skill shortages and their ability to maintain effective and efficient work operations. Workers' needs typically centre on issues of job security, occupational mobility, meeting educational requirements for enrolment in skills training, and passing secondary education equivalency exams.

The network has focused on workplace literacy education services that deliver credited and customized training. Credited training works within a union and employer partnership to survey workers' interest in a literacy program, establish a communications plan to fully inform all stakeholders, assess the learning needs of potential enrollees, develop a budget, draft funding proposals, write the training agreement, and implement the training. Credited training ensures that all the necessary workplace supports are in place; examinations are provided as the means of acquiring credentials; and participants develop a sense of community that sustains their motivation and commitment to succeed. In addition, these longer-term training programs contribute to the development of a public lifelong education and training culture where participation becomes normative.

In contrast, customized training aims to develop more narrowly defined workplace skills through short-term programs that offer no credit or examinations for qualifications.

Employees benefit by improving their job skills and enhancing their employability and mobility. Additionally, they may acquire skills that support their future participation in vocational training and motivate them to continue learning and complete the Secondary School Equivalency Tests.

Employers and employees benefit from the network's training programs. Employers are able to introduce new technologies to the workplace more efficiently and improve workplace production standards and product quality. As employees become more efficient, their employment retention can be secured. By saving the employer the costs of replacing their current workforce and training new workers, high production levels can be sustained. Accidents and errors in the workplace and absenteeism decline as employee literacy improves, and job satisfaction and the quality of workplace culture increases. Workers who complete the literacy programs enjoy greater job satisfaction and autonomy in the workplace as their work becomes more meaningful and satisfying. Increases in employee self-esteem, self-confidence, and pride in their work have also been reported. The benefits have also extended into the employee's family with parenting and similar family issues being addressed more satisfactorily.

According to Julien, continuous learning and training in the workplace is likely to be a development and survival issue for many firms, and the importance of the network's future role is now being confirmed. From the perspective of governments, the economic demands of the national and global markets will work to maintain their role in training delivery, and the benefits of higher levels of literacy to society as a whole are now clear and will remain to stimulate government's attention in lifelong learning provision. Workers as responsible individuals, family members, and community participants are now aware of the importance of literacy beyond the credentials earned from high school completion. Workers will continue to seek learning opportunities in their local communities and anticipate that school board adult education programs will respond to their needs. This context demands that government priorities be clearly stated, shared funding programs expanded, and partnerships sustained as the strategy for all aspects of literacy programming and monitoring and that the follow-up of training outcomes be systematized.

### ***A Sectoral Overview of Workplace Literacy Provision***

*Richard Lipman Wood Manufacturing Council, Ottawa, ON*

The Wood Manufacturing Council of Canada (WMC) is the human resources sector council for the advanced wood products industry whose members manufacture kitchen cabinets, bathroom vanities, prefabricated wood buildings, doors, and windows and residential, office, commercial, and institutional furniture. As president of the WMC, Richard Lipman brought a unique, national, human resources perspective to the forum. Lipman described how the WMC, as a new sector council, has its origins in an HRSDC Contribution Agreement signed in August 2001. With the election of a permanent board of directors in 2002, WMC joined approximately 30 other federally funded sector councils, which represent industries that employ more than 50 per cent of Canada's

labour force. The council's boards include representatives from business, education, labour, and related stakeholder constituencies. The major functions and roles of the councils are to address their particular labour market issues and propose solutions and strategies that sustain the health and vitality of members' economic and labour relations.

To achieve their goals, councils use, among other strategies, sector research; standards development; certification and accreditation programs; and career information and employee recruitment, retention, and promotion planning. Situational analyses of Canadian industries over the last decade confirm that major market changes have occurred, including a greater emphasis on global exports and greater rationalization of production among firms, frequent competition of small firms against international competitors, and greater competition from Asia (China in particular), and human resource issues have become critical factors in the survival and success of Canadian industry.

Currently, WMC is focusing on a number of human resource projects: career awareness, occupational standards, essential skills assessment, high school curriculum development, training needs assessment, and labour market sector studies. The wood products sector has approximately 130,000 workers employed in 9,200 companies, where new technology is being introduced at a rapid rate. The value of the sector to Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia economies are \$7.6 billion, \$4.2 billion, and \$1.1 billion annually. Sectoral research studies, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, have confirmed that employees' literacy and essential skills are lower than required, and the council is now acquiring information and advice on how best to establish a national program to respond. With HRSDC, the council is examining how essential skills (ES) are used on the job, developing ES occupational profiles, and adopting scales that equate workplace literacy skills with IALS scores. Among the wood sector profiles developed are profiles for wood finishers, furniture and fixture assemblers, wood working machinery operators, and sawmill machine operators.

What the WMC has learned to date is that over 40 per cent of member firms are unfamiliar with the ES framework; 59 per cent of firms have difficulty recruiting employees; over 80 per cent of firms have employees whose work was thought to be likely to improve from ES training; and 83 per cent saw skill deficits, while only 31 per cent provided training. Thinking skills were identified as the most problematic of the ES, while numeracy, working with others, document use, and reading text were also a cause for employer concern. Further findings reveal that ES deficits are not limited to the production floor workers. Supervisors, team leaders, and others also have ES challenges. The sectoral research studies confirm that employers still value soft skills (worker attitudes and values) over ES or technical skills.

Evidence of literacy deficiencies includes reports of workers seeking assistance in completing forms, difficulties in translating written to verbal work instructions, trouble reading cut lists and blueprints, difficulties with computer technology, and unwillingness to be assigned to new work. Employers are addressing workers' ES learning needs by

increasing awareness about ES in their firms, building partnerships with labour to address the issues collaboratively, setting ES benchmarks and expectations for performance, and considering the use of ES in selection, placement, and promotion decisions. In addition, firms are conducting individual and organizational needs assessments, implementing workplace ES training, and promoting employee buy-in to workplace learning.

To conclude, Lipman drew five specific recommendations from WMC experience for consideration by forum participants:

- Work collaboratively with partners to increase ES awareness.
- Develop worker recruitment and retention strategies.
- Support the development of pre-employment programs linked to ES.
- Encourage the development of employee learning assessment tools and processes.
- Support the delivery of ES training.

## **Workshop 2: Towards Quality Adult Literacy Programs**

Moderator: *Ron Faris President, Golden Horizon Ventures, Victoria, BC*

### **Purpose**

The workshop examined various ways of determining achievements of literacy programs in terms of outcomes and broader impacts for adult learners, families, workplaces, and communities. An emphasis was on the means by which quality adult literacy programs could be more likely achieved as learners prepare for active participation in the emerging knowledge-based economy and society. Two key themes were emphasized:

- The development of appropriate adult instructional materials, curriculum, and training of instructors (both professional and volunteers)
- The customization of adult learning instruction and support services for specific groups of learners such as First Nations, single parents, visible minorities, and the disabled

Each speaker at the workshop addressed the issues of quality from his or her own professional experience and perspectives. One speaker, Paul O'Toole, spoke from a unique professional and personal perspective – that of an employed under-educated adult who chose to change his life's trajectory by enrolling as an adult basic education learner, earning a degree, and eventually becoming an ABE instructor in the college where he began his personal journey of change.

### **Components of a Quality ABE Program**

*Nick Rubidge President, College of the Rockies, Cranbrook, BC*

As a college president, Nick Rubidge brought an institutional leadership and administrative perspective to the workshop. He identified three broad categories of

factors that have an impact on the quality of a college's ABE program: the external policy environment, institutional and local support, and specific program related factors. For a program to be successful, factors in all three categories need to be aligned.

Policies of the various levels of government and regulations among the ministries/ departments and agencies within which a program operates must be consistent. When learner support policies and regulations of federal employment and provincial/territorial social welfare ministries/departments are misaligned, for example, unnecessary bureaucratic conflicts, barriers to learning, and equity issues are created at the local level. Colleges are aware that learners with low levels of literacy often face multiple barriers to participation, have multiple learning needs, experience difficult living circumstances, and have few financial resources. The fewer barriers to participation faced by this population, the greater the likelihood that they will access literacy programs and achieve their goals.

Quality ABE programs, according to Rubidge, also require particular elements of local support including childcare, counselling, and program development resources to enable instruction and support services to be designed to meet local contexts and needs. Because these local resources are often peripheral to core academic and vocational programs, they are frequently the first to be cut in times of budgetary contraction and restraint. In addition, some agencies that fund programs have rigid requirements for program design and accountability that directly or indirectly discourage institutions from offering quality literacy programs.

The third cluster of factors includes elements specific to the design and delivery of literacy programs, including curriculum, teaching materials, and instruction. A quality literacy program will focus on concrete outcomes of greatest relevance to the learner. Without a local capacity to identify learning needs and adjust curriculum to the local context, quality cannot be assured. A similar issue is the capacity to locate and develop appropriate adult education instructional materials at the local community level. Too frequently, materials used for pre-adults in the K–12 system, together with dated teaching resources, find their way into adult classes, contributing additional barriers to learner motivation and satisfaction.

Rubidge asserted that to develop quality programs in the near future, more research, experience, and resources from successful programs will have to be shared, bringing to an end institutional competitiveness. Historically, college ABE programs have relied on itinerant, often part-time, inadequately trained instructors who saw teaching adults as a short-term employment opportunity. The system has essentially relied on part-time, talented amateurs. Research shows adults do learn better in environments and under conditions different from those of children, and good teachers of children are not necessarily good teachers of adults. To deliver quality ABE programs, instructors will require professional training and knowledge of the extensive research that is available to guide practice.

In Rubidge's opinion, governments' benign neglect of literacy has contributed to the perpetuation of under-education and today's problems of intergenerational illiteracy. Little or nothing has been done to build a strong literacy education system since some promising initiatives during the 60s, 70s, and 80s. We have to appreciate that literacy is gained slowly, and a quality literacy education system will require a sustained, concerted national and provincial/territorial effort. In summation, Rubidge recommended that quality literacy programs must have an adult curriculum, adult-oriented learning resources, trained instructors, and appropriate levels of funding within a policy and regulatory environment supportive of adult learners.

### ***Reflections on a Personal Journey***

*Paul O'Toole Instructor, Northern Lights College, Dawson Creek, BC*

Paul O'Toole related his story as a mature adult who returned to school. Today Paul is married with two adult children, living in Fort St. John, where he is an ABE instructor at Northern Lights College (NLC). Fifteen years ago, at the age of 38, after 20 years employment with Canadian Airlines, he found himself facing decisions about his future. He had to decide whether to relocate, commute, or quit his job. He had no "hard" technical skills, did not wish to relocate, and was happy living in his community. Thankfully his employer and union were very supportive and offered him either short-term leave with no loss of pension or seniority, or unpaid longer-term leave without seniority penalty. His family was also very encouraging, and he opted to return to school full-time.

At NLC, he discovered that he was not the oldest student. Although he had graduated from high school, his marks were not high, and he was uncomfortable showing his transcripts to his children. Partway through his program, O'Toole had to return to work to pay bills. The disruptions caused him problems, and he experienced great difficulty getting back into a learning mode each time he returned to college. He reminded us that mature students need to attend school without worrying all the time about expenses, bills, and distractions. He often questioned his decision to return, wondering "Will it be worth it? Will there be a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? Will there be only unpaid bills?" One of his insights was that part-time students are often offered more hours of work and feel pressure to take the work, although by doing so they cut into their school time. Frequently, there are not enough hours in the day for mature students. Reflecting on other jurisdictions, O'Toole pointed out that Ontario has a program called LEAP (Learning, Earning and Parenting) with daycare and other support; there was no similar program at NLC.

While attending NLC, O'Toole commuted to work on weekends, attended classes during the week, and found time for sports and other activities with his children. At times before exams or during his practicum, he rarely saw his family. His wife took on additional roles, travelling to hockey tournaments; often, other parents would take the kids when she could not be in two places at once.

In 1998, O'Toole achieved the success he sought by earning a BGS and a professional teaching certificate from SFU. He "retired" from the airline after 28 years and began teaching in the public school system. In 2001, he joined the staff of NLC where he taught a work and study program in the trades and technology department and coordinated the Petroleum Employment and Career Training Program for 25 Aboriginal students at the Doig River First Nation north of Fort St. John. Now he teaches humanities in the ABE department. Both of his children have gone on to postsecondary education, and, after a career in dance, his daughter, at the age of 23, is enrolled at Carleton University.

Reflecting on his experience as a student and educator, O'Toole recognized the importance of the relationship between teaching and learning styles, understanding adults' learning needs, and the kind of instructional environment that best suits diverse learning styles. In his teaching, he focuses on selecting content and materials relevant to learners' needs, experiences, and backgrounds and on involving learners in activities that are meaningful to them. He saw his own experience as proof that adults returning to school can be successful when they are deeply committed and willing to make sacrifices to achieve their goals. Many others faced the same obstacles, and he considered himself fortunate to "get through."

O'Toole concluded by recommending that CMEC lobby federal and provincial/territorial governments to reinstate program funding; develop programs in cooperation with community groups; focus on programs for adults with literacy levels between grades 5 and 8; and link adult basic education to trades training and apprenticeship.

### ***Adult Literacy in the Indigenous Community***

*Janice Brant Consultant, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, ON*

Speaking as a First Nations educator, Janice Brant described how Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning reflect three broad philosophical positions: multidimensionality of learning; holism (balancing the spirit, heart, mind, and body); and relationality (kinship and the sense of belonging with the social and natural environment). Brant highlighted how, historically, life experience, observation, communal-relations, cosmology, art, mythology, and spiritual and intellectual beliefs had shaped Indigenous peoples' principles and practices of teaching and learning. She spoke to seven themes that provide a foundation for Indigenous approaches to literacy learning: cultural philosophy, culture-based curricula, prior learning assessment, learning circles and communities, principles of adult learning, reflective practice and self evaluation, and the characteristics of literacy practitioners.

Restoring Indigenous cultural practices and reasserting the role of culture in teaching and learning processes is a high priority for Indigenous communities. Examples of cultural practices now widely accepted in the contemporary Indigenous learning community include the oral tradition of story-telling, learner self-directedness, and the use of learning circles. Learning circles support linguistic and cultural revitalization,

strengthen identities, build community, and celebrate diversity. Healing circles enable participants to learn how to deal with their experiences as the victims of racism, violence, and marginalization. Fostering a learning community is an essential aspect of Indigenous adult education practice and serves to build, for example, respectful and collaborative intergenerational participation and a place for elders as cultural, moral, and spiritual teachers.

The principles of adult learning that typically serve as indicators of well-planned programs and quality instructional environments are equally important in Indigenous adult education programs. Indigenous adult literacy programs, as do all other programs that aim to achieve excellence, seek learning climates that establish mutual respect, inclusion, and acceptance; focus on learner-identified needs; support self-evaluation, self-directedness, and reflection; recognize learners' multiple roles in the community; and value learners' life experiences as a resource for teaching and learning.

Brant emphasized that self-evaluation in particular is one aspect of Indigenous culture and philosophy that supports the autonomy of the individual within the frames of the extended family and broader community. Self-evaluation sustains the learner's sense of balance and harmony and requires thoughtful support by instructors who understand how to be responsive to individual needs and avoid in-group comparisons and public methods of assessment. The use of prior learning assessment and the personal portfolio are other examples of contemporary adult education practice that can support Indigenous adults' self-discovery and healing, as they combine reflection and a positive assessment of the present and future.

Indigenous adult literacy program instructors must be comfortable within their learners' cultural communities and serve as role models for learners. Listening and participation behaviours and the ability to support the development of learners' interpersonal skills are particularly important professional capacities. Brant closed by stating that collaborative planning and program implementation with Indigenous partners is essential for success. Indigenous peoples have a unique perspective and worldview that must be understood by instructors and program planners if quality adult literacy programs are to be developed for Indigenous learners.

### **Workshop 3: Adult Literacy: How Do We Measure Success?**

Moderator: *Raymond Théberge* Director General, CMEC

#### **Purpose**

The workshop examined questions around how to identify criteria for use in judging the success of literacy programs from a broad range of stakeholder perspectives.

Participants were challenged to identify means by which jurisdictions might select key goals for literacy learning in a knowledge-based economy and society.

Themes presented to participants for their consideration included

- Identifying exemplary key goals that jurisdictions wished to achieve

- Identifying broad measures/outcomes of literacy education to achieve social inclusion and justice goals, in addition to outcomes to strengthen Canada's role in the global economy

### **Questions of Quality, Capacity and Commitment**

*B. Allan Quigley St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, NS*

Allan Quigley challenged himself and workshop participants to consider the question, "How do we measure success?" In his view, the question suggested that things are somehow "normal" in literacy education, that we now only need to measure success and share those methods. However, he cautioned, "All is not normal in literacy."

While Quigley could not speak to the situation in francophone Canada, he stated that literacy programs in English-speaking regions of Canada are severely under-funded. Many adult educators engaged in professional development at their own expense, motivated to do a better job for their learners and expecting no bonus pay, career advancement, or even a guarantee of a job the following year. While not all literacy or basic education programs in all provinces or territories are in desperate financial straits, Quigley argued that the field ought to measure, enhance, and sustain the quality of its programs. Practitioners needed a living wage and at least the fundamental training that any educational system for professionals would normally provide.

According to Quigley, Canada today has less than 10 active researchers contributing regularly on adult literacy issues, and there are fewer academic researchers in North America today than when he entered the field as a literacy teacher 40 years ago. Canada has been getting far more than it pays for from the literacy field, and there is a limit to what can be expected. Reflecting on 40 years' experience, Quigley stated that he had never seen morale lower. In his view, we cannot talk about quality or measurement without first recognizing the issues of capacity and resources we face and, above all, the need to envision a better future for literacy.

Quigley reminded listeners that across Canada there are numerous examples of "practice-brilliance," that is, remarkable teaching and tutoring effectiveness that contribute to quality programs. However, we need to ask: "Quality from whose perspective – sponsoring agencies, instructors, adult learners, or researchers?" "What exists now in terms of quality measures?" "What could or should occur in the future to build on these successes?" Historically, the views of sponsoring and organizing agencies have dominated our discourses. Since the first adult literacy courses at the YMCA in Kingston Ontario in 1859 (Quigley, in press), through to the Adult Occupational Training Act of 1967 and the late-1970s, literacy's discourses have been largely dominated by the sponsoring agencies. The views of teachers, volunteers, and researchers gained prominence in the 1970s. Today, the voices of learners are being heard in discussions about programs and their quality.

The framework Quigley proposed for participants' consideration consisted of the following elements and processes:

- Establishing across Canada quality index committees to determine what program quality is and to learn from what exists, creating an international quality Index
- Investing in professionalism and well-trained literacy volunteers and developing the capacity of existing degree and certificate programs to prepare practitioners and researchers
- Supporting the research-in-practice "movement" and establishing an international clearing house to disseminate practice-based research findings
- Funding research to build a comprehensive history of Canadian adult literacy
- Prioritizing Canada's literacy research needs and investing in studies, including establishing research-in-residence positions with the NLS

Quigley concluded by stating that the field is in urgent need of new resources, lest we permanently assume that the way the field now functions is somehow normal and there are no real alternatives. "There are indeed alternatives in this field, and, with the support of CMEC, we can create others into the future."

### ***Looking at Success from the Field of Practice***

*Wendy DesBrisay Movement for Canadian Literacy*

Wendy DesBrisay pointed out that several issues needed to be resolved before attempting to answer the question: "How do we measure success?" For example, one needs to know how literacy is to be defined, who the "we" might be, and what counts as evidence of success. Should higher scores on a literacy survey be evidence of program success? According to DesBrisay, governments' literacy goals seem to be narrowing, with traditional social valuing of literacy being replaced by economic values. Further, we do not have a system in place that allows us to assess the outcomes of literacy education and provide timely information to guide the responsible management of programs.

The literacy community, through a national consultation process, in which DesBrisay was active, developed a 10-year results-based action plan for consideration by governments (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). The plan spells out what the field considers to be success and how it can be measured. The literacy community's vision for a national agenda was built upon a number of foundational beliefs:

- Equity of access by all Canadians to literacy learning to meet their personal goals related to their work, family, and community needs and aspirations
- Community identification of their own literacy needs and solutions to programming challenges

- Wide availability of family and intergenerational literacy programs, availability of public literacy services in both official languages, opportunities for learners to become literate in their mother tongue, and literacy programs that are sensitive to learners' cultural values and social realities
- Policies and programs at national, provincial/territorial, and local levels planned and implemented in collaboration with all stakeholders

The 10-year action plan DesBrisay outlined (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005) was based on four strategic pillars: a quality adult literacy system, attention to learning barriers and the need for social inclusion, research to develop and disseminate literacy knowledge, and partnerships.

To ensure a quality system is developed, the first pillar would require a governance system where all levels of government, including First Nations governments, work together with stakeholders to identify operating principles, policies, roles, accountability frameworks, and funding formulas. Adequate funding would be required, including support for quality elements currently missing from provincial/territorial systems such as monitoring and evaluation, professional development, and specific action plans for target groups such as immigrants and families. Access to literacy programs would need to be equitable, barriers to learning removed, and a broad range of programs implemented. Intergovernmental cooperation across jurisdictions and interdepartmental cooperation within jurisdictions would be required.

The removal of barriers to learning and social inclusion, the second pillar, would require governments to review existing policies, programs, and patterns of participation and to establish policies to systematically enable target populations to increase their utilization of learning opportunities. Public information would need to be made more user-friendly and accessible; the role of all existing policies and programs would need to be reviewed to assess their potential for supporting literacy learning.

Research, pillar three, would need to be supported to expand our understanding of literacy processes and to fill knowledge gaps. Policy development, for example, needs to be informed from a broad range of research perspectives. Practitioners would benefit from research on best practices and effective dissemination of research findings.

The fourth pillar, developing partnerships, requires the reconfirmation and restructuring of historical federal-provincial/territorial relationships and government and labour and government and industry partnerships; educational institution partnerships; and new partnerships with communities, community development groups, professional organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

DesBrisay argued that achievable goals for the establishment of elements for each of the four pillars would need to be developed and progress monitored to ensure the growth and sustainability of the system. Short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes would have to be stated, and their appropriateness reviewed over time. It might take six years for a sustainable and diverse system to be implemented with stable funding, a

broad range of programs, low turnover among instructors, increased rates of participation, and improved rates of learner retention for targeted low literate populations. By the tenth year, outcomes of the system at the meta level would be anticipated to include improved scores on national literacy surveys and recognition from UN agencies and OECD of improved human and social capital according to international indicators. At the provincial/territorial and community levels, indicators ought to demonstrate improvements in learning participation, the use of leisure and recreation facilities, reduced anti-social behaviour among youth populations, increased participation in the labour force, and improvements in earnings and job retention among at-risk target populations. DesBrisay concluded by cautioning listeners that many of the societal outcomes sought can be achieved only over the long term, several generations at least, and through collaboration and commitment to the achievement of mass literacy objectives at all levels: the individual, family, community, region, and state.

### ***Adult Literacy Achievement Indicators in Quebec***

*Luc Beauchesne* Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, QC

Luc Beauchesne informed the workshop participants that the Government of Quebec found the results of the IALLS to be disconcerting as they revealed Quebec to be below the average literacy levels of populations in other countries and Canada as a whole. The survey data suggested that adults' skill levels declined with age; anglophones had higher skill levels than francophones (although at equivalent levels of education, there were no differences); and that allophones had lower skill levels than other groups. While Quebecers' average prose literacy scores had increased between 1991 and 2001 from 264.1 to 275.3, the gap between the Quebec and Canadian average scores had been reduced from 14.7 points in 1991 to 5.5 in 2001, but not closed. Similar results were observed for document literacy, where a 13.3 point gap in average scores was reduced to 5.3 points.

Beauchesne outlined Quebec's new adult education and training policy aimed at increasing enrolments in adult education and primary literacy activities. Elements of the policy included reducing existing program withdrawal rates, targeting persons with the lowest levels of literacy, including parents, and language training for allophones. All Quebec educational institutions were required to have an achievement plan, and 17 indicators of success were identified for program evaluation and future evaluation of the policy's implementation. Achievement indicators have also been identified for general adult education programs. The achievement indicators are largely measures of learner enrolments, withdrawals, re-entry, academic achievement, and transfers to higher-level programs.

## Summary of Workshop Recommendations

### Workshop 1: Promoting Workplace Literacy

Moderator: *Moura Quayle, Deputy Minister, Advanced Education and Training, Victoria, BC*

Presenters at the workshop outlined a number of principles to guide the promotion of workplace literacy programs: partnership, flexibility, community differences, resources, and sustainability.

Partnership requires the recognition of the public, private, and community non-profit sectors as full partners with government, providing leadership and communicating the sense of urgency and action necessary for improving workplace literacy without delay. Government must demonstrate the political will to move the agenda forward.

Flexibility must be built into policies and programs in recognition of the multiple social roles working learners occupy and a vision of workplace literacy as worker/learner-centred to guide all instruction and program planning. Learners' work schedules and family and community responsibilities necessitate new methods of organizing learning opportunities. There are particularities, or differences, of place in all communities; plans must be capable of accommodating whatever social, cultural, and geographic variables may be present to restrict access to learning or serve as barriers in ways that may only be recognized at the local level.

Sufficient resources must be provided to avoid the risk that programs will be ineffective. Demand for workplace learning has increased, the size of the workforce has grown, but government support for training has remained static. Experience and program evaluations have shown that funding for workplace literacy must now consider previously ignored costs such as time away from work, indirect program delivery costs, travel expenses, and program development. The consequences of not funding what were previously thought to be costs to be borne by learners themselves have been very expensive. International experience also demonstrates the necessity of a systemic approach to the removal of barriers to learning.

Sustainability of funding is also a central principle as there is a need to institutionalize programs for their long-term delivery. Raising a population's literacy is known to be a long-term project, and the infrastructure required for a quality based national literacy system cannot survive short-term cyclical boom and bust funding.

## **Workshop 2: Towards Quality Adult Literacy Programs**

Moderator: *Ron Faris, President, Golden Horizon Ventures, Victoria, BC*

Presenters and participants aired a number of very specific recommendations during the discussion on quality adult literacy. Among those that were discussed in the limited time available were recommendations related to the specific needs of mature adult learners for financial support and services to ensure their daily attendance and likelihood of completing an extended period of full-time study.

To maintain learners' motivation to participate and succeed, participants were unanimous in recommending that only adult content instructional materials be used and that all instructors receive training to prepare them to work with adult learners. Further, to maximize the potential outcomes of participation in literacy education, participants recommended that planners ensure credentials are broadly recognized and "laddered" to future learning opportunities.

Workshop participants, many of whom had extensive field experience, reported that programs developed with community partners are far more likely to succeed than prescribed programs introduced without community consultation and support. Participants strongly recommended that CMEC recognize the lessons learned from Canada's successful programs. Among the barriers to national, high-quality literacy programs that needed to be addressed by CMEC were the lack of agreement on literacy definition and standards that are needed for national program coherence. The participants also recommended that Indigenous adult literacy programs for on- and off-reserve populations be recognized as a very high priority.

Finally, workshop participants also strongly recommended that a strategy be implemented at the national level to coordinate best practices research and that resources be made available to disseminate the research products nationally and internationally.

## **Workshop 3: Adult Literacy: How Do We Measure Success?**

Moderator: *Raymond Théberge, Director General, CMEC*

Workshop participants contextualized the complex issues surrounding the identification of indicators of literacy program success and contributed many valuable comments. Questions of whose interests are being served by programs and how data can be used to influence policy and program development and literacy teaching to build quality programs have not yet been fully explored and debated by researchers or practitioners in the field. Among the panellists' concrete proposals for future discussion were a seven-step model presented by Allan Quigley and a four-pillar logic model developed by the literacy community and presented by Wendy DesBrisay.

Participants agreed on the following regarding the measurement of literacy program success:

- The technology, including the models that define who manages the processes of selecting outcomes and indicators of success in Canada do not yet exist.
- There must be accommodation of all the major constituencies (stakeholders) in defining success.
- Criteria for success would need to be applied to a great variety of programs reflecting community and cultural interests beyond the marketplace.
- Literacy success needs to be conceptualized and indicators identified for use at the local, provincial/territorial, national, and international levels.

## FORUM REFLECTIONS

The second forum conducted under the auspices of the March 2005 CMEC Literacy Action Plan may have been unlike some previous national literacy consultations in three important respects. First, missing from the discussions at this meeting was the divide and acrimony that often resulted when economists and business stakeholders met with community-based partners to discuss literacy investments and priorities. Economists and business leaders at those meetings typically argued that literacy funding was best directed toward improving Canada's economic competitiveness while giving little or no ground to the legitimacy of investments in other sectors. Now that, thanks to the IALS, ALLS, and other survey instruments, literacy is quantifiable, and a variable for insertion into the economists' equations, it is possible for adherents to that social science to join with their colleagues from other disciplines and agree that literacy yields direct and indirect benefits in a number of important sectors, including the economy. Literacy does sustain a healthy population and reduce health care costs. Literacy also promotes social cohesion, and the very real costs to the Treasury of social exclusion can be reduced by higher literacy.

A second noticeable aspect of the debates and discussions during the forum sessions and social gatherings was the extent of agreement among participants about needed future policy directions, the roles of partnerships, program planning approaches, and the infrastructure needed to build a quality national literacy education system. Few dissenting voices were heard when political will and a long-term strategy were called "crucial" or when partnerships for workplace literacy education were declared to be essential to program success. While these are only two examples, the point needs to be made that the issues on which participants agreed were many, and those on which there was disagreement were few.

The third aspect of the discussions that suggests a new era of literacy advocacy and planning has now been reached was the extent to which the descriptions, claims, and experiences regarding literacy provision during the meetings were research based. Panellists, plenary speakers, and workshop participants invited to make formal presentations, as expected, often supported their assertions with research findings. However, throughout the forum, questioners and discussants made good use of new, rich, qualitative research and practitioner-generated research, particularly in the areas of program design, instruction, and factors influencing participation. Forum participants frequently stated that more research is needed, research is valued and used in the field, and the dissemination of research is important for improving current practice and training future practitioners. The success of the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) was cited often as a most valuable resource for the field.

Overall, forum participants expressed a sense of urgency, for CMEC, or some group or body, regardless of jurisdictional interests, to assume leadership and begin the collaborative processes needed for the Canadian federation to “get on with the job” of building a national adult literacy strategy. There was a consensus that governments have done a good job of telling Canadians that there is a literacy skills deficit, yet they have done a poor job of responding collaboratively to a pressing need for well-resourced action. Representatives of the field regularly expressed concerns about the lack of political will and sustained commitment on the part of political parties and governments to “stay the course” and “pay the tariff.”

Listening and learning in the Prince George adult literacy forum reminded one of the elementary science class experience of looking at how a beam of light was refracted by a prism to create a spectrum of colours. In this case, particular empirical information combined with expert analysis to create colourful insights into the dynamic and complex challenges of adult literacy in Canada.

The initial panel provided a statistical picture of the state of literacy at both a national and an international level. In response to the panel title “Adult Literacy - How Far Have We Come?”, a consensus of panellists’ responses was “not far.” Indeed, the spectre that haunted the conversations throughout this panel – and the forum – was the reality that there has, in overall statistical terms, been no diminution in the percentage of Canadian adults with low literacy skills since the 1994 IALS report. The three panellists agreed that in the ever-changing knowledge-based, global economy nations such as Sweden, already advantaged with significantly higher national literacy, were moving even further ahead of Canada in literacy provision and that nations such as the UK and the Asian giants of India and China – with long-standing literacy issues – were now engaged in major literacy initiatives that found no parallel in Canada.

There was a consensus that any nation – including Canada – that tolerated a two-tiered society with a permanent underclass was at a stark competitive disadvantage in an emerging knowledge-based economy. Further, quality adult literacy provision must be the foundation of a flexible, responsive, future-oriented labour market and literacy policy and strategy that enables local/community-level response. Forum participants called for a well-developed national/provincial/territorial strategic plan that integrates economic and social policy and identified the two crucial pre-conditions for such action – political will and commitment to long-term, rather than “drive-by” funding.

The second panel described a variety of delivery systems in selected Canadian jurisdictions to illustrate how each was responding to the adult literacy challenge. Whether it was the newly created Literacy Commission of Saskatchewan, the community-based work of Parkdale Project Read in Toronto, or the Literacy Now initiatives in British Columbia, four core principles of literacy policy and practice were identified:

- Complex adult literacy issues are best addressed in a flexible, comprehensive manner at the local/community level (e.g., family, school, workplace, and community literacy initiatives).
- Multiple, interrelated problems of many basic literacy learners go far beyond under-education, and often include ill health, poor housing, social exclusion, and poverty, and therefore require integrated multiple-government-departmental intervention solutions at the community level.
- A broad, practical definition of literacy based on the real-life roles and responsibilities of adults is essential to guide the design of interventions and support the development of literacies necessary for full participation in the knowledge-based society (e.g., health, citizenship, multicultural, environmental, and information technology literacies) and foster social cohesion among “whole people in whole communities.”
- Special needs and assets of people in First Nation and ethnic communities, as well as groups including seniors, youth, immigrants, and the differently abled, must be recognized and – with their active involvement – must be taken into consideration.

The third panel provided a clear economic rationale and imperative for investments in literacy. Drawing upon evidence-based approaches, the panel provided both macro- and micro-economic analyses of the social and individual returns on investment in quality literacy provision, including

- Evidence of the link between increased literacy and both improved productivity and wages
- Significant downstream savings in reduced costs to the health, justice, and social service systems through a highly literate citizenry making better decisions and more actively participating in, and contributing to, the welfare of their families, workplace, local communities, and society.

The panel identified the need for federal-provincial/territorial collaboration in identifying the elements of a realistic budgeting approach for quality literacy provision.

Three outstanding keynote presentations bolstered the evidence and analyses of the panels. Mike McCracken provided a “tool-box” – a macro-economic analysis that linked labour market variables with quality literacy provision in a knowledge-based, global economy. McCracken specified the policy instruments that can be manipulated to achieve results needed to generate and sustain literacy improvements in each of three “boxes” – workplace, community, and marketplace. In sum, he provided strong evidence that greater literacy provision would foster a more vibrant economy and democracy.

Barry Brooks provided clear empirical evidence and political analysis of achievements to date from the implementation of Skills for Life, the United Kingdom’s comprehensive national lifelong learning strategy. Brooks’ highlighted the magnitude of planning and extent of action required to establish a national quality literacy strategy. Three interrelated messages stand out from the British experience: the need for long-term political will and commitment, the absolute necessity for the initiative to be well

resourced, and the value of embedding literacy in the mission of all government agencies – all three of which are manifested in the Skills for Life strategy. Two important examples of the systemic thinking in Britain’s national literacy workforce strategy that registered with forum participants are timely provision of professional development opportunities for volunteer and professional literacy workers to ensure quality training and the setting of concrete objectives to be achieved within specific periods of time and monitored by a responsible public agency.

Vanessa Little shared evidence of the positive changes in people’s lives when literacy initiatives are embedded in a learning community of place – specifically the Australian learning city of Hume. Early successes in this comprehensive, learning-based community development model, in which all community sectors look at their goals and challenges through a literacy lens, include major employment opportunities for Aboriginal learners, a rapid expansion of local library membership and usage, and active participation and collaboration of citizens from over 50 ethnic communities in community learning centres and learning festivals. One refreshing aspect of the Hume Global Learning Village experience that attracted the attention of some forum members was the emphasis placed by Little on linking persons and resources to maximize the utility of existing human and knowledge resources rather than emphasizing the needs for investment in expensive hi-tech hardware, professional consultancies, and the purchase of services.

The workshops were an opportunity for specialist resource persons to challenge thinking among attendees on three broad issues: the promotion of workplace literacy, achieving quality programs, and the measurement of program success. Many examples arose to demonstrate how literacy has emerged in the last decade to be widely recognized as a complex phenomenon involving social interactions, communications, technology, cognition, and decision making, when previously it was regarded quite simply as the ability of an individual to read and write.

To use an evolutionary metaphor, literacy today can be regarded as the scales on a modern, fast-swimming, agile, assertive, colourful fish. The modern fish has thousands of small, overlapping, literacy scales in comparison to the literacy scales of yesterday’s fish, an ancient coelacanth, a slow, dull, ponderous, compliant fish with only a few, large, heavy, relatively independent scales. One fish travels great distances in large numbers and must adapt to different environments during its life cycle; the other, a solitary creature in comparison, inhabits a relatively small area of deep-ocean, where it remains virtually unknown in one unchanging environment. One requires many small, light, replaceable scales to protect it, maintain its health, function efficiently, and thrive in its environment, and the other requires but a few, irreplaceable, heavily armoured scales for its preservation. Literacy practice today requires an understanding of a very different literacy fish than was previously the case.

Workshop presenters introduced participants to the many scales and environmental issues of the modern literacy fish through the complexities of the literacy learning issues they addressed, educational practices they reviewed, research they highlighted, and

personal experiences they shared. Participants in turn brought their own insights and personal recommendations to the floor for discussion. Time constraints prevented all the ideas and recommendations to CMEC from being subjected to critical analysis, and the record of the workshops represents the brainstorming that occurred rather than consensual support for any one, or more, of the particular recommendations. To bring greater clarity and coherence to the workshop outcomes, the editors have sought, in a separate section of this report presented with the executive summary, to identify themes, uncover underlying connections and linkages, and contextualize the many recommendations brought forward by the workshop moderators.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: References

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## Appendix 2: Biographies of Presenters

*Luc Beauchesne* is a research officer with the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sport in Quebec, where he is principally responsible for the design and development of student retention and success indicators at the primary and secondary levels. He is also responsible for contextual indicators for the vocational sector and student retention and success indicators for adults.

*Janice Brant* was born and raised in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory situated along the north shore of the Bay of Quinte in southern Ontario. She has worked with several colleges and universities as a learning facilitator and instructor and is currently working on research projects with the National Indigenous Literacy Association and Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

*Satya Brink* is currently Director, National Learning Policy Directorate at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, where she is responsible for the development of evidence for policies related to human capital and lifelong learning.

*Barry Brooks* is Director for Lifelong Learning at Tribal Group, CTAD, in the United Kingdom. Until recently, he was a senior civil servant at the Department for Education and Skills, where he was Head of the Skills for Life strategy unit.

*Barbara Byers* is the elected executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress responsible for education, youth, training and technology, literacy, apprenticeship, and employment insurance. As a labour representative, she also ensures that the voices of women are heard within the International Labour Organization.

*Wendy DesBrisay* has more than 20 years of experience in the field of adult literacy and is currently executive director of the Movement for Canadian Literacy. In 2005, she chaired a multisectoral National Advisory Committee of Literacy and essential skills struck to outline a national literacy strategy for HRSDC.

*Sandi Howell* is the provincial coordinator of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and Essential Skills for Manitoba Advanced Education and Training. Sandi has spent 20 years as a consultant developing workplace curricula and implementing workplace training with a focus on essential skills and English as a second language.

*Jean-Denis Julien* has been a training counsellor with the adult education departments, Commission Scholaire des Chenes, in Drummondville and now in Sherbrooke since 1980, where he has developed workplace basic skills training especially with the textile manufacturing sector council. He has also been actively involved as a member of the provincial advisory committee on literacy and recently prepared a state-of-the-field review of workplace training in Quebec for the Workplace Basic Skills Training Working Group.

*Yvon Laberge* is a founding member of the Family Literacy Action Group of Alberta (now the Centre for Family Literacy) and the Federation Canadienne Pour l'Alphabetisation en Francais. Yvon has worked on literacy projects internationally and is currently director of Eduk, a non-profit agency providing access to adult education programs in French across Alberta.

*Brenda LeClair* is the executive director of Literacy Now, a British Columbia initiative to stimulate and strengthen community strategies for supporting literacy from infancy through adulthood. Prior to joining Literacy Now, Brenda was deputy superintendent with the Langley School Board.

*Richard Lipman* is president of the Wood Manufacturing Council, the human resources sector council for the advanced wood products processing industry. He serves on the executive committees of both the Canada Career Consortium and the Alliance of Sector Councils.

*Margaret Lipp* was assistant deputy minister for Saskatchewan Learning prior to becoming the provincial literacy commissioner. She serves on the board of directors for the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and is the government representative from the K-12 education sector on the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board.

*Vanessa Little* is the general manager, Learning Community with Hume City Council in Melbourne, Australia. Under her leadership, Hume City Council has developed the Hume Global Learning Center, a state-of-the-art community learning facility. Prior to her current position, Vanessa was previously senior policy advisor to the South Australian Government for Information and Technology and Internet uptake in the community, health, small business, and local government sectors.

*Michael C. McCracken* is one of the founders of Informetrica Limited, a Canadian-based economic research and information company providing long-term national, provincial, and industrial forecasts to companies, governments, and other organizations across Canada and abroad. He is treasurer of the Canadian Employment Research Forum (CERF) and the Trade Statistics Advisory Council at Statistics Canada.

*Scott Murray* holds the post of director, Education Outcomes, at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), where he is responsible for their program of adult and student skill assessment. Prior to his UNESCO appointment, he spent over 20 years in the Special Surveys Division of Statistics Canada.

*Paul O'Toole* is an instructor in the Adult Basic Education Department at Northern Lights College, with experience in the Trades and Technology Department that includes working with First Nations students entering the oil and gas industry.

*B. Allan Quigley* is professor of adult education at St. Francis Xavier University. For almost 40 years, his primary professional and academic research interest has been adult literacy education. He has published widely and is an active researcher currently focusing on authentic teaching.

*W. Craig Riddell* is Royal Bank faculty research professor in the Department of Economics at the University of British Columbia. His research interests are in labour economics, labour relations, and public policy, and his current research is focused on skill formation, education and training, unemployment, and labour market dynamics.

*Kjell Rubenson* is professor of education and co-director of the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Learning at the University of British Columbia. He has conducted research on lifelong learning, adult education and educational policy for a number of international agencies, including OECD, UNESCO, and the European Commission.

*Nick Rubidge* is president of the College of the Rockies in Cranbrook, British Columbia, where ABE accounts for approximately one-fifth of the total student enrolment. For over 20 years prior to his present appointment, he served with the provincial government in a number of roles in the BC postsecondary education system, with responsibility for adult education, literacy, and vocational training.

*Nadine Sookermany* is a community literacy worker with Parkdale Project Read in Toronto. She is currently working on a national research project, Moving Research About Violence and Learning, and is actively involved as a front-line counsellor in the violence-against-women sector.

## Appendix 3: List of Participants

### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

VANESSA LITTLE  
General Manager  
Hume Global Learning Centre  
Australia

MICHAEL C. McCRACKEN  
Chair and Chief Executive Officer  
Informetrica Limited

BARRY BROOKS  
Director for Lifelong Learning  
Tribal Education  
United Kingdom

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