

# CUPE Integrates Literacy



**A Canadian Labour Congress Case Study**



Canadian Labour Congress

Congrès du travail du Canada



# **CUPE INTEGRATES LITERACY: A Canadian Labour Congress Case Study**

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- *Bargaining Basic Skills: What Unions Should Know about Negotiating Worker-Centred Literacy Programs* © 2000
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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are delighted to present you with the story of how a major Canadian union has approached the important issue of literacy. It is the story of how the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) took steps to move from a project that is about promoting basic skills programs for CUPE members to one that includes 'integrating' literacy and clear language into the life of the union.

The CUPE story, by definition, is a work in progress. In sharing it now, we hope it might serve as a practical example to other organizations affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) with a similar goal of integrating literacy. While the specifics of the CUPE experience cannot be duplicated by other unions, federations of labour or labour councils, there are ideas that can be adapted to other contexts. We hope that the analysis of integrating literacy might also support the integration of other equality issues into the culture and agenda of the labour movement.

This story is only one of many, because there are other unions, federations of labour and labour councils with their own amazing stories to tell. Hopefully, there will be the chance to tell other stories as our collective work in this area grows and moves forward.

We would like to thank the people who worked on this project. CLC Literacy Co-ordinator Tamara Levine co-ordinated the work. Bev Burke researched and wrote the case study with the help of Jean Cannon Unda. Sylvia Sioufi, CUPE Literacy Co-ordinator, provided guidance and co-ordinated the input of the CUPE staff and activists who participated in the project. Cindy Wiggins, Suzan Fergus and Elaine Dumais of the CLC Education Department made valuable contributions to the work.

Special thanks for the financial support of the National Office of Literacy and Learning, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

We look forward to working with you as we continue to live, gather and share the stories.

In Solidarity,



Barbara Byers,  
CLC Executive Vice-President



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## Charts

#1, A and B – The CUPE Organizational Chart

#2 – Historical Timeline

# Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

## CUPE-related organizational terms

CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
HEU	Hospital Employees' Union (BC Health Service Division of CUPE)
NEB	National Executive Board
UD	Union Development Department

## Literacy, education and training

BEST	Basic Education for Skills Training
CAMA	Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
LRG	Literacy Reference Group (CUPE) <sup>1</sup>
LWG	Literacy Working Group (of the CLC)
MCL	Movement for Canadian Literacy
NLS	National Literacy Secretariat of the HRSDC (This branch of HRSDC was restructured in 2006 and renamed the National Office of Literacy and Learning (NOLL).

**Please note** We use the terms 'literacy and basic skills', except where a program is called "Essential Skills" as in CUPE Local 500.

## Other labour organizations

CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
NSFL	Nova Scotia Federation of Labour
OFL	Ontario Federation of Labour
SFL	Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

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<sup>1</sup> This name has recently been changed to 'Literacy Working Group'. However we will continue to use 'Literacy Reference Group' in this report to avoid confusion with the CLC Literacy Working Group.

## A Case Study: CUPE ‘Integrates’ Literacy

*Literacy is a metaphor for access and inclusion. Literacy is like a burr that gets on to your clothes and you carry it everywhere.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### What this case study is about and who it’s for

This is the story of how Canada’s largest union has taken steps to move from a literacy project that is about basic skills programs for CUPE members to one that includes ‘integrating’ literacy and clear language into the life of the union. It is an attempt to show how a government-funded project has evolved to include core organizational support for new ways of approaching other aspects of union work using the tools of literacy and clear language. In this context, ‘integration’ means working towards a time when a literacy and clear language lens is applied to planning, strategizing, implementing and evaluating everything the union does.

The goal of integration is to:

1. build the union, because taking literacy and clear language into account strengthens our capacity to achieve our collective goals, and
2. build commitment within the union to ensure that literacy and clear language work is sustainable over time.

To tell the story, we refer to some common organizational factors to consider in moving towards integration. These factors are outlined in the box on page 8. We will also look at the impact of the integration process on CUPE, and point to some of the challenges that lie ahead.

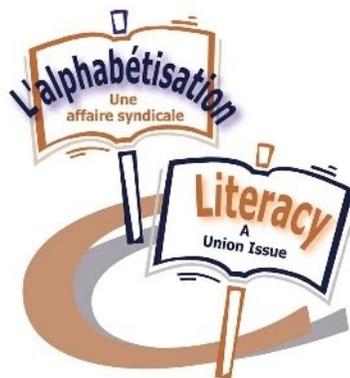
We will not begin the story by talking about ‘integration’. First literacy had to make its way into the union. Then the focus was on building awareness and support for literacy and clear language. Only after this groundwork was laid during the first three years of the national program could the goal become integrating literacy into the agenda and culture of the union.



The CUPE story is a work in progress. In sharing it now, we hope it might serve as a practical example to other unions, federations of labour and labour councils affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) with a similar goal of integrating literacy. While the specifics of the CUPE experience cannot be duplicated by other organizations, there are ideas that can be adapted to other contexts. We hope that the analysis of integrating literacy might also support the integration of other equality issues into the culture and agenda of the labour movement.

### **Organizational factors we considered in the process of integration<sup>2</sup>**

1. The vision for literacy and where it was coming from in the union.
2. The climate for introducing the literacy work, both within and beyond the organization.
3. The strategies used over time to move the literacy and clear language agenda forward.
4. How the buy-in from key people in the organization was accomplished.
5. How the leadership and others viewed the importance of literacy and clear language.
6. What decisions, policies and resolutions were implemented to be able to secure the necessary resources for the program.
7. The resources required (time, staff and money) and where they came from.
8. The ingredients in the shift to an integration model of literacy and clear language.
9. The ongoing activities of the union where literacy and clear language were integrated, how that happened and the ensuing ripple effects.



<sup>2</sup>This is an organizational and analytical tool developed by Jean Connon-Unda for the CLC, to help unions integrate literacy.

# TOWARDS INTEGRATING LITERACY: THE CUPE EXPERIENCE

## I. Phase One: Getting literacy on the CUPE radar

The first stage involved creating the conditions for getting literacy on the CUPE radar. We look at what was happening inside and outside the union and how the climate influenced CUPE. Then we explore how literacy made its way into the union.

### 1. The climate for literacy within and beyond the union

#### **CUPE: The organization**

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is Canada's largest union representing over 500,000 public sector workers. CUPE members live and work in almost every Canadian town and city. They work in health care, education, municipalities, childcare, transportation, communications, airlines, emergency services, and other services vital to Canadians. CUPE has 2,800 locals ranging in size from a few members to more than 15,000. Some locals consist of members who all work in one workplace, while others span a region or province.

A network of 400 staff representatives work directly with the locals. Staff specialists in areas such as education, research, health and safety, and equality also provide a resource for members in the national office and in the regions.

*Refer to Charts # 1, A & B for an overview of CUPE's organizational structure*

#### **Planting the seeds of literacy in CUPE**

The late 1980s and 1990s were exciting times for labour literacy, with significant involvement by CUPE locals and CUPE leadership and staff playing key roles in a number of innovative programs. As a national union, however, CUPE had yet to grapple with its direction on literacy and training.

- The Ontario Federation of Labour’s (OFL) BEST program (Basic Education for Skills Training), launched in 1988, was based on a co-worker or ‘peer’ instructor model. Until BEST’s provincial funding was cut off in 1998, dozens of CUPE locals were involved in BEST workplace programs across the province. The program involved current CUPE senior staff: Julie Davis was then the OFL Vice-President responsible for the BEST program and Morna Ballantyne was the CUPE representative on the OFL Education Committee. Monique Joly, a CUPE staffer, was trained in 1990 as a BEST instructor to run a French as a Second Language program at the CUPE National Office. Hired as the BEST French Training Coordinator in 1993, Monique became a CUPE education rep in 1997. The BEST program was adapted in 1995 for the HEU in B.C. by Sylvia Sioufi, who was hired as CUPE’s first literacy coordinator in 2000 and continues in this role.
- The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) *Labour Communications Skills* project began in 1994 and included pilots to test different union and joint models of delivery. CUPE National President, Paul Moist, was involved in the MFL project as President of CUPE Local 500 representing municipal workers at the City of Winnipeg.



CUPE staff recall that ‘training and adjustment’ was on the labour agenda in the early to mid 1990s, a result of massive upheaval, restructuring and downsizing in the workplace. This sparked an internal debate about how training should be funded, who should deliver it and what the union’s role should be.

The debate also opened up the need to consider literacy challenges within the training agenda. This included looking at the barriers to access and participation in the training programs and materials faced by workers with limited literacy skills. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) National Training Conference in 1997 further pushed CUPE to think about its training policy.

## **The ‘Literate Cities’ Project**

In 1996, the CLC hired Tamara Levine of the OFL BEST program to launch its Workplace Literacy Project. Tamara would play a major role in getting CUPE involved in literacy. CAMA (the Canadian Association of Municipal Employees) had invited Tamara (first as BEST Regional Coordinator for Eastern Ontario and then as CLC Literacy Coordinator) to sit on the CAMA ‘*Literate Cities*’ project steering committee.<sup>3</sup> She successfully convinced CAMA of the value of offering a seat to CUPE as the major union representing municipal workers, and lobbied CUPE to join the steering committee.

Brigid Hayes of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) and later a member of the CAMA steering committee was another significant player in getting CUPE involved in literacy. Her role at the NLS was to develop and recommend funding for new partnerships in workplace literacy and she saw CUPE as a key union to get involved. Brigid brought not only the possibility of funding to the table but also union sensitivity and a rich background with workplace literacy programs.

## **2. A CUPE vision for literacy: What it is, where it came from**

### **A CUPE national literacy program takes shape**

Within this context, CUPE National began to take an interest in literacy. The National Literacy Program was largely initiated by two CUPE women: Morna Ballantyne held a key policy position in the union as Executive Assistant to CUPE National President Judy Darcy and Cathy Remus, a Research Officer, brought personal commitment and a passion for literacy.

When Morna was approached in 1995 by Tamara Levine from BEST about getting CUPE involved in the CAMA program, she immediately saw the possibilities. Municipalities were a key CUPE sector, the work was concrete and focused, and Morna saw it as a way to “build something positive”. Graham Deline from the Union Development Department was assigned to sit on the CAMA steering committee and on the CLC Literacy Working Group when it began in 1998.

In 1996, Cathy Remus from the Research Department was assigned to represent CUPE National on the CLC Training and Technology Committee. She helped plan the CLC 1997 National Training Conference and co-chaired the workshop on Basic Skills. When Cathy moved from Research to Union Development in 1999, the literacy and training agendas moved with her. With Cathy on the CAMA steering committee and the CLC Literacy Working Group, CUPE National began to play a more active role.

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<sup>3</sup> CAMA got funding from the NLS for pilot workplace basic skills programs in cities across the country, involving municipal workers who were largely CUPE members.

Morna and Cathy organized a meeting with CUPE senior management, Tamara Levine (CLC) and Brigid Hayes (NLS) to discuss developing a national literacy program with government funding. They then presented their vision of how literacy could both support individual members and strengthen the union to CUPE's National President, Judy Darcy. In 2000, with the support of leadership and senior staff, CUPE successfully applied for NLS funding.

Following CUPE's National Conference on literacy held in January 2001, CUPE's vision of literacy was further developed by the CUPE National Literacy Reference Group (LRG) and became CUPE policy at the National Convention in 2001.

### **Resolution #304 - National Convention 2001**

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that CUPE National continue to support literacy, basic skills, worker and workplace education programs and to encourage local unions to support and participate in CUPE's literacy project; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that CUPE National encourage and support locals and assist with needs assessments with interested locals; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that local unions endeavour to achieve contract language ensuring these education programs are fully funded by the employer, while being union developed and operated voluntary programs that meet the needs of the workers; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that such programs:

- ◆ enable workers to have more control over their lives and jobs;
- ◆ build on what workers already know;
- ◆ address the needs of the whole person;
- ◆ be developmental;
- ◆ reflect the diverse learning styles and needs of adult workers;
- ◆ involve workers in decision-making;
- ◆ seek to integrate literacy training with other aspects of workplace training;
- ◆ be confidential;
- ◆ are open to all;
- ◆ be accessible.

## **The vision of integrating literacy**

In 2003, the CLC Literacy Working Group began to discuss ways of integrating literacy into the ongoing activities of the union. CUPE took up this theme in its Literacy Reference Group and talked about what this could mean in CUPE:

- literacy and clear language would be included in the strategic priorities of the union.
- literacy would be included in union priorities.
- a literacy and clear language lens would be applied in member education.
- more workplace basic skills programs would be bargained by locals or funded through the different sectors, drawing on the CAMA model, to benefit marginalized CUPE members.
- clear language would be integrated into collective agreements, union communications and all other CUPE activities.

## **II. Phase Two: Building awareness and support for literacy and clear language in the union**

### **1. CUPE's National Literacy Program: goals and strategies**

#### **Program goal**

The first CUPE National Literacy Program began in 2000 with two key goals:

- To promote the value of literacy and workplace learning and the key role that CUPE can play in moving the literacy and clear language agenda forward, and
- To facilitate the development of new and existing workplace programs and clear language initiatives that address the literacy needs of CUPE members.

It wasn't until 2003 that the third goal was added:

- To integrate literacy and clear language into the organizational culture and work of the union at the national, provincial and local levels.

Chart #2 *The Historical Timeline* provides a snapshot of the key activities undertaken to meet these goals in the CUPE National Literacy Program from 2000-2006.

## **Program strategies to build awareness and support**

There were several key strategies used to build awareness and support for the program. We will touch briefly on those strategies which not only built awareness and support but also helped move towards integrating literacy into the organizational structure and activities of the union.



### ***Strategy #1 – Building partnerships***

The decision to work with the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) helped to focus CUPE's literacy work and give it a base among CUPE locals. CUPE was also able to use CAMA events as a way to further its own training agenda. A significant start-up event in the program was the CUPE-CAMA Conference in Bathurst, New Brunswick in 2000, which all CUPE national and regional Union Development (education) staff were asked to attend. Since then, CUPE members who sit on joint municipal workplace literacy committees attend workshops in advance of CAMA events as a way to train activists in a union vision of literacy. Creating this network and base of support in the regions has been critical to the future success of integrating literacy at the local and regional levels.

A partnership with the CLC was developed from the outset of the program. The CLC played a key role in initiating the CUPE literacy program by getting CUPE on the CAMA steering committee and supporting the development of the first funding proposal to the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). CUPE joined the CLC Literacy Working Group, helping to develop and distribute CLC resources within CUPE. CUPE took advantage of the CLC week-long literacy and clear language courses to train literacy activists and adapted the courses for their own use. Participation in the CLC LWG introduced CUPE to the concept of 'integration'. It also provided access to some training and tools for thinking about how to apply the concept within CUPE.

### ***Strategy #2 – Locating the National Literacy Program in the CUPE Union Development department***

Housing the program in the Union Development department of the CUPE national office was a strategic decision to use education to build the National Literacy Program. The Union Development department offered: 1) a structural link with the regions through the education representatives, and 2) access to existing union networks and activities. The member education program and other ongoing education activities were used to distribute the literacy and clear language work. Union Development is also responsible for staff training which will be a focus for future work. Literacy and clear language are most successfully integrated into CUPE's member education

program where the regional education representatives have made literacy a priority.

### ***Strategy #3 – Creating a CUPE National Literacy Reference Group (LRG)***

The LRG was created to advise CUPE on the direction of the program and to develop a literacy advocates' network across the union. In the beginning, the group was on the margins of CUPE's formal organizational structure. While this marginal status presented challenges, it also meant that the program had the freedom to choose LRG representatives with a passion for literacy, and instead of the usual political process for choosing national committee representatives. The LRG helped ground the new program in what was already going on in literacy throughout the union at the local level. The education sessions included in each meeting helped consolidate the group and develop a shared vision. The LRG was given formal status as a national working group in 2005, an important step toward integrating literacy into CUPE's organizational structure.

### ***Strategy #4 – Promoting clear language***

Clear language is linked to literacy as the other side of the access and participation coin. It is the responsibility of the organization to make the union accessible to all of its members. However, even when everything is in clear language, there are still some members who can't participate and require basic skills programs. Within CUPE, clear language provided a link to many union activities, becoming a hook for making conventions and conferences more broadly accessible. Clear language was seen as relevant to the day to day work of many national departments and locals. In Saskatchewan, for example, a pilot project in clear language helped solve a pay stub issue for a group of food service workers in a Saskatoon local. The project illustrated how a local could use clear language as a way to solve a specific problem where other strategies had failed. It provides a well-documented model for potential uses of clear language to other locals.

### ***Strategy #5 – The Training Agenda around literacy and clear language***

Including opportunities for training in all program activities was a way to build both literacy awareness and capacity throughout the union. For example, training was inserted into CAMA functions as capacity building for CUPE members on joint municipal workplace literacy committees. Literacy and clear language information and awareness sessions were inserted into as many union events as possible – into workshops, conferences, conventions, meetings and any other event open to some form of involvement by the literacy program. CUPE literacy and clear language workshops and CLC week-long courses helped develop CUPE activists and advocates for the program with a shared union vision of literacy. Shorter information sessions built awareness at all levels of the union.

## **2. Getting leadership involvement**

From the beginning of the program, there was an effort to get the support of top leadership. In the initial stages this meant getting 'buy-in' for a national literacy project and verbal support for literacy as a union issue. Morna Ballantyne, Executive Assistant to CUPE National President Judy Darcy (and later Managing Director of National Services), was approached as a strategic ally both by Tamara Levine of the CLC and Brigid Hayes of the NLS. Morna invited Judy to an initial meeting with Brigid and Tamara to discuss a possible CUPE literacy proposal. The President needed to be satisfied that it was doable and that CUPE could deliver on the project. Since funding could be secured at this stage (2000) from the NLS with no cash outlay from the union, it was easier to convince the leadership to support the program. CUPE agrees that the literacy program wouldn't have happened without the NLS funding.

The CUPE National Literacy Conference in January 2001 publicly demonstrated leadership support for the program. Claude Généreux, then President of CUPE Québec and now National Secretary-Treasurer, attended the conference and was a keynote speaker. Judy Darcy spoke about why literacy is a union issue. Longtime union literacy champion, Barb Byers, then President of the SFL and now CLC Vice-President, spoke about how to bring union leadership on-side.

However, the CUPE experience shows that integrating literacy is not just about getting buy-in to the importance of literacy but getting leadership involved in making it happen. CUPE was fortunate to have literacy champions in leadership positions. For example, Paul Moist, President of CUPE, was the President of CUPE Local 500 when he secured a major workplace training initiative for his local at the City of Winnipeg. Danny Cavanagh, President of the Nova Scotia Division and a member of the National Executive Board, (NEB) was a participant in a workplace education program at the City of Truro and a literacy champion before becoming a founding member of the LRG. He is the current NEB liaison. Leo Cheverie from CUPE in PEI, who represents the PEI Federation of Labour on the CLC Literacy Working Group and is a former member of the CUPE LRG, is now a member of the CUPE National Executive Board.

The more recent change in status of the LRG to a National Working Group has meant that there is an NEB liaison person appointed to the Literacy Reference Group. The liaison person attends all LRG meetings and reports back to the NEB. Betty Jean Sutherland from Nova Scotia, the first NEB member in the position, credits her participation in the LRG meetings with making her a supporter of the literacy program.



### **3. Building commitment: decisions, policies and resolutions**

Key decisions were taken, resolutions passed and policies implemented to lay the groundwork to secure the necessary resources for the program.

#### **Decisions about staffing and where to house the literacy program**

Funding for a literacy position is only part of the answer. The effectiveness of the work depends on where the position is housed, how it is defined, what supports are in place and how the position is staffed. The fact that some unions have hired a literacy coordinator on contract has sometimes meant that the advancement and integration of literacy and clear language within the organization is less likely to succeed than if the work is assigned to a staff person who is “embedded” there.

In 2000, CUPE hired their Literacy Coordinator into a regular staff position within the national department, Union Development, with outside (NLS) funding. Thus, from the beginning, the position was integrated into the national union as part of the bargaining unit, with benefits, access to staff meetings, etc. The staffing decisions have all been excellent choices: Cathy Remus, Sylvia Sioufi and Irene Jansen all had both CUPE experience and a passion for literacy.

#### **NEB policy decisions**

There have been two key policy decisions at the NEB with respect to literacy:

1. *To fund the literacy position internally should the NLS funding end.*  
This was the key piece in trying to build a sustainable program that would carry on independent of government funding. No other labour organization has made such a commitment to date.
2. *To make the Literacy Reference Group a formal National Working Group.*  
This shift has integrated literacy into the organization in a significant

way. The LRG is now included in meetings of all national committees and working groups, providing an opportunity to explore areas of collaboration. The new structure allows the LRG the best of both worlds: to continue to choose new members with literacy experience while planting its feet more firmly within CUPE.

## **Resolutions**

CUPE has passed five resolutions on literacy and clear language at National Conventions since 2001. In addition to resolution #304 on the union's vision of workplace literacy (see page 12), other resolutions on workplace programs encourage locals to negotiate programs, and to identify and support learners. Other areas covered by national resolutions include offering literacy workshops at union schools and developing tools in clear language, including resources to show locals how to write clear language resolutions. Eight resolutions on literacy and clear language have also been passed at Division conventions. In addition to building awareness and support for the literacy program, writing resolutions encouraged locals and Divisions to get involved in a clear language initiative.

## **4. Gathering resources**

Resources had to be found to develop and run a National Literacy Program. In addition to funding from the National Literacy Secretariat, it was agreed that CUPE needed to allocate internal resources to the program. Additional resources had to be secured from other parts of CUPE to integrate literacy into other union activities.



In addition to NLS funding, the internal union resources required to run the National Literacy Program, and where they came from, are listed below:

- ▶ The Director of Union Development committed time to monitor, support and advocate for the program, particularly in inter-departmental situations.
- ▶ Core costs covered by CUPE, largely from the Union Development budget, included some travel, printing and administrative support from a half time, bilingual staff person.
- ▶ The members of the LRG volunteer most of their time. Travel and some lost wages are now mainly covered by CUPE rather than by the NLS grant.

To move towards the goal of integrating literacy, CUPE has allocated the following additional resources:

- ▶ The NEB set aside funds in the CUPE budget to maintain the literacy coordinator position should government funding end. This decision is key to a sustainable program.
- ▶ Union Development agreed to:
  - Assign literacy and clear language as part of the role of education staff working in the regions. Most have facilitated a literacy workshop, held an awareness session, assisted a local or committee in developing a clear language resolution or promoted the literacy program in their courses.
  - Assign its course designers the task of integrating literacy into several member education courses.
  - Have member facilitators, working with regional education staff, assist with clear language training.
- ▶ The Union Development department will also coordinate and roll out the staff training planned for the next phase of the program.
- ▶ Staff time was required from other national departments to attend training in literacy and clear language and to initiate clear language projects, in health and safety for example.
- ▶ The Communications department provided staff support to producing CUPE literacy resources.
- ▶ Division Executives and national servicing reps in Saskatchewan and B.C. are taking the lead in pursuing funding for the expansion of workplace programs into other CUPE sectors beyond the municipal sector (e.g. health and education). Funding is also being sought for regional coordination of the work.

### III. Phase Three: Moving towards integration

Although the CUPE National Literacy Program was already working in ways that contributed to integration, the program became more intentional about integrating literacy and clear language into the ongoing activities of the union in 2003. While the basic skills aspects of literacy would remain central, adopting an integration approach opened up the possibility for literacy and clear language to penetrate more deeply into new and previously unconnected areas within CUPE. This approach was facilitated by the positive “culture” that had been developing through the work of the Literacy Program.



#### Union Education

Because the program was housed within Union Development, the department has been the focus for integration activities. Results include the following:

- ▶ Literacy is included in the responsibilities of regional education staff.
- ▶ There was a clear language edit of the Stewards course.
- ▶ The women’s leadership program incorporated clear language, including a two hour clear language session delivered by the Literacy Coordinator.
- ▶ There are plans to train members to co-facilitate new literacy courses.
- ▶ Member facilitators have been trained to deliver clear language courses.
- ▶ Nine CUPE Education staff and member facilitators have participated in CLC Train-the-trainer courses.
- ▶ A feedback form for facilitators, including questions on literacy and clear language, was developed although it is not yet being widely used.

Most CUPE schools now include literacy workshops as part of the program. Education staff report that their awareness of how to apply a ‘literacy lens’ to their work has led to sensitivity to the range of literacy levels among participants in their classes, an attempt to use less difficult terms and less reliance on written language. A challenge is that little attention has been paid to date to the training of CUPE staff representatives on how literacy and clear language could enhance their work. Such training is within the mandate of Union Development and is a major priority for the next phase of the program.

#### Other national departments

The CUPE National Literacy Program has done some clear language work with other national departments, including delivering clear language workshops with

Research and Communications staff and assisting with workshops and materials for a Health and Safety Conference. The Communications Department has assigned a staff person to work with the Literacy Program in the design of its materials. One unprompted clear language initiative from the Health and Safety Department involved producing a clear language outline of the 'right to refuse' on a pocket-sized card. The emergence of spontaneous initiatives like this one shows a change in the climate of the union in relation to literacy and clear language work.

### **Convention strategy**

The National Literacy Program has targeted CUPE's biennial national conventions since 2001. The LRG has developed resolutions and worked with departments and branches to incorporate literacy into convention activities such as evening forums and sector meetings. The CUPE literacy pamphlet was distributed on the convention floor. A presentation was made to 100 member facilitators who help deliver CUPE's education program.

A two-pronged strategy developed for the CUPE National Convention in 2005 moved the Literacy Program into the limelight. The fact that CUPE encouraged the option to submit resolutions in clear language and that close to half of the resolutions presented were in clear language, was a visible and empowering development for many delegates. The second element of the strategy was the CUPE National Literacy Award.

### **Other union events**

The program targeted Division and Sector conferences and conventions for presentations and/or material displays. Literacy and clear language were integrated into the Ontario Human Rights Conference with a checklist for facilitators, a training session and a demonstration of how to use clear language screens in presentations to the conference plenary. CUPE divisions in Nova Scotia and B.C. passed a significant number of resolutions on literacy and clear language at their conventions.

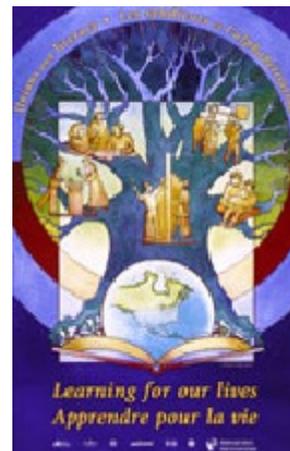
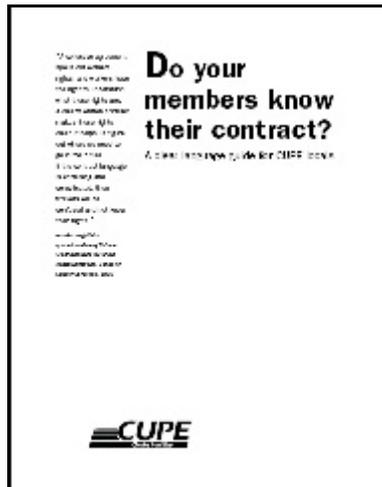
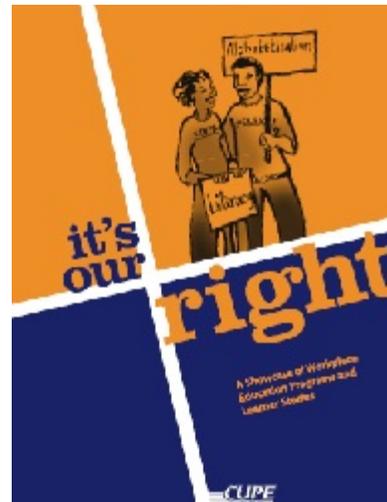
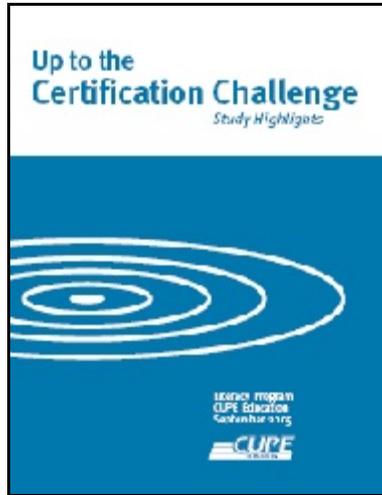
### **Bargaining**

The literacy program provided support to bargaining clear language in collective agreements through :

- ▶ the CUPE publication *Do your members know their contract?* that is widely distributed and includes some sample language.
- ▶ a workshop run by CUPE staff for union-management bargaining committee members in Fort McMurray, Alberta, to develop a clear language collective agreement.
- ▶ locals such as Local 500 in Winnipeg where an Essential Skills Program was bargained as part of a larger training package.

However, across the union, literacy and basic skills (and workplace training) generally are not included in bargaining priorities.

# CUPE literacy resources:



## **THE IMPACT ON CUPE**

### **There is awareness of and support for literacy and clear language**

The 2006 evaluation of the CUPE National Literacy Program interviewed or surveyed approximately 600 CUPE leaders, staff and activists on their view of the importance of literacy and clear language and support for the program. Close to 100% felt that literacy is an important union issue while 75% said that it is as important as health and safety. The vast majority of those contacted knew about the existence of the CUPE Literacy Program. There was broad support expressed for clear language work in all areas of union life, including collective agreement language. This provides a base for a next step involving providing support to staff representatives in how to negotiate basic skills training and clear language collective agreements.

Over a third of senior staff and NEB members, including the National President and Secretary-Treasurer, have some previous involvement with literacy. They have a union vision of literacy and understand how it supports union priorities. The National President has spoken out about literacy, and was the only affiliate president to attend a CLC roundtable with the Federal Minister on “Essential Skills” in 2005.

However, only a minority of staff have made literacy and clear language part of their ongoing work to date. Staff need to see how literacy and clear language can support – not add to – their workload. As well, the NEB will need to make literacy a strategic priority of the union. While there is strong political support from CUPE leadership for the literacy program, there is no clear statement from the NEB that staff need to make literacy and clear language a priority in their work.

### **Workplace programs expanding with regional support**

Through workplace basic skills programs, CUPE’s most disadvantaged members have been able to build skills, adapt to changing job requirements, develop an interest in further learning and improve family relations. The CUPE literacy evaluation documented many benefits for the union, including improved relationships with management, good publicity in the community and increased member participation and activists’ skills. Clear language communication awareness and skills are helping make the union accessible to more of the membership. There is a process beginning in Saskatchewan to expand support for workplace literacy into the health sector. This process involves locals from the health care sector and national staff representatives taking the lead, working with the National Literacy Coordinator to secure funding which includes regional program coordination.

## Integration into different levels of the union



The degree to which CUPE has succeeded in integration, especially at the national level, is a shining example of what labour can achieve in this regard. There is:

- an articulated union vision of literacy;
- a significant leadership commitment;
- a full-time, permanent staff position within Union Development;
- a Literacy Reference Group with the status of other national committees;
- an NEB liaison person;
- policies in place, resolutions in clear language; and
- a national literacy award.

## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

### What does 'literacy' mean?

There are different understandings among leadership, staff and activists about what 'literacy' means. Integrating literacy and clear language requires understanding literacy as a means to further equality and access rather than seeing reading and writing as ends in themselves. In addition to the longer term education work this implies, the LRG has discussed the issue of how to name the program. Rather than abandoning the term 'literacy', they have decided to work with the Communications staff, sharing concepts like literacy as equity and access and Paulo Freire's notion of "reading the world," not just the words. This is a work in progress.

### The role of the National Executive Board

While there is strong political support from CUPE leadership for the literacy program, there is no clear statement from the NEB that staff need to make literacy and clear language a priority in their work. Many NEB members think literacy should be among the official strategic priorities of the union. This would greatly help the process of integration by supporting staff to make room for literacy and clear language within their heavy workloads

### Getting the CUPE Divisions on board

While there is uneven integration at the Division level, it is most successful where there is both a structural link between the LRG representative and the Division Executive and a working relationship with the regional education staff. These relationships need to be developed, nurtured and reinforced.

**Staff training and support in literacy and clear language**

Training and support is needed for national staff representatives who work directly with the locals. They can have a major influence on getting workplace training on the bargaining agenda, supporting the development of joint workplace programs, and developing clear language contracts. Training could include raising awareness and developing strategies for 1) bargaining support for workplace education programs, and 2) negotiating clear language collective agreements.

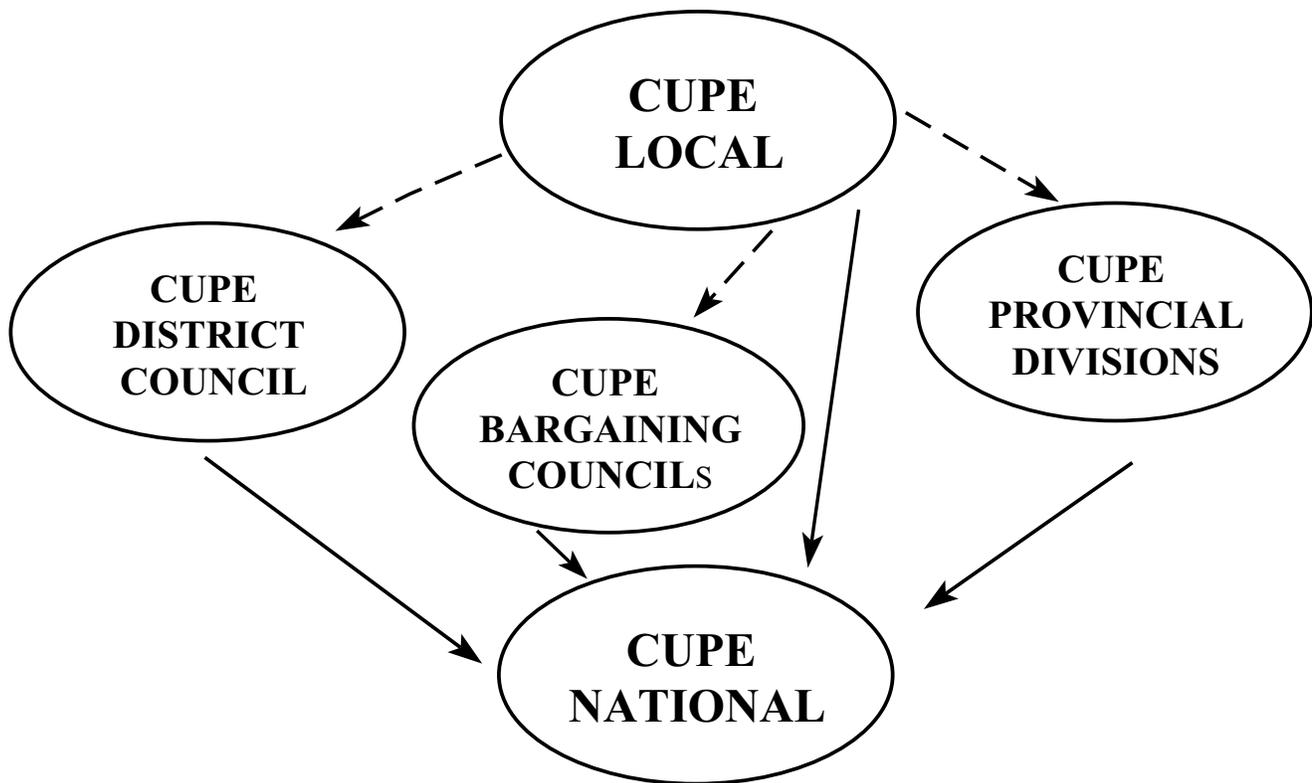
## CONCLUSION

During the evaluation of the CUPE program, the LRG was asked to list the main ways they thought that they had made integration happen in CUPE. Below is their list.

### **How CUPE made the present level of integration happen**

- ✓ Hired a Literacy Coordinator with experience working in CUPE as well as on the ground literacy programs.
- ✓ Situated the program with member education in Union Development.
- ✓ Named the work as 'integration' and developed an outreach strategy.
- ✓ Involved leadership from the beginning and got buy-in.
- ✓ Put together the Literacy Reference Group as an ad-hoc group that could get things going.
- ✓ Used existing partnerships (CLC, CAMA).
- ✓ Developed a workshop model and resources that promotes a CUPE vision for union-centred workplace programs and encourages members to think and read critically and to explore issues of power.
- ✓ Piloted programs to demonstrate the different ways that CUPE locals could get involved in literacy and clear language.
- ✓ Achieved status for the LRG as a National Working Group with an NEB liaison person as a strategy for connecting to the rest of the organization and entrenching literacy within the union.
- ✓ Developed and rolled out a convention strategy: resolutions in clear language and a national literacy award.

## Chart # 1: CUPE Organizational Chart - Part A

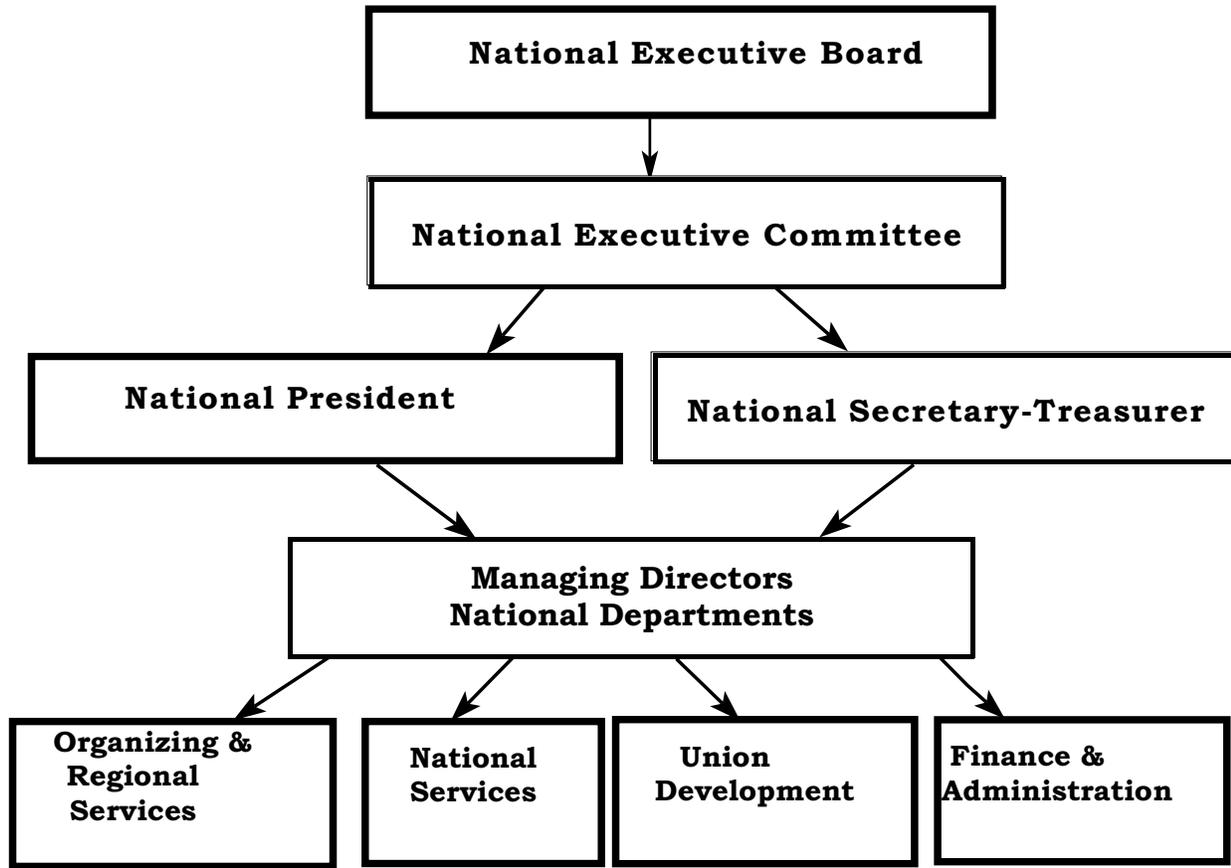


**All CUPE locals are part of CUPE National. Locals can also join their:**

- Provincial Division: the Division is the political wing of CUPE. Divisions coordinate campaigns at the provincial level. Activists are involved in provincial Divisions through both sector and issue-oriented committees.
- District Council: CUPE District Councils bring together CUPE locals at the community level.
- Bargaining Council: some CUPE locals negotiate at a central table with employer associations. The bargaining council is the bargaining agent for that group of locals.

Please see Part B for information on the structure of CUPE National.

## Chart # 1: CUPE Organizational Chart - Part B



- Regional Directors
  - Atlantic
  - Maritimes
  - Québec
  - Ontario
  - Manitoba
  - Saskatchewan
  - Alberta
  - British Columbia
- National Reps & Organizers
- Specialist Reps<sup>5</sup>
  - Research, Job Evaluation and Health & Safety
  - Equality
  - Communications
  - Legal
  - Education

- Branch Director
  - Research, Job Evaluation and Health & Safety
  - Equality
  - Communications
  - Legal
- Senior officers/ technical staff at National Office<sup>4</sup>
- Specialist Reps in the regions<sup>5</sup>

- Membership Development
- Staff Development
- Literacy Program
- Education Officers at National Office<sup>4</sup>
- Education Reps in the regions

- Accounting
- Technology
- Human Resources

<sup>4</sup>CUPE headquarters are located in the National Office in Ottawa. CUPE also has eight regional offices and a number of smaller area offices.

<sup>5</sup>Specialist Reps are part of their national department but also report to Regional Directors because their assignments are specific to the region in which they work.

## CHART #2– CUPE LITERACY PROGRAM HISTORICAL TIMELINE

	1995 – June 2000	July 2000 – June 2001	July 2001 – June 2003	July 2003 – Aug. 2004	Aug. 2004 – Present
<b>Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participation on CAMA steering committee and CLC LWG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify level of literacy awareness</li> <li>– Define and promote a national literacy agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Build literacy awareness and expertise in the union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Integrate literacy work in the union and extend workplace programs to new sectors and regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Build capacity at the local level to ensure members have access to workplace programs – and that literacy and clear language become part of CUPE culture</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Graham Deline and later Cathy Remus</li> <li>– Part of current assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Full-time literacy coordinator hired: Sylvia Sioufi</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sylvia Sioufi</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sylvia Sioufi</li> <li>– Irene Jansen (Mar-Aug/04)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Irene Jansen (Aug 04 - May 05)</li> <li>– Sylvia Sioufi</li> </ul>
<b>Resource Production &amp; Research</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inventory and survey of existing workplace programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Web page established</li> <li>– Promotional materials</li> <li>– First issue of newsletter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Special editions of newsletter</li> <li>– Promotional materials</li> <li>– Clear Language Jeopardy game</li> <li>– ‘Do your members know their contract’ booklet</li> <li>– Facilitator Feedback tool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Literacy Advocates Kit</li> <li>– Research on water workers</li> <li>– Popular summary of research</li> <li>– ‘It’s our Right’ booklet</li> <li>– Contribution to CLC tools</li> </ul>

	1995 – June 2000	July 2000 – June 2001	July 2001 – June 2003	July 2003 – Aug. 2004	Aug. 2004 – Present
<b>National Events &amp; Conferences</b>	– CAMA literacy conference in Bathurst, NB	– CUPE national literacy conference – Jan/01	– Co-sponsored two CAMA ‘Literate Cities’ conferences	– 6 CAMA regional workshops	– 2 CAMA regional workshops
<b>Integration</b>		– Session with facilitators at Ontario Human Rights Conference & presentation to participants	– ‘Tips on integration’ for member facilitators – Presentations/ sessions with staff in 3 branches – Clear language training session for UDD staff at national office – Literacy presentations at CUPE Division conventions – Literacy included in CUPE strategic plan – National convention adopts policy on workplace education and literacy	- LRG participated in meeting of all national committees - NEB Liaison appointed - Outreach to Health and Safety activists and staff - Integrated clear language into the national women’s leadership program and Stewards course - Clear language and literacy resolutions adopted at Division conventions - NEB approves budget for literacy coordinator position - Paul Moist statement on importance of literacy	– First CUPE literacy award – Clear language format resolutions at national convention – Clear language demonstration project on pay stubs in Saskatoon – Literacy and clear language issues covered in CUPE publications such as ‘Organize’ and ‘Fast Facts’

	1995 – June 2000	July 2000 – June 2001	July 2001 – June 2003	July 2003 – Aug. 2004	Aug. 2004 – Present
<b>Coordination</b>		– Literacy Reference Group (LRG) established	– Capacity building at LRG meetings	– LRG recognized as an established committee	– LRG becomes a national working group
<b>Workplace Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 5 pilot CAMA projects begun in 1996</li> <li>– CUPE locals involved in BEST &amp; WEST programs</li> <li>– HEU literacy project</li> </ul>	– Identify and connect with existing workplace programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– CAMA awards begin</li> <li>– 5 new local and 2 new provincial programs begun (including partnership agreement with NSFL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Needs assessment with the SFL for waste &amp; water workers</li> <li>– Supported peer tutor training in three provinces</li> <li>– 9 new local literacy programs and 1 provincial project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Exploration of work in health sector in Saskatoon</li> <li>– A dozen new literacy programs</li> </ul>
<b>Workshops/ Union Courses</b>	– Union Roundtable before the CAMA Bathurst conference	– Literacy awareness session at Saskatchewan Division Convention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Union workshops prior to CAMA conferences</li> <li>– Development of first Literacy &amp; Clear Language Courses</li> <li>– Development of 3-hour awareness sessions</li> <li>– Subsidies to participate in CLC/CUPE workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Development of weeklong course on clear language collective agreements</li> <li>– Clear language train the trainer for Education reps and member facilitators (through CLC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Redesign of literacy courses as a three-level week-end series</li> <li>– Development of member facilitator training to deliver literacy courses</li> </ul>

	1995 – June 2000	July 2000 – June 2001	July 2001 – June 2003	July 2003 – Aug. 2004	Aug. 2004 – Present
<b>Funding: National Project</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NLS Grant: 60%</li> <li>– CUPE National : 40% (mostly in-kind support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NLS Grant: 50%</li> <li>– CUPE National: 50% (including in-kind support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NLS Grant: 45%</li> <li>– CUPE National: 55% (including in-kind support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NLS Contribution: 35%</li> <li>– CUPE National: 65% (including in-kind support)</li> </ul>
<b>Links to literacy community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Joined the CLC LWG (1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active in CLC LWG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active in CLC LWG</li> <li>– Joined Movement for Canadian Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active in CLC LWG</li> <li>– Sponsored ‘Seeds for Change’ workshop at Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active in CLC LWG</li> <li>– Outreach/ partnership with literacy organizations</li> <li>– Outreach to literacy workers in Ontario</li> </ul>

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