



Literacy is a right

Learning at work: it's our right • L'apprentissage au travail : c'est notre droit

Literacy is a right for all. It is increasingly important in the workplace, helping workers to succeed at work and in life. Literacy can be a critical foundation for further training and education and is an important vehicle for inclusion and participation.

Recent agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments bring new opportunities for funding literacy at work. The Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) transfer funds and move responsibility for delivering training programs from the federal government to the provinces and territories.

These agreements allow for training for employed workers with low literacy skills or without a high school diploma. This makes it possible to support literacy training in the workplace in meaningful ways.

But will provinces and territories act on the need for literacy in the workplace? The Canadian Union of Public Employees knows that programs held in the workplace are effective. These five fact sheets reinforce our call on governments

to invest in literacy programs at work.

CUPE has a long history of direct involvement in workplace literacy, including our national literacy program established in 2000. Our members have benefited from workplace basic skills programs, especially those workers who have had little access to educational opportunities or who need training in English or French as a second language. Workers have been able to build skills, adapt to changing job requirements, develop an interest in further learning and become more active in their union and community.

CUPE shares labour's commitment to policies and programs that secure:

- the right to learn for both employed and unemployed workers
- a pan-Canadian strategy and system of adult education and training, that ensures quality programming and equitable access across the country



- a serious investment in literacy and training by employers and governments
- the integration of literacy in skills training and apprenticeship programs
- the development of a culture of learning in our unions and workplaces

While provinces and territories are responsible for education and training, the federal government must continue to play a role in developing policy and increasing funding for literacy.

Literacy and basic skills

For CUPE, reading and writing are not ends in themselves. We understand literacy to be about reading the world, not just the words. Literacy is a tool for equity and social change, a means to further equality and access.

Most people agree that literacy is more than being able to read and write. People have a range

of literacy skills – it's not an either/or skill set. There is no single definition of literacy. The meaning of literacy continually shifts to reflect changing economic, social and political contexts.

Because some see “literacy” as a negative term, other terms are often used: basic skills, essential skills, adult basic education, or foundation skills. We describe literacy as the skills we need for work, learning and life. Basic skills programs include:

- reading
- writing
- math
- using computers
- oral communication
- English or French as a second or other language
- upgrading for certification or further education
- critical thinking

What does literacy mean to CUPE?

As workers, literacy empowers us to:

- develop our skills, knowledge and potential at work, at home, and in our community
- question, evaluate, envision
- assert our rights and build our union
- act as full citizens and work for social justice

“Through literacy in the workplace programs, CUPE has built new relationships with hundreds of our union’s members. For most of these workers, it’s the first time that they’ve connected with the union. Our experience shows that literacy skills learning not only helps provide workers with very valid education, but creates a positive impact on their family and community life as well.”

Paul Moist, National President, Canadian Union of Public Employees