



national
union

research

In Defense of
Workplace Training
and Joint
Labour-Management
Training

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What does skills training include?

Joint labour/management training refers to training and education that is a result of negotiated terms between the union and management. Workplace training refers to training that takes place on the job.

Objectives of this paper

The range of what is offered under this label is very broad. Adult Basic Education, ESL/FSL, computer courses, credited university and college courses. Of the joint union/management programs, some are offered on the job, and some are offered in public institutions, sometimes with valuable input and direction from the parties.

Key questions

This paper will attempt to explore what workers need and want, who can best deliver on these needs, and finally, what role the labour movement should be playing to ensure that the educational needs of workers are met.

This paper is intended to ask and explore answers to key questions:

1. What do workers need and who best meets those needs?
2. Does the current direction of the labour movement optimize workers having their needs met?
3. What role can the labour movement play to ensure quality training for workers?

1) What do workers need?

Content

Ranking of needs

In a study conducted by the London and District Labour Council, written by John Anderson and funded by H. R. D. C., the ranking of needs from highest to lowest were:

Computer skills	110
Skills upgrading	106
Health and safety	102
Job search skills	88

College or university courses	86
Union skills	85
Apprenticeship	80
Labour history	77
Labour certificate program	74
Diversity or equity training	70
Numeracy	66
Literacy	64
English as a Second Language	50

What the colleges offer

Computer skills, skills upgrading, college and university courses, apprenticeship, some labour history, labour certification programs, numeracy, literacy, and English/French as a second language have a long history of being offered across Canada in public institutions, the colleges and secondary schools, many with no tuition, and the rest with modest tuition.

Training dollars put elsewhere

In the past decade many of these courses and programs have been moved out of public institutions. Sometimes the move was motivated by a dissatisfaction with those public institutions, sometimes the appeal of money coming into unions and community groups was so great that they, along with privates, joined the competition for educational dollars. Within the labour movement was heard the cries of “we can do it better, and we can do it cheaper.” They could easily be mistaken for Frank Stronach of Magna.

Accessibility

The benefits of the classroom

Historically, public institutions have delivered the bulk of adult education. They have delivered it in classrooms and inside the plant. The preference is to bring the student to the classroom if possible, because learning to think critically is best done in a system which has supports and educational workers available, such as librarians and counselling centres. Students do their acquisition of basic skills best when it is embedded in programs that they can aspire to. Learning sometimes is best for students in the workplace, and when that is

so, public educators have worked and will continue to work in that environment. Students' needs must dictate these decisions. There is only one right answer to where the training should take place.

The benefits of on the job training

It often makes more sense to take the teacher to the students if the students are all in one locale. When education is added to a workday it often becomes important not to add additional hours to the day.

Location, timing and methodology

To make education accessible, it may have to be offered in the college or in the workplace, or it may have to be offered at non-standard times or standard times, or it may have to be offered through one of the newer technologies or by tried and true methods. The decision on how and where the course gets offered should be decided by the students' needs and not by what is cheapest, nor by what provides the greatest opportunity for organizing.

Costs

For public education to work there must be adequate public funding. That is the opposite of what governments want to provide. Governments would have you believe that health care and education caused the deficit.

Timing

Students should not be 'detoured' by tuition costs. They should not be leaving learning experiences mired in debt. When debt is inevitable, students with family obligations pass on the experience. They give up their dreams as selfish, rather than financially strap their spouses and children. This means the labour movement must oppose governments who want students to bear all or most of the cost. This means rejecting income-contingent loan plans which serve to extend the period the students are in debt.

The hours of delivery must be dictated by the needs of students. There is nothing in our collective agreement that bars negotiating a course or program on any day of the week, including Saturday and Sunday at any time of the day. Our only concern should be having students

learn when they are receptive to learning.

Students in basic skills programs within colleges historically paid little or no tuition and often had a living allowance. These courses were taught by professional, trained professors skilled in working with adults. Governments have withdrawn that support. Many within the labour movement blame the colleges rather than the government.

Quality

Colleges offered high quality education. The ratio of students to teachers was small. Teachers could customize learning environments. There was time for curriculum development and redesign of courses. That is eroding as work is transferred to those who do it cheaply.

Many in the labour movement believe that anyone can teach. This philosophy hurts the very people the movement is designed to protect.

Transportability and transferability of credits

Students have a right to get education that is credited and recognized across the country by employers and other educational institutions. Students have a right to learn without the agenda of corporations taking priority. They have a right to learn basic skills without the agenda of unions taking priority over their needs. The union agenda needs to be reflected in the curriculum but organizing cannot become the priority. If it does, we are no better than IBM. If it does, we are left without the ability to fight corporatization of education.

2) Does the current direction of the labour movement optimize workers having their needs met?

In conclusion, we believe the CLC was correct in 1992 when they passed policy that identified public education institutions as the preferred deliverer of education. The labour movement has supported the transfer of teaching in public institutions to community groups and labour organizations.

Unions make tactical error

Adult upgrading, English/French as a Second Language, and job search skills have been moved from

colleges and schools to community partners (NGOs and not-for-profits). We believe that the labour movement, while being well-meaning, is making a tactical error that is not in the long term interests of the students and not consistent with the ideals and history of the labour movement.

Workers win universality of education with the establishment of a public system

Workers in the early days of organizing in Canada fought to assure public education, education that was available to all, not just the wealthy. Pressure from the labour movement has always supported public education and public health care. While both were ideologically opposed in the United States, in Canada these public services have demonstrated that you can have a high quality service with fairly paid employees that cost less than private models.

In the past decade, Reaganomics have been transported to Canada.

Governments begin to dismantle public services

Federal and provincial governments have decided to reduce spending in health and education.

In health care, key services are being transferred to privates, to NGOs and service groups, and to families.

In education it has been transferred to privates, to community groups or NGOs (e.g. Cross-cultural Learners' Centre), and to unions, (e.g. BEST, Nfld.). Now one must ask, how have governments managed to transfer high priority services so successfully? The formula is easy to see. Here are the steps:

- Reduce funding to public education.
- Start a program of misinformation criticizing the public services so that the system begins to falter. Have spin doctors. Make certain that the problems are blamed on the institutions and not on the under-funding. Bad mouth teachers — greedy, inflexible, protected by their collective agreement at the expense of the kids.

- Co-opt unions and NGOs. Where possible, describe it as new money, not transferred money.
- Set up community advisory boards to review proposals. Where possible, allow the colleges and school boards to compete, knowing they cannot compete with non-unionized rates or rates well below professional teachers, or they cannot compete with proposals that are largely staffed by volunteers.
- Once the colleges stop competing, withdraw funding from union and NGO programs.

Rather than strengthen, labour decides to compete

Rather than strengthen public education as our foreparents did, the labour movement has become the competition. By becoming the competition the public education system has lost an historical ally. And conversely, it is hard for those remaining in public institutions to come to the aid of unions when the government grants are cut.

It is time for a serious reconsideration of labour's agenda. Hopefully we can, together, breathe life into the 1992 policy commitment to public education. If one looks to other countries which have destabilized public education (or public health care for that matter), the real losers have been the students (or the clients). They end up paying more, and having less access, and the quality of the service is diminished.

3) What role can labour play?

In closing, we are not saying that the labour movement has no role. On the contrary, they have a positive, and we would argue critical, role to play to save public education.

- **Mount a Campaign**

Labour should lead a fight for public education that matches or surpasses anything we have ever done. If

there is the political will within we can force the government to establish a system that goes from kindergarten to old age that truly meets the learning needs of our citizens. We have the talent for research, for organizing, and for marketing this objective.

- **Establish partnerships**

When training is successfully negotiated, negotiate the deliverer as public education institution, just as we negotiate to have Health & Safety delivered by the Workers' Health and Safety Centre.

- **Act as a Role Model**

The starting point is that labour must respect unionized teachers. Examine your attitudes to our members. We have many members who are good trade unionists, so do you. You have some duds, so do we. Our salaries and our benefits and our vacations were achieved through collective bargaining. While we get above-average vacations for Canada, we work long hours (44 per week without overtime in Ontario) during the school year.

Some teacher groups have belonged to the labour movement for years. Some, like the OSSTF and Ontario's Catholic teachers, have recently joined. Your respect of teachers will be key to whether more come to the labour movement as full partners. Teachers have already shown their value in fighting right-wing governments.

- **Become Advisors**

We recommend that Labour Councils invite the colleges to set up subcommittees of their Boards of Directors made up of Labour Councils, employers, and employees selected by the union to address questions of quality and access. Boards without significant labour

involvement are making decisions which are primarily dictated by the CEOs of the colleges, that respond to underfunding by cutting quality.

The Boards should also be asked to set up special advisory committees, made up of Board members, employers and unions to address the concerns around apprenticeship programs.

Most Labour Councils could get press coverage for such an event. Labour Councils could formally request an opportunity to present labour's concerns about content, quality and accessibility to the Board. The public image of the labour movement has been enhanced by the role it has played regarding medicare. We believe that the role we are proposing will not only improve quality education, it will enhance labour's image.

- **Influence Government**

Make education an election issue by developing a consistent strategy which would demand:

- public money be directed to public education
- adequate funding to provide quality education with quality resources
- access for all of those who are unemployed and underemployed
- basic education upgrading where required
- transferability and transportability of education and training
- make literacy and education as a basic human right for adults as well as children
- affordability

- **Labour as a Partner**

Education workers are not opposed to the labour movement being involved in education. We welcome it.

The hope for the future

We don't have a problem if you apply for the funds and then contract with the colleges to have full-time teachers deliver the service. It is one way to influence a quality outcome.

However, we believe that when labour unions, community agencies, not-for-profit and for-profit groups see themselves as deliverers of educational programs, they are undermining the public system of adult education and training.

We ask you to work with public institutions to ensure accessibility, the services of libraries and counselling centres, to improve responsiveness and to demand quality.