

**EMBEDDED LITERACY:  
STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORK AND LEARNING**

By

Deborah D'Amico, PhD  
Research Associate  
Queens College Worker Education, City University of New York

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## **Embedded Literacy: Strengthening the Connection between Work and Learning**

Work and learning are integral to each other, and their connection is powerful. What delivery strategies for adult work-based education fully exploit this powerful synergy? While functional context literacy attempts to take advantage of the relationship of work to learning, adult educators, employers, and policy makers can do far more than infusing work-based content into curriculum materials. For example, motivation is perhaps the biggest challenge for adult education in this country. We have not had success in attracting more than a tiny percentage of adults who need basic education to our programs. However, connecting the design of education and its rewards in the workplace more closely could have an impact on motivation and recruitment. Without more explicit connections than subject matter in reading material, the link between work and education is tenuous and the power of work to inspire learning is lost.

Drawing on my own work in research and evaluation, primarily of education linked to training in a union or labor-management context, I will offer delivery strategies that connect learning to work inside and outside of the classroom. In these examples, literacy is embedded in a work context larger than the classroom itself. It is part of job training, job training that itself is embedded either in work the learner is already doing or needs to do on the job s/he has, and in a career ladder that links education and employment opportunities in a particular industry. Such opportunities themselves may be nested in a context of sectoral development policies, strategic efforts to invest public and/or private dollars in both industries that provide good jobs with opportunities to advance *and* the training and education that leads to such jobs.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of adult learning at the basic skills level does not take place in these contexts, and remains disconnected from work. How do we make the connection between work and learning when, in the real lives of adult learners, this link is severed? Successful strategies for delivering adult learning in welfare to work settings provide some examples.

Most adult learners want education for themselves for the same reason we want it for them-to find a permanent exit from lives of poverty and dead-end, precarious employment. Research tells us that most adults need to reach post-secondary education to accomplish this. What are the best strategies for getting them to this point? This paper argues that adult learning must be embedded in real opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skill at work, to climb the ladder of learning, and to reap the rewards for doing both. To create this context of hope for workers with who lack basic reading, writing, math and English language skills requires that education and training be delivered in a context of advocacy and action in support of such opportunities.

### **The Context of Contextual Literacy**

My training in workplace literacy began when I directed one of the U.S. Department of Education National Workplace Literacy Demonstration projects in 1991. That project was a partnership between the Literacy Assistance Center, where I worked when the

project began, and the Consortium for Worker Education, where I worked when the project ended. My first teacher in this field was Dr. Francine Boren-Gilkenson, who taught me to ask, “Literacy for what?” In every group of dislocated, underemployed or at-risk workers I’ve ever faced, this question resounds. Basic skills learning has to be connected to something meaningful to inspire persistence and participation by adults, especially adult who feel shortchanged by schools. Work-based learning attempts to connect reading, writing, math and English language fluency to employment. What kinds of programs strengthen this connection and result in meaningful employment outcomes?

Because the rewards of employment are affected by many factors beyond the education levels or experience or training that workers acquire, work-based learning that expects to generate outcomes needs to be embedded in strategies that go beyond education, training and job placement for individuals. Rather, these strategies need to address the growth of inequality generated by an increasingly bifurcated economy, by advocating for low-wage workers whose options for earning a viable income have narrowed. Many low-income workers also face barriers of race and gender that affect how much education and training can lift them above poverty<sup>1</sup>.

In his article “Workforce Development Policies: A New Era for Education and Training,” Elliot reviews American attitudes toward work that underlie welfare reform policy, but points out that wages for those at the bottom of the occupational ladder have been falling for three decades and that economic inequality is greater now than ever before. These two factors act to weaken the link between work itself and the American Dream of upward mobility or success. He concludes:

Given these policy and economic trends, it is hard to overemphasize the importance of workforce development: the policies, programs and supports that can enable low-income people to succeed in navigating an increasingly complex labor market (2002: 1).

Workforce development provides a more appropriate context in which to embed the relationship between employment and literacy than more narrow terms, such as workplace literacy, or even work-based learning. Workforce development encompasses the notion of preparing workers within regions and economic sectors as well as workplaces. It assumes that the potential for workers to improve their wages and careers as they gain in basic and work-related skills is an integral part of understanding how individuals persevere and progress as they tie their learning to their livelihoods. Below, I provide evidence-based strategies for looking at basic skills learning embedded in workforce development programs that reward individuals for increasing their skills at work, and place the learning of individuals in this broader context.

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<sup>1</sup> See D. D’Amico, Race, class, gender and sexual orientation in adult literacy: Power, pedagogy and programs, forthcoming in the Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy for a discussion of how race and gender interact with education in the labor market.

## **Incumbent Workers: Integrating basic skills and job training in a labor management partnership environment**

In 1997, I was asked to compare and document five short-term training programs for workers with low literacy. All five programs took place at health care institutions that participate in a labor management education and training fund with Local 1199 Health and Hospital Workers Union, of SEIU (Service Employees International Union). SEIU is the largest union in the United States, and Local 1199 is the largest health care union in the nation, with a current total of close to a quarter million members in the New York-New Jersey area. The ETJSP (Employment, Training and Job Security Program) is the collectively bargained joint fund that operates education programs for members. As a labor management institution operating in a single industry, the ETJSP pursues a “sectoral” strategy. Briefly defined, sectoral approaches to workforce development seek to influence industry-wide dynamics that affect the quality of jobs. In union-based sectoral approaches, labor management contractual relationships act to “prevent employers from competing in ways that ultimately harm everyone in the industry-employers and workers alike. They identify competitive practices that harm the quality of jobs (Working for America, 2002:5).”

In the case of this example, training and education models responded to industry restructuring that was moving jobs from acute care facilities to more patient/customer centered positions in ambulatory care. The agreement between labor and management was that workers at risk of layoff would be offered the opportunity to train for the new positions in ambulatory care and the participating institutions would hire from this pool of retrained workers. This prevented low literate service workers with seniority, for example, from being fired rather than retrained. The ETJSP decided to use a variety of models for combining basic skills with job training for the new positions, and to compare the effectiveness of these diverse strategies.

Figure One outlines the major achievements and features of each of the five programs I studied. Two of the five programs used the job-to-job training model of the ETJSP, which offers short-term intensive education and training on paid time. These were:

- 1) **Registrar-receptionist training**, which offered *a two-week “vestibule” or preview literacy class, tightly focused around the same core curriculum and skills as the 10 days of classroom-based job skills training and the two day on-the-job training segments that followed the literacy component*. All 11 participants scored below minimum competency on a customized, contextualized health care worker literacy assessment. All of the participants passed all three components of the training and were placed in upgraded positions as these became available at participating institutions.
- 2) **For sterile supply technicians who now needed to pass a national certifying exam** to maintain their jobs, *an integrated team approach* was used. The literacy teacher attended the 26 morning classes, in which a supervisor covered the content material of the test, always relating it to the extensive on-the-job

experience of technicians. In the afternoon, the literacy teacher worked on mastering the text and test conventions of the exam, which is at the postsecondary level. Literacy levels of the 9 participants ranged from 2.7 to 12.9 on the TABE, with most falling between 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade levels. All passed the progress tests, strongly indicating passage of the registration exam.

- 3) In the case of **Certified Nursing Assistant training**, *literacy and job skills were integrated throughout the 140-hour training*, all done on the workers own time, unlike the job-to-job model. TABE scores indicated 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level or below on reading, and a range of math levels from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, with 18 at 1-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 16 at 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> and 11 at 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>. Participants had to pass a written and clinical exam from the state. Ninety-five percent, or 58 of the 61 trainees, passed the certifying exam.
- 4) **The Clinical Associate** training upgraded the pay and skills of workers in several older job titles at the participating institution. Notably, literacy assessment was not done prior to program entry. Everyone who was eligible by job title for the program was admitted, a model known as *Inclusion with Tutoring*. Tutoring was made available to anyone who needed it to pass the course. Twenty-six days of paid time were spent in training, half in the classroom and half on the job, where trainees were paired with appropriate workers. All students passed both performance and paper and pencil tests for each skill area taught. Interestingly, although a literacy criterion was not used for admission, participants were subsequently tested to assess their literacy levels. More than half scored below 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading levels on the TABE, with 17% at or below 5<sup>th</sup> grade in reading and 27% at this level in math. Instructors were surprised at the scores of individuals, noting that many whose performance was outstanding scored low on the TABE. All 205 participants completed the program and were upgraded to clinical associates.
- 5) At the fifth institution, **training was provided for three different job titles, and workers were tested prior to admission and placed in remedial class if they scored below reasonable competence on an assessment tool designed for health care workers**. Those in the remedial group received 84 hours of literacy skills (including two days of computer training). Members attended half on their own time and half on paid time. The success rate for completing targeted training was 54% among those who attended the remedial class before training and 66% among those who went directly into training.

**FIGURE ONE**

**ACHIEVEMENTS OF 1199 ETJSP SHORT-TERM TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR WORKERS WITH LOW LITERACY**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Number of Trainees</b>	11	9	61	205	56
<b>Program Goal</b>	Qualify as registrat-receptionists	Pass national certifying exam	Pass state certification test	Qualify as clinical associates	Complete literacy skills class and pass job training class
<b>Length of training</b>	26 days	26 days	140 hours	26 days	12 days
<b>Program model for combining literacy and training</b>	14 day preview class; 10 days in job skills; 2 days on-site	Literacy teachers and skills trainer team teach in morning; afternoon skills tutorial	Hands-on skills practice; review tests; literacy infused as needed	Inclusion/tutoring and extra support as needed	Vestibule pre-class based on test scores; training follows for those who pass literacy component
<b>Outcome</b>	100% pass all 3 components and go on wait list for registrar receptionist jobs	100% passed first three progress tests, strongly indicating passage of registration exam	95% (58) pass certifying exam from New York State	100% completed successfully and are working as clinical associates	100% pass the literacy component; 54% pass job skills component

One of the three trainings offered at the 5<sup>th</sup> institution achieved a relatively high pass rate among those who had been in the remedial class. In this case, the trainers adjusted to the literacy levels in class by reducing the teacher to student ratio from 10:1 to 7:1, allowing more time for review, and re-working the final exam to be more “user-friendly.” The goal was to test trainees on content, not literacy. Seasoned literacy instructors LaMar and Meyers concluded:

Although members who scored below competence on the [customized] assessment clearly need to strengthen their general literacy skills, they are capable of passing a training course as long as the course is “hands-on” and connected to actual jobs, provides adequate time in key courses . . .and builds in time for review. (D’Amico, n.d.:11)”

This raises the question of the goal of workplace or work-based learning. Is it to raise literacy levels as measured by standardized assessments of literacy per se, or to achieve a combined level of literacy and job skills that gets the worker to the next step in an industry, a workplace, or his or her own trajectory? In the case of these trainings, most workers achieved the goal of qualifying for new and better jobs. They passed required written and performance tests, including state and national certifying exams. Feedback from supervisors on the job was overwhelmingly positive. For example, the supervisor trainer of Central Supply technicians observed:

I am watching the application at work. I have seen them take the information and use it at work. They are starting to ask questions. They are stronger, more successful workers in central Supply. They now have a stronger intellectual base for their work . . . They know the whys. They don’t just study for a test and get registered, they wanted to make a difference at work, and we are feeling that already. It’s the best reward. (quoted in D’Amico, 1997: 8-9).”

At the fourth program described above, which involved more than 200 trainees, program directors observed that participants “understand their role more, they are given more respect and so have more self-respect, and this increases their performance (9).”

Using tests at the outset to divide groups of workers by competency on the basis of a paper and pencil test, albeit a contextualized one, not only seemed to result in fewer positive outcomes, but also went against observations at other sites that some of the workers who tested lowest on literacy after the training were some of the best learners during training and best workers on the job. The same program that divided workers into a remedial and non-remedial group had the least success with the most school-like pedagogy, a lecture format that featured little hands-on learning. Many publicly and privately funded training programs have established literacy levels as gatekeeping standards that determine entrance to training. The 1999 experience suggests that, at least in cases where workers have a great deal of on the job experience in an industry, literacy tests as predictors of performance in job training may do more harm than good.

Given the credence that the communities of practice conception of adult learning is gaining, the role of peer support and peer learning were also striking in this study. While noted by all the teachers in the five institutions, peer support and learning was most striking in the Central Supply technician class. Recall that literacy levels ranged from 2.7

to 12.9, with most falling in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade on the TABE. The training prepared these nine individuals to pass an International Association of Central Supply standardized test at the postsecondary level. Given their literacy scores, the difficulty of the text, and the fact that the tests were generated by an outside organization (Purdue University) not connected to the class, few would have predicted their success. One individual expressed a great fear of reading and writing, claiming to have lost his glasses and that a hand injury kept him from writing. He asked to leave the class, but his co-workers objected strenuously and pledged to support him. Although he failed the first exam, he continued in the class, improving his reading comprehension and scoring an 86 out of 100% on the next three exams. The tight team-work of the study groups, the small size of the class, and the extraordinary commitment of the literacy teacher and the content trainer worked to create a community of practice that was an unqualified success. The literacy teacher was a content learner along with students, who helped her understand the technical aspects of their work. The supervisor worked daily with the students, and was able to draw on the strengths and knowledge of participants, based on her long experience with them. Finally, trainees reconfigured their workplace community of practice, in which workers evolve a set of strategies for getting work done that draws on the differing skills and abilities distributed among the group, enabling individuals to transcend their limitations.

Most importantly, two levels of contextualization supported the high success rates of these combination literacy and job skills classes. First, with a range of success, most programs attempted to contextualize the literacy instruction, regardless of the model combining it with training, not only in work-related materials but also in work settings, through on-the-job components and simulations. Second, the classes were embedded in a ladder of education and training that can take workers from literacy and ESL classes through professional degrees. Not only are these opportunities provided at no cost to members, they are often supported by full or partial salary during training, and in some cases, by child care during both training and work. Moreover, workers with contractually defined seniority levels had “rights” to retraining and to placement in participating institutions. The employers themselves were intimately involved with designing training, and so had a stake in hiring individuals for new positions or paying salary increases. This is the value of a true labor-management partnership in support of sectoral workforce development. The ETJSP regularly commissions research from the State University of New York that identifies trends in hiring and shortage areas so that training and education correspond to real jobs. The ETJSP trains more than 20,000 members per year.

It is interesting to note that the ETJSP effectively creates conditions similar to those that existed when Sticht did his groundbreaking work in contextualized literacy in the US military. As he stated recently, low-literate students in the military studied in a context that included adequate medical and dental care, clothing, food and housing (2003). They also studied in the context of educational and promotional opportunities provided by the US military forces. Local 1199 members enjoy free comprehensive medical and dental care, no cost for prescription drugs, with no copay or deductible, as well as access to child care, assistance with low interest mortgages through the union and a career ladder of education and training opportunities supported by their education fund. It is

instructive, not to say inspiring, for us to hear what adult learners can achieve under conditions that afford them a measure of security, health, respect and opportunity.

### **Sector-based training and education for welfare to work populations**

The hospitality industries in San Francisco and Las Vegas are other examples of labor-management partnerships that incorporate basic skills learning into job training, and, in both cases serve low-income workers including welfare-to-work populations. Upgrade training is also provided for advancement within the industry. Both partnerships are major sources of custom-trained new workers for the tourism/hospitality sector. The Culinary Union Training Center in Las Vegas is the largest training provider for clients of the Nevada Department of Human Services and the only provider that accepts every person referred, regardless of literacy level or learning disabilities. Job turnover rate is half that of other new industry hires, and 69% of trainees land jobs with partnership employers. Among state providers, the Center has the highest placement rates and wages at the lowest cost to students and taxpayers (Working for America Institute n.d.: 26, 33).

These examples show what a well-funded, contractually protected labor-management context, in partnership with public agencies, does for worker education and training. What other kinds of sectoral workforce development efforts serve individuals on public assistance? The Aspen Institute studied industry-based sectoral approaches to employment training to assess their impact on participating welfare recipients. Although most sectoral training programs require a high school diploma, 55% of the participants in Aspen's multi-year study of six industry-based employment-training programs had less than 12 years of education. Only one of the programs studied involved a labor-management contractual bargaining agreement. Participant outcomes, two years after training was completed, included:

- 68% were working year round at their jobs
- 45% were receiving health insurance through their jobs
- Median annual earnings were \$15,015, 39% higher than the previous year and 381% higher than before training
- 48% moved out of poverty on the basis of individual earnings alone
- 82% reported better career prospects due to training
- Noting that these findings are “in marked contrast to the experiences of former welfare recipients reported in many other studies,” the Institute urges that sectoral approaches be encouraged by WIA and TANF policy (Conway and Zandniapour, 2002.:1-2)

What features of sectoral strategies account for this kind of success? According to Public/Private Ventures (PPV), a sectoral strategy is one that:

- Targets an occupation or cluster of occupations within an industry or sector
- Seeks to become influential within that sector
- Intervenes in the sector to benefit low-income workers by connecting individuals to better jobs and by achieving systemic changes in the labor market that broadly benefit workers (Elliot et. al., 2001: 1-2).

One way of doing this is a labor-management agreement, in place in the health and hospitality sector examples above. Other sectoral employment strategies seek to alter occupations that offer workers low pay and benefits and/or expand the abilities of low-skilled workers to qualify for better jobs ordinarily out of their reach. One strategy for intervening in the labor market, long advocated by adult literacy providers, is to remove artificial barriers to employment that require levels of education and training that are not central to good job performance.

For example, The Good Faith Fund (GFF), a project of the Arkansas Enterprise Group (AEG), aims to develop the economy of rural eastern and southern Arkansas. After extensive market research, AEG determined that the health sector provided the best opportunities for decent entry-level employment with the potential for advancement. GFF's Careers in Health Care focuses on connecting low-income workers and public assistance recipients to jobs as CNAs and mental health aides. A rigorous 360 hour, 12 week training that includes four weeks of occupational skills and four weeks of on-site supervised clinical training far exceeds state requirements for 75 hours of training. Increasing the hours and intensity of training is a strategy to improve both access to and quality of jobs, and drive wages up. Participants who retain employment will be encouraged to come back for training for the higher paying job of mental health aide. The project is seeking funding for those who perform exceptionally and want to become LPNs (Elliot and King, 1999: 18-19).

The Good Faith Fund has had to convince some local employers that CNAs do not need a GED or high school diploma if they are properly trained (8). This kind of influence on employers can open up skill training to many individuals who would otherwise be shut out. Progressing through a training program which requires literacy, and using both basic and occupational skills daily on the job, in turn, can bolster the confidence, skills and hope for the future that will push individuals into GED programs and beyond. At the same time, the Good Faith Fund is also working to persuade public officials to increase skill requirements of CNAs to justify higher wages for these workers. By working with employers and the public sector, as well as providing quality training for the industry, the Good Faith Fund is moving toward effecting change in the health sector in Arkansas (6).

Public Private Ventures, which also conducts multi-state and multi-project evaluations of WIA sponsored programs, concludes:

Mixed strategies—combining job goals, job search, work experience and education and training—are more likely to produce placement in better jobs and long-term successes.

Work-based strategies, including supported work and on-the-job training, are consistently effective in increasing employment and earnings. (2002:6).

Are increases in employment and earnings the goals of work-based learning? Would participants who complete training programs show higher TABE scores if tested pre-and post-training? Should this be a standard for work-based learning? Or is the goal to provide access to opportunity and the means to take advantage of it, in a setting where there are ongoing efforts to improve the quality of jobs and to provide pathways to advancement?

Note that all of the examples so far blend basic skills education into job training, or, in the case of Good Faith, do not assume that the lack of high school diplomas should bar individuals from selected training programs or jobs. Yet, studies claiming a failure of job training programs were part of the evidence for the Work First mandate, and there is no denying that poorly designed training programs without links to jobs or the ability to leverage influence over the quality of jobs have often failed. A recent assessment of skills training, however, makes the case that this picture of training and education is a misconception rooted in a skewed reading of research on training. For example, evaluations of training often lumped together quite different programs with varying practices and outcomes, and did not identify effective practices where these existed. The report concludes that policymakers should develop a broader base of information about what works to help low-income individuals succeed in the contemporary job market (Smith et.al., 2002: 1-3). Clearly, programs that embed training and education combinations in workforce development strategies that intervene in promising industries on behalf of low-skilled and low-income workers are establishing a good track record.

### **Getting to Postsecondary education**

Research has long demonstrated that, for most individuals, wages that sustain families and the security and benefits necessary to rise above poverty require post-secondary education for most workers (see for example, Bos 1996; Spruck Wrigley et. al., 2003). This will become increasingly true as the shift to an information economy, or a bifurcated labor market with low paying service jobs at one end and information workers at the other, continues. How then, do we move people to the GED and beyond? As researchers from the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy at Harvard recently clarified, the value of the GED is realized primarily by those who use it as a stepping stone to postsecondary education (Cain, 2003).

The Best of Both (2002) summarizes Working Ventures exploration of partnerships between community-based organizations and community colleges. It profiles programs such as the Instituto del Progreso Latino/West Side Technical Institute of Richard J. Daly Community College, which prepares low income, low skilled Latinos and African Americans for metalworking jobs in manufacturing in Chicago, as part of the Chicago Manufacturing Technology Bridge Program. More than 200 participants have been enrolled, with a graduation rate of 65%. Almost 70% of graduates have obtained manufacturing jobs with average starting wages of nearly \$10 an hour. Although originally designed to serve workers with a minimum of eighth grade reading and math levels, Insituto has established a pre-Bridge program that develops the math, English, and beginning computer skills that its less prepared population needs. Participants receive counseling, case management, paid internships during training, job placement assistance and advanced placement in continued technical training. Students receive instruction in industry-specific English and basic math and more than 80 hours of hands-on training in the College's state-of-the art machine shop. For taking blueprint reading, quality control, computer applications and applied physics, along with machining and

welding, students earn five college credits that can be applied toward an advanced machining certificate or an Associate's Degree (Roberts, 2003: 19) .

Upon completion of the first 16 weeks of training, participants can choose employment, further education, or both. Approximately one-third of the graduates have continued in community college, most in the advanced machining certificate program and some in Associates Degree programs. Recently, the college's effort to improve the basic skills of participants during the formal training program resulted in 9 of 11 Bridge participants passing the entrance examination for the college level advanced machining program. The college credits awarded for the Bridge program are an incentive to continue (27).

The partnership between Instituto and Daley Community College is a part of the Chicago Bridges program coordinated by the University of Illinois at Chicago. Instituto receives funding from Chicago's Empowerment Zone and a range of federal and state workforce development programs. It is also a certified affiliate of the One-Stop system under WIA. In this case, a community-based organization and a community college work together to create opportunities for participants by both offering good jobs and facilitating postsecondary education. For blue-collar workers of color with low literacy and/or limited English language skills, this kind of advocacy opens up doors in both industry and education too often closed to this population. The National Center on Education and the Economy provides a strategy for combining and changing existing education and training policy to make such options available to more Americans in their recent paper, *Toward a National Workforce Education and Training Policy* (Uhalde et. al., 2003).

### **Conclusion: Lessons from evidence-based strategies for literacy and job training embedded in pro-worker sectoral development strategies**

The evidence from the examples above suggest common features of strategies that successfully improve the chances of those lacking basic skills in selected job markets. Moreover, a recent report on expanding the employment options of adults with limited English language proficiency echoes many of the findings of the studies cited here (Spruck Wrigley et. al., 2003: 4-7). These are:

- 1) Integrating job training with English language, literacy and math instruction increases employment and earnings.
- 2) This combination works best when individuals have access to the security, benefits, and protections that good jobs, especially union jobs, provide, or when the education and training are offered as part of an array of necessary services.
- 3) Job training combined with post-secondary education options can substantially increase earnings and job quality.
- 4) Bridge programs can facilitate and speed the transition to training and higher education for those with low literacy or limited English proficiency, moving individuals up career ladders and increasing their earnings accordingly.
- 5) Structured career ladders that tie advancement in wages and promotions within an industry to training and education opportunities are necessary to provide pathways out of poverty for low-income workers.

- 6) Adult pedagogy and settings that simulate work environments, draw on peer support, respect and build on the existing skills and knowledge of workers and adapt programs to the literacy needs and learning styles of adults can enable adults to learn new skills and apply them at work, regardless of their literacy levels. Programs should not require school-like testing that is unrelated to job performance for entry to training.
- 7) Partnerships among organized labor, management, government, community organizations, adult education providers and colleges are necessary to not only provide education and training, but also create a context in which these efforts are rewarded on the job with wages that support families. Recently, Workforce Investment Boards in a number of communities moved in this direction by raising the income standards for jobs and training programs that receive public funding (Working for America Institute, 2003, [www.workingforamerica.org](http://www.workingforamerica.org))

### **Conclusion**

To support these kinds of programs, and to enable low-income, low-skilled workers to support their families and achieve their dreams, America needs to invest more in its workers. As the Workforce Alliance notes, inflation-adjusted investments in worker training fell 29% between 1985 and 2003, the very period during which layoffs created greater need for such services. In addition, federal support for education and training, as opposed to job search and job placement, has been reduced during the period of welfare reform. The cost of college education has risen dramatically; paradoxically, the need for postsecondary learning has risen as access has narrowed. More recently, funding for adult education has also been reduced. Yet, increased investment in education and training is crucial if American workers are to adapt to a rapidly changing economy and regain the power to feed, clothe, and house their families (Spence and Kiel, 2003).

The partnerships discussed above illustrate the value of investments in workers that provide education, training, and opportunities for advancement, grounded in partnerships that unite stakeholders and boost regional economies. Their evidence shows that embedding literacy and English language skills in contexts that position workers to reap the rewards for learning increases motivation and persistence and boosts outcomes in employment and earnings. How do we build more of such programs?

It will take all of us working together to redirect our public policies to create opportunities for lifelong learning and advancement for all workers, . . . to make the Workforce Investment Act a useful tool in the fight for good jobs and wage standards and to make sure that people who move from welfare to work don't wind up with less . . . It will take all of us working together to raise standards and expectations in our communities . . . to increase the skill and employment levels in our inner cities and to eliminate the fundamental inequalities and injustices in today's economy (Sweeney, n.d.:5).

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