

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 692

CE 068 686

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 TITLE Basic Education in the Workplace Exploratory Project. Canadian Manufacturers' Association. Perceptions of Workplace Literacy Skills in Manitoba's Manufacturing Sector. Final Report.  
 INSTITUTION Manitoba Dept. of Education and Training, Winnipeg. Literacy and Continuing Education Branch.  
 SPONS AGENCY National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa (Ontario).  
 PUB DATE Mar 93  
 NOTE 23p.; Developed for the Basic Education in the Workplace Steering Committee. For related documents, see CE 068 682-690.  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; \*Basic Skills; Educational Research; Employer Attitudes; Foreign Countries; \*Job Skills; Literacy Education; Manufacturing; \*Manufacturing Industry; \*Needs Assessment; Numeracy; Skill Analysis; Surveys  
 IDENTIFIERS Manitoba; Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

A project assessed perceptions of manufacturing employers regarding the workplace literacy skills of occupational groups in their industry in Manitoba. A mailed survey was sent to 125 members of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association; 41 completed it. The first part of the survey obtained information about the occupations in manufacturing and required reading, writing, math, and communication skills. The second part gathered employers' perceptions about workplace literacy skills and occupational groups most in need of improved basic workplace skills and determined if they were interested in a further initiative to examine workplace literacy skills. Two-thirds of the respondents identified 9 of 10 common industrial reading documents/tasks as occupational reading tasks. The most common mathematics operations were working with decimals, using metric measurement, and working with fractions. Two-thirds of the respondents used tape measure, calipers, micrometer, and scales. Half of the respondents identified all four types of writing: work orders, complete forms, time cards, and safety reports. All respondents stated listening speaking were used. English as a second language was a concern for 16 companies. Of 41 industries completing the survey, 23 indicated an interest in participating in a further initiative. (Appendixes include the survey, occupational groups needing improved workplace literacy skills, and list of participating companies.) (YLB)

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# Basic Education in the Workplace Exploratory Project Canadian Manufacturers' Association

## Perceptions of Workplace Literacy Skills in Manitoba's Manufacturing Sector

### Final Report

by  
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March 1993

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**The Canadian  
Manufacturers'  
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**Basic Education in the Workplace**

**Steering Committee**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report describes the Basic Education in the Workplace Exploratory Project undertaken by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association of Manitoba (CMA). The funding for this project was provided by the National Literacy Secretariat through the Manitoba Basic Education in the Workplace Steering Committee.

The project was designed to assess:

- a) the perceptions of manufacturing employers regarding the workplace literacy skills of occupational groups in their industry and
- b) their interest in participating in a further project.

On the basis of the results of this project, the CMA Basic Education in the Workplace Steering Committee would make a decision whether or not to proceed with a further initiative and if so, would define the parameters and goals of that project.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The project objectives were:

- Promote awareness of workplace literacy in the manufacturing sector in Manitoba,
- Design an instrument to assess the perceptions of workplace literacy skills for common occupations in the manufacturing sector,
- Assess employers' perceptions of the need for workplace literacy skills,
- Assess the interest in a further investigation of workplace literacy skills, and
- Develop a proposal for further study, if warranted.

## **SURVEY DEVELOPMENT**

To gather the perceptions and determine the interest, a mail out survey, developed for this project, was sent to members of the CMA. A copy of the survey may be found in Appendix 1.

The first part of the survey was designed to obtain information about the occupations in manufacturing and the reading, writing, math and communication skills required by these occupations.

The second part of the survey was designed to:

- 1) gather employers' perceptions about workplace literacy skills in general,
- 2) gather perceptions about the occupational groups in manufacturing most in need of improvement of basic workplace skills,
- 3) determine if any employers had participated in workplace literacy skill assessments, and
- 4) determine if there was sufficient interest in a further CMA initiative to examine workplace literacy skills in the manufacturing sector.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

### **Return Rate**

One hundred and twenty-five (125) CMA members received the survey and 41 completed it, for a return rate of 33%.

## Occupations in Manufacturing Industry

The most common occupations were:

- Material Handler (32),
- Machine Operator (31),
- Machinist (21),
- Industrial Mechanic (20), and
- Welder (20).

However, if the occupations of Lathe Operator (15) and Brake Operator (8) were included in the Machine Operator category, this would be the most common occupational group. The results are presented in Table 1.

Other common occupations added by the respondents included:

Shipper/Receiver (5), Industrial Electrician/Electrician (5), Spray Painter/Painter (4), and Machine Grinder (2). A full list of other occupations is found in Appendix 2.

Occupation	Number	Occupation	Number
Material Handler	32	Lathe Operator	15
Machine Operator	31	Millwright	13
Machinist	21	Sheet Metal Operator	13
Industrial Mechanic	20	Fabricator	12
Welder	20	Tool & Die Maker	10
Assembler	17	Instrument Technician	10
Mechanic	16	Brake Operator	8

## Reading Skills

The survey listed 10 common industrial reading documents/tasks. Of these, all but code books were identified by two-thirds of the respondents as occupational reading tasks. The results are presented below in Table 2.

Other types of workplace reading added to the list by respondents were :

Formulations,	Process Instructions,
Shipping Picks,	Material Safety Data Sheets,
Process Control Checklists,	Schematics,
Bills of Material,	Specifications,
Process Set up Sheets, and	Service Bulletins.

There were two additional comments provided by respondents:

- 'Memos, Product Schedules, Manuals and reports do not currently go to shop floor due to skill limitations on shop floor.'
- 'Not all of the above jobs require all of above reading tasks.'

<b>Reading Document/Task</b>	<b>Number</b>
Safety Regulations	37
Work Orders	36
Forms	34
Memos	33
Blueprints	32
Manuals	31
Diagrams	31
Product Schedules	27
Reports	24
Code Books	13



<b>Table 3      Type of Mathematical Operations</b>			
<b>Operation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Operation</b>	<b>Number</b>
Decimals	31	Volume	17
Metric	30	Area	16
Fractions	23	Estimation	16
Angles	19	Circumference	14
Cutting Speeds	18	Perimeter	13

<b>Table 4      Other Mathematical Operations</b>	
Length (2)	Weight Totals (2)
Arithmetic Totals	Bend Allowance
Calculation of Time Consumed	Estimation of Completion of Jobs
Feed Rates	Flows
Formula Proportions	Lefts, Rights
Materials Required	Operating Rates
Opposite Hand	Percentages
Simple Addition and Subtraction	Simple Math
Shear Sizes	Statistics - Basics
Tolerances	Width

## **Communication Skills**

There were two questions concerning communication skills; one for writing and one for oral and visual communications.

### **Writing**

All four types of writing presented in the survey were identified by half of the respondents: Work Orders (29), Complete Forms (27), Time Cards (27), and Safety Reports (18).

Other writing skills added by respondents are presented below.

Log Book Entries (2)	Change Orders
Core Sheets	Instruction Clarification
Inventory Tags	Non-conformance Reports
Pouring Sheets	Production Travellers
Production Reports	Quality Checks
Summary Reports (Production/ Job)	TQM Proposals

**Listening and Speaking**      *All respondents stated these two skills were used in manufacturing occupations.*

**Hand Signals:**                      *These were used in 5 companies*

**English Second Language**      *This was a concern for 16 companies.*

### **Other Communication Skills**

Other points added by respondents in the communication category included:

Writing (3),	Reading Instructions (2),
Ability to Work as Team Member (2),	Computer Literacy,
Clarity of Communication, and	English as a First Language.

## Occupational Groups Most Needing Improvement in Workplace Literacy Skills\_\_

In the survey, the companies were asked to identify the occupations in their industry which were most in need of improvement in Workplace Literacy Skills. Specific company perceptions may be found in Appendix 3. The general results are presented below in Table 5.

Table 5 Occupations Needing Improved Workplace Literacy Skills			
<i>All Manufacturing Occupations</i>	8	<i>Unknown/Not able to Identify</i>	3
<i>Specific Occupations</i>	16	<i>Specific Worker Groups</i>	5
Sheet Metal Workers	(2)	Occupations with Minority Workers	(3)
Welders	(2)	English Second Language Workers	(2)
CNC Machine Operators	(2)		
Machine Operators	(2)		
Mechanics	(2)		
Quilters and Sewers	(1)		
Assemblers	(1)		
Material Handlers	(1)		
Painters	(1)		
Heat Treators	(1)		
Platers	(1)		

### Perceptions of Need for Improvement of Workplace Literacy Skills

The general perception was that increasing demands are being placed on workers due to the impact of technology and the need to produce products to compete in today's market, both locally and globally. Specific company perceptions may be found in Appendix 4. The general results are presented in Table 6.

One comment was added to the survey about training and workplace literacy skills:

- "Employees need to be trained to become proficient at learning new skills on their own. If we train in specific skills applicable to their current job - we will be training employees over and over again as their jobs change."

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
Need To Improve Basic Skills	12
Require Improvement	8
Need Grade 12	6
High School Math	3
Grade 11	2
Too Low For The Demands	3

### **Past Workplace Literacy Skill Assessments**

Nine companies had undertaken some form of workplace literacy needs assessment. Of these companies, five were conducted under the auspices of the Workplace Language Training funded by Employment and Immigration Canada and delivered through Manitoba Education and Training. Two assessments were conducted on an informal basis within the company. One was conducted by Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (N.A.I.T.) through the company's head office in Edmonton. The last one was conducted by Keewatin Community College for employees with ESL needs at the company. The companies indicated they were willing to share the data gathered through these needs assessments, with the exception of the one conducted by N.A.I.T.

### **Industries' Interest in Further Study**

Of the 41 industries completing the survey, 23 indicated an interest in participating in a further initiative; 13 were not interested; 3 might be interested and 2 gave no response. This indicated there was sufficient interest to undertake a further initiative.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

- ◇ Through the covering letter and the survey for this exploratory initiative, awareness of workplace literacy skills within the manufacturing sector in Manitoba has been increased.
- ◇ An instrument to send to employers to gather their perceptions about workplace literacy skills has been developed. The instrument has since been adapted for use in another sector.
- ◇ Workplace literacy skills are needed by occupations in the manufacturing industry.
- ◇ Based on the information received from the respondents, it may be stated that the workplace literacy skills of reading, writing, mathematical operations and tools, and oral communication are fundamental occupational skills in the manufacturing sector in Manitoba.
- ◇ There was sufficient interest on behalf of employers to pursue a further, in-depth study of workplace literacy in the manufacturing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER INITIATIVE

- ◇ A study of workplace literacy skills in the manufacturing sector be undertaken.
- ◇ Clarification of the difference between basic skills and Grade 12 be conducted.
- ◇ Limit the study to the occupational group of machine operators.
- ◇ A wide a range of industries be included in the study.
- ◇ The study include industries outside of the Winnipeg perimeter.
- ◇ The study include industries of different sizes.

Based on these recommendations, the CMA Basic Education in the Workplace Steering Committee submitted a proposal the Manitoba Basic Education in the Workplace Steering Committee to undertake an analysis of the workplace literacy skills of machine operators in the manufacturing sector. The goals of this initiative are:

- ◇ To identify the variety of occupations included in the machine operator category.
- ◇ To identify the workplace literacy skills, reading, writing, math, and communication skills, needed to carry out the duties of machine operators.
- ◇ To establish a profile of the most common/core workplace literacy skills of machine operators.

**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1

CMA Manitoba  
Workplace Literacy Skill Survey

Company Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person : \_\_\_\_\_

Total Number of Employees: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please check the manufacturing occupations operating in your company.

Assembler	_____	Brake Operator	_____	Fabricator	_____
Industrial Mechanic	_____	Instrument Technician	_____	Mechanic	_____
Lathe Operator	_____	Machinist	_____	Millwright	_____
Machine Operator	_____	Material Handler	_____	Welder	_____
Sheet Metal Worker	_____	Tool and Die Maker	_____		

2. Please list any other manufacturing related occupations in your company.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What type of reading is required in these operations ? (Check all that apply.)

Blueprints	_____	Code Books	_____	Diagrams	_____
Forms	_____	Manuals	_____	Memos	_____
Reports	_____	Product Schedules	_____		
Work Orders	_____	Safety Regulations	_____		
Other : _____		Please Specify :	_____		

4. What type of writing is required in these operations ? (Check all that apply.)

Complete Forms	_____	Safety Reports	_____
Time Cards	_____	Work Orders	_____
Other : _____	Please Specify _____		

5. What math is required in these operations ? (Check all that apply.)

Fractions	_____	Decimals	_____
Metric	_____	Estimation	_____
Calculation of:	Area	Perimeter	Circumference
	Volume	Angles	Cutting Speeds
Other : _____	Please Specify _____		

6. What tools or equipment needing Math skills are used in operations?

Calipers \_\_\_\_\_ Micrometers \_\_\_\_\_  
Tape Measures \_\_\_\_\_ Scales \_\_\_\_\_  
Other : \_\_\_\_\_ Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What communication skills are required by these occupations? (Check all that apply.)

Listening \_\_\_; Speaking \_\_\_; Hand Signals \_\_\_; English Second Language \_\_\_  
Other : \_\_\_\_\_ Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What are your perceptions of reading, writing and math skills needed in the manufacturing industry? (Use additional paper, if necessary.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Which occupation groups are most in need of improved reading, writing and math skills?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Has a workplace literacy skill assessment ever been conducted in your company ?

No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ If Yes, please specify when and who conducted it.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to share this information with the CMA ?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

11. Would your company be interested in participating in a CMA initiative to identify the workplace literacy skills required by various occupations in the manufacturing industry?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Contact Person (if different than above): \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.*  
PLEASE RETURN THE SURVEY BY MAIL TO:  
THE CANADIAN MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION  
402, CENTURY PLAZA, ONE WESLEY AVENUE  
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA R3C 4C6 OR BY FAX : (204) 943-3476

## Appendix 2

### Other Occupations In Manufacturing Sector as Provided by Respondents

Agriculture Research	Butcher
CNC Punching Machine Operators	Core Maker
Cut to Length and Shear Operators	Die Polisher
Electricians	Electronics Technician
Fork Lift Operator	Formulator
Furnace Operator	General Labourer
Grain Cleaner	Group Leaders
Heat Treator/Chrome Plater	Industrial Electrician/Electrician
Inspector	Inventory Control
Machine Grinder	Maintenance Personnel
Metallizing (Proprietary Process)	Moulder
Packager	Pattern Maker
Pourer	Power Engineers
Process Management	Process Operator
Production Operations	Programmer CNC Equipment
Roll Formers	Saw Operators
Sewing Machine Operator	Shipper Receiver
Spray Painter/Painters	Thermal Spray Operator
Tool Design & Process Design	Vinyl & Silicone Moulding

Appendix 3

Occupational Groups Needing Improved Workplace Literacy Skills

Company	Occupational Groups
1	Machine Operator level require improved skills. Other levels receive the skills through their training
2	Lower skilled jobs which also contain highest percentages of immigrants.
3	General factory workers and supervisors in general have poor skills.
4	All occupations involved in manufacturing.
5	Entry level groups. Technical groups generally have acquired that knowledge to acquire the certification.
6	Basic entry level, primary level line employees.
7	Not able to identify
8	The non-apprentice occupations
9	No single group can be identified; all groups share similar degree of need.
10	Unknown in our organization; No specific problem
11	All groups in today's market.
12	Sheet metal worker; Assembler.
13	No particular group. In today's workplace, everybody needs to be able to communicate verbally as well as in writing.
14	Unknown
15	Based on our needs assessment, all areas of the workplace feel a need for improved skill in communication (reading, writing, math)
16	Entry Level staff.
17	Our employees appear to have sufficient knowledge of these skills to deal with their jobs. Shortfall is coming up with new ideas to improve workplace, product and equipment.

Appendix 3

Occupational Groups Needing Improved Workplace Literacy Skills Continued

Company	Occupational Groups
18	Trades and processing groups.
19	Unskilled workers.
20	In our company, machine (pultoversion) operators are the most in need.
21	Most occupations using minority group workers.
22	All operations would benefits from improvement.
23	Quilters, Sewing
24	Technicians: Mechanics and Material Handlers
25	Production staff - ESL; Everyone - Statistical.
26	Within our organization, the Welding Department employees
27	All employees need blueprint reading skills, but especially sheet metal workers and welders. Painters require reading skills for application instructions. CNC machine operators require basic computer skills (e.g. keyboard)
28	Company trained N/C Operators.
29	Production line workers (process operators, grain cleaners, warehousemen)
30	The Manufacturing Area.
31	Machine Operator - in general unskilled labour; Industrial Mechanics, Machinists, Heat Treators, and Platers.

## Appendix 4

### Perceptions of Workplace Literacy Skills Needed in Manufacturing Sector

Co.	Perceptions of Workplace Literacy Skills Needed
1	Basic reading, writing and math skills are required by the Machine Operator level (Grade 12)
2	Requirements range from basic English and simple arithmetic to fairly sophisticated levels for trades and office
3	People tend to rely on computers, calculators, however the basics come first.
4	Basic reading, writing and math are needed in industry today, a warm body is no longer enough.
5	Grade 12 or equivalent, due to the strict regulations that govern our industry
6	Clear understanding of English Oral /written. Basic problem solving; Using addition, subtraction, division and multiplication.
7	To operate the "new operation machines", efficiently, high school math should be a requirement.
8	Need working knowledge of reading, writing and math skills.
9	We believe that literacy and numeracy skills are lacking due to second language and educational background.
10	Basic Grade 12
11	All are highly important.
12	In order to produce a superior product, reading, writing, and math skills are the very basics required for communication within an informed company, and are extremely necessary to achieve these goals, both on a domestic and global basis.
13	All skill levels must be upgraded to compete effectively in today's market.
14	Lower than required.
15	Actual study would be required - perception is Grade 12 +
16	Essential - Reading/understanding - Standards/ops policies/safety policies
17	Grade 11 level.
18	Increasing at a rapid pace as companies transfer more of the day to day management over to those closest to the process.

## Appendix 4

### Perceptions of Workplace Literacy Skills Needed in Manufacturing Sector Cont'd

19	There is a lack of basic literacy and math skills among entry level staff in manufacturing.
20	With the rapid increase of technology, operators need to upgrade in all above skill areas. We need to train our people more and they need the basic educational skills as a foundation.
21	Grade 12, English, Math, Computer literacy
22	All skills are required for communication between employees and employer to produce the best product with the most efficiency.
23	Skills are basically minimal. They are in need of upgrading somewhat, - not necessarily a huge upgrading, - but an upgrading nevertheless.
24	Ability to read (& understand) technical documents requires improvement.
25	The skills needed are generally a lot higher than most people possess. Skill levels are far too low on average.
26	Basic Skills to meet current and future needs particularly technical related.
27	It is generally accepted throughout our operation that all would benefit from improvements in the reading, writing and math skills.
28	Employees should have the basic skills necessary for these activities.
29	Reading Comprehension and basic math skills are lacking
30	Increasing needs - understanding and being able to actively participate in team effort is essential.
31	Our skills in the type of work done is satisfactory. However reading, writing, and math skills would give a greater advantage.
32	To become active participative members, staff require Grade 12 skills. Most employees don't have this skill due to lack of training or inability to recall training. Math is critical.
33	Need spelling , grammar and vocabulary to communicate effectively. Writing must be legible. Math must include percentages and statistics.
34	In rural areas, many of the labour type jobs applicants have weak skills
35	With technology advancing, higher math skills are required to operate the High Tech Machinery with computer applications.

Companies Participating in CMA Survey

Alcatel Telecommunications Cable	Ancast Industries Ltd.
Argus Industrial	Atlas-Graham Ind. Co. Ltd.
Brovail LifeSciences	Burns Meats
Canada Post Corp. MidWest Div.	Canadian Bronze Co. Ltd.
Canadian Metal Co. Ltd.	Canadian Oxy.
Carte International Inc.	Century Steel
Coca Cola Bottling	Controlled Environments
Custom Steel Mfg. Ltd.	Dominion Bridge
E.H. Price Limited.	Fiat Products Ltd.
Griffin Canada Inc.	International Game Technology
Inventronics Limited	KT Industries
Labatt Manitoba Brewery	Loewen Windows
Manitoba Honey Producers Ltd.	Manitoba Rolling Mills
Manitoba Sugar Company	Melet Plastics Inc.
National Coating Technologies Inc.	Omniglass Ltd.
Otto Bock Orthopedic Industry of Canada Ltd.	Repap Manitoba
Simmons Canada	Standard Aero
Temro Division. Budd Canada Inc.	The Royal Canadian Mint
Triple E Canada Ltd.	Wardrop Consulting
Westeel	Westroc Ind. Ltd.
Woodstone Food Corporation	