

Good literacy skills are important to finding and keeping a rewarding job. Skills are important to economic growth for our province.

Employees with higher literacy skills usually

- earn more income
- are more likely to have steady jobs
- can move easily to other jobs
- have full-time work
- go for further training
- have higher self-esteem, and
- have fewer work-related injuries.

The more you learn, the more you earn

There is a clear link between literacy and employment. According to a recent study¹, young men who went back to school and got a post-secondary certificate saw their wages increase 8% more than those who did not go back to school. Young women saw their wages increase by 10%.

Workers with high school education or above were also twice as likely to participate post-secondary learning as those with less than a high school education.

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS)² rated participants in five literacy skill levels, with level 5 being the highest, and level 3 being the minimum skill level that people need to succeed in their careers and in daily life. The study found that people with lower literacy levels had lower rates of employment and lower earnings. They also tend to work in occupations with lower skill requirements. The higher the proficiency in literacy, the more workers tend to earn, particularly women.

People in the workforce need higher levels of literacy than in the past

There is more demand for higher literacy skills even for entry into jobs where these skills are not used much. Jobs that need little reading and writing are disappearing, including work in industries for natural resources, such as fishing, mining and forestry. Well-paid, secure jobs need higher levels of skills and certification

Literacy skills are important in all job-related training

Lack of basic education is a barrier not only to employment, but to the job training necessary to gain employment. Employment Insurance and Social Assistance rules do not allow people time or money to pay for literacy training.

Less literate adults need enough time to build literacy skills and gain confidence in using them. Only then will they be able to look for jobs other than those that are low-paying and without benefits, keeping workers below the poverty line.

¹ Participation in Adult Schooling and its Earnings Impact in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2006

² IALSS, Statistics Canada, 2005

Everyone wins when all Canadians can get and keep decent-paying, quality jobs

Canada is one of the few industrialized countries without a coordinated national system of adult basic education. We need a full range of partners at the national, provincial, regional, local and organizational levels to develop plans that show understanding of the value of workers. Partners could include, but are not limited to, government, business, labour, education, community groups and learners.

What can people do?

Workforce education programs are one answer. Workplace literacy programs are most successful when the stakeholders develop them together. Workers, management, unions, community agencies, literacy organizations and governments can together develop and deliver many different programs to meet workers' needs. Programs may include employment preparation, welfare-to-work projects, on-site tutoring and special jobsites where workers can "earn and learn."

Programs that are developed through a joint process with interest groups are most likely to succeed when each group feels their needs are met and they are pleased to participate. This process shows respect. Good workforce education projects recognize and build on the skills and knowledge that participants already have.

Benefits of workplace literacy programs include:

- greater employee self-confidence
- improved literacy skills
- increased participation in further training
- better problem-solving skills
- better team-building skills
- increased ability to use technology
- increased health and safety, and
- improved labour-management relations.

For more information on literacy and how you can help, contact:

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