

Literacy: The Road to Economic Prosperity

by Stephen Lund

Technology moves quickly. Just keeping up with the pace of change can be challenging. Staying current means having a solid education foundation, good technology skills, and a commitment to lifelong learning. These skills aren't a nice-to-have anymore; they are table stakes for a globally competitive workforce.

As president and CEO of the province's business development agency, it's my job to help grow the economy by working with local companies and bringing new international players to Nova Scotia. In order to be successful, businesses need two things: good people and competitive costs.

We sell Nova Scotia on the strength of our workforce and as a result, we've attracted some of the top companies in the world. We have the most post-secondary schools per capita in the country and, as a result, our workforce is highly skilled and educated. But at the same time, four in 10 Nova Scotians struggle with literacy. That doesn't just limit an individual's potential – it also has an impact on our businesses, our ability to compete globally, and our overall economy.

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As technology changes the way we work, we need higher levels of education to keep pace. The scope of literacy as a concept is far wider than the basic ability to read and write. Today, when we talk about literacy, we're talking about a person's ability to function in today's knowledge economy – one that demands increasingly more advanced skills in reading, writing, math, computing, critical thinking and problem solving.



Graphic © Literacy Nova Scotia

This makes literacy not just a social issue, but a business issue – one that has a profound impact on the province's economy. It has become a major challenge for businesses in this province, and it'll continue to present a bigger and bigger problem if we don't start addressing it.

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The question becomes: What can we do to help make a change in Nova Scotia?

There are organizations moving the dial.



Stephen Lund

The Department of Labour and Advanced Education is a huge supporter of both literacy and essential skills through its Adult Learning and Workplace Initiatives divisions.

The Workplace Education Initiative provides learning opportunities in the workplace through a customized curriculum. It focuses on hard and soft

skills – oral communication, problem solving, and computer use. And it’s tailored to each business or organization, so programs focus on the skills that are most relevant to each specific workplace.

And through its new Productivity Investment Program, the province has doubled its investment in the Workplace Education Initiative.

Literacy Nova Scotia has sharpened its focus on workforce and workplace literacy and essential skills. Literacy Nova Scotia is consulting with key players and holding regional meetings to increase awareness and develop new partnership opportunities.

These programs address the growing need to connect adult education learning programs to help “up-skill” the workforce. The result is more people with the essential skills needed to succeed in today’s society.

From a business perspective, Kohler Windows is an example of a company that is addressing its workforce literacy challenges head-on.

The company’s “Kohler University” program supports workers as they complete their grade 12 equivalency. For Kevin Pelley, president of Kohler Windows, it’s about helping his employees stay current in their careers - for the long term.

NSBI is also doing its part. Last year, we worked with Literacy Nova Scotia and its partners on the

annual Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament for Literacy. This event helped raise \$63,000 for literacy programs in the province. This is great news, but it’s a drop in a bucket when you consider the need and demand for more programming in our province.

NSBI is one of many organizations supporting Junior Achievement programs in the province.

JA’s Economics of Staying in School (ESIS) program sends volunteers directly into the classroom to teach students about “the real world.” The program teaches students about the cost of living on their own, and the impact education has on their future earning potential. It’s an enlightening process for students to find out how much it really costs to own a home, drive a car and have a family – especially “luxuries” like electricity and phone service!

There are some great things happening, but we can always do more. The reality is - we need a more educated, higher skilled workforce if we want to stay competitive and pull ahead.

What can you as business leaders do? Make education a priority. Make it mandatory in your organization. Help your employees set lifelong learning goals and support them as they reach those goals. Understand that learning doesn’t always come naturally, it’s not always easy, and everyone is different. Be encouraging.

If you’re lucky enough to already have a highly educated workforce, invest in programs at a community level. Encourage your employees to volunteer and get involved. Put a team together and golf in the PGI this year – the money raised goes directly into literacy programs in all parts of Nova Scotia.

Most importantly, be ambassadors for change. Lead by example. The return on your investment won’t just be a leaner, more productive, more competitive business, but a more prosperous province as well. 📌

Stephen Lund is president and CEO of Nova Scotia Business Inc., the province’s business development agency. NSBI is the investment attraction arm of the province and helps companies in Nova Scotia grow through trade development, financing, and venture capital. See www.novascotiabusiness.com/



Practitioner Training: A Source of Professional and Personal Growth

by Kate Nonesuch

I was very happy to be chosen to write the curriculum for the new Practitioner Training program. As I approached the end of my classroom teaching, I wanted to make a contribution that would pay back to the literacy field all the things I had learned, so I set myself a goal: to write down everything I know about teaching before I retire. Several things came together in the practitioner training project that helped me towards that goal.

First, I was in total agreement with Literacy Nova Scotia's principle, that adult literacy learners deserve the best instructors and programs.

Second, the curriculum in math and communications, which have been revised in recent years by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, lines up with what I knew about teaching from personal experience, and what I knew from reading the research. I knew there would be no conflict between the training I was writing and the curriculum that the practitioners would work with after training.

This project was a great opportunity for me to work online, and to write for participants who would work online. I love computers and the internet and various pieces of technology, but at the same time, I often get so frustrated I could spit. I thought my feelings would probably match many potential participants in the training, so, with the wonderful assistance of other members of the project team, we were able to allow for both the wonders of technology and the practical barriers to its everyday use.

I loved the thoroughness of the field testing, with a very interesting group of practitioners who agreed to try out and give feedback on the



Kate Nonesuch in action in The Teaching Toolbox videos

material I produced. It was a luxury to have the time and the space to really look at what was working and to tweak it when it wasn't.

The Teaching Toolbox was not part of the original proposal, but it grew into an essential element of working online. I had lots of fun working on some of the videos, and watching others after they were made. It has made me want to do more, longer videos, and to demonstrate the techniques with students on camera.

All in all, writing this curriculum was a source of personal and professional growth for me, and I hope it will be the same to practitioners who complete the training in the future.

Literacy Educator Kate Nonesuch is the curriculum writer for Literacy Nova Scotia's Practitioner Training Program. More information on this program is found on page 7 and at <http://www.ns.literacy.ca/ptc.htm>



We at Literacy Nova Scotia are deeply inspired by the adult learners whom we are privileged to serve.

Student writing submissions for the Adult Learners' Week (ALW) Creative Writing Contest and our online newspaper *The Learning Beacon* give us glimpses into the lives of people across Nova Scotia who have succeeded, often in spite of great difficulties, in improving their confidence and skills, and realizing their higher potential.

Shannon Bridger and Marcia Jeffers are both past winners of our ALW Creative Writing Contest and their stories are featured in *The Learning Beacon*. Shannon submitted her winning entry in 2010 while upgrading her education at the NSCC Waterfront Campus in Halifax. She plans to graduate with an Adult High School Diploma in June and to eventually pursue a masters degree in English and creative writing. Marcia won the contest in 2009 while she was enrolled in a continuing care program at NSCC Truro Campus. She is currently employed at a long term care facility, doing a job she loves.

We asked Shannon and Marcia to update us on their progress since they enrolled in adult learning programs, and to explain what keeps them motivated. Both of these remarkable young women demonstrate the qualities that define adult learners: courage, persistence, adaptability and downright awesomeness!

Shannon Bridger

LNS: Why did you decide to enrol in an adult learning program? What motivated you?

SB: It was one of those things. I was in my mid-twenties, I had left school at 19 and I realized at 25 that it was time to do something with my life. I saw my friends moving on. My uncle and one cousin are the only people in my family to have a high school diploma. I wanted that. I didn't want a life where I just settled. I want to do big things, where I can create. I didn't want to look back when I reached 40 and wish that I had done more. I wanted to make an impact in some way. I started at the Waterfront Campus of NSCC in January 2010.

LNS: What new skills have you acquired as a result?

SB: Not skills so much as an attitude – confidence. I always had good skills but now I write better and I do good research. The Adult Learning Program (ALP) unlocked what was already there but I didn't realize it was.

LNS: What new hobbies or activities do you enjoy now as a result of ALP?

SB: I do a lot of writing, learning and researching on my own; learning new information that otherwise I wouldn't have thought about on my own. The Adult Learning Program has taught me to have greater understanding and empathy for people who are from different walks of life. It has taught me responsibility and to be more of an adult. I am very involved with the ALP newspaper. My teacher created the ALP newspaper to help us develop new skills and also to help us understand we are people with good ideas and creativity. It has given us opportunities to express ourselves, develop responsibility, meet deadlines and work as a team.

LNS: How has continuing your education changed your life?

SB: I used to feel I was in the dark. Now I see new paths opening for me. I can do things I never thought were possible for me. I want to



write, publish, and pursue film. I didn't pursue any of that before because I didn't think I could do it. I am following through on things. The future is brighter for me because I know what I can do now.

LNS: Does your future look different now than it did 5 years ago? How will it be different?

SB: Oh my God, yes it is different! Five years ago I was floating. I had dreams but when I thought of what I had to do to follow them, I would rather just go get drunk with my friends. Now I know I can fulfill my dreams, I know how. This is the same for a lot of people in my situation. When I look back to when I was 17, I thought I had so much wisdom. Now I know I was just naive. I know now that I have ADD (diagnosed about a year ago) and that gives me confidence. I am not stupid, lazy or crazy; that is from a book I read about ADD, and a weight has been lifted from me. I can work harder now because I know how to work around the problems. My fantasy is that in five years time I will be writing and editing and I'll be the next JK Rowling. The reality is that I plan to be working on a masters degree in English and creative writing. Not a bad reality!

Marcia Jeffers

LNS: Why did you decide to enrol in an adult learning program? What motivated you to do so?

MJ: I happened upon an NSCC website for a program which related to my previous work experience purely by coincidence. The site's direct approach: "Want to be a CCA but don't have your Grade 12?" was enough to pique my interest; I sought out more information by contacting the college and was encouraged to become a participant by a warm and encouraging ALP Counsellor on campus. Like so many other adult learners, I'd become frustrated with working too hard for too little. I was eager for change in my life, and wanted this program to be the stimulus for that change.

LNS: What new skills have you acquired as a result of participating in adult learning programs?

MJ: What is most obvious to me is that I've honed my interpersonal skills, specifically the ability to relate to my co-workers, inspire positive and creative thinking in others, and to alleviate conflict. I've also sharpened my communication skills, and developed leadership qualities that previously I didn't know existed. I am extremely confident about my ability to follow through with important goals, which was not the case prior to my adult learning experience. And without the support of my teachers and classmates, I would not believe today that I am a unique voice and a strong advocate for others in need.

LNS: What new hobbies or activities do you enjoy now as a result of participating in adult learning programs?

MJ: I was encouraged to get my driver's license by staff members of NSCC while enrolled in my program, and now I enjoy the freedom of getting into my car and going wherever my heart desires. I feel liberated in a way which many people take for granted. I have always enjoyed the act of writing, and have been working on short stories about Long Term Care from the perspective of a caregiver who truly cares about the qualities in *Continued next page >>*

Downright Awesome Learners, continued from page 5

people that make them individual. My life feels richer, and I enjoy trying to communicate that feeling. My hobbies haven't changed drastically, but my ability to fine tune them and the confidence to pursue them definitely has.

LNS: *How has continuing your education changed your life?*

MJ: **I feel a sense of deep relief at being able to pay my bills on time, and without worrying about stretching dollars until my next pay cheque.** While I do agree with the adage Money doesn't buy happiness, I firmly believe that money buys peace of mind. My income is higher than it's ever been in my entire working life, and that affords me the liberty of building a secure future instead of struggling to merely exist in the present, or sometimes even play catch up with the past.

I've also been given many opportunities to share my learning story with others, and to touch people who relate to what I've been through both before and after educational pursuits. I believe in the power of adult learning, and feel blessed when I hear that I have motivated people to pursue their own goals because I have surpassed many of my own.

LNS: *Does your future look different now than it did 5 years ago? How will it be different?*

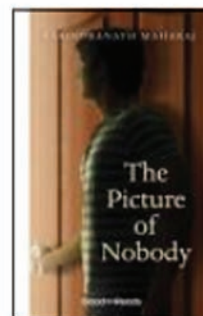
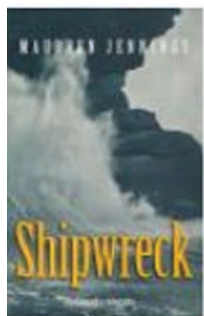
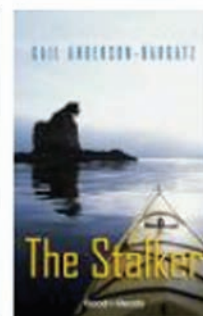
MJ: **Five years ago I was unsatisfied with the person I thought I was destined to become, and often thought I was wasting unused potential.** To say my future looks different now is an understatement; I am confidently approaching what's next in my life because I know I have the strength to accomplish just about anything I decide to do. I have goals that are much more attainable now that I've built a solid educational spring board. My future will be different in that as long as I want more for myself, I know I can go out there and get it. Prior to adult learning, I had no idea that I was capable of this way of thinking. My future is no longer impossible to imagine, and I now look forward to planning how I will take my next steps. 📖



Literacy Organizations Have Good Friends at NSBI

Eight community learning networks received unexpected gifts in January. Spearheaded by Candace Sweet, manager of events and sponsorships, and chair of the Nova Scotia PGI Planning Committee, the staff at Nova Scotia Business Inc (NSBI) raised \$450 during the months of November and December. Staff contributed to the Casual Friday fund and purchased tickets on an e-Reader. Candace purchased sets of the Canadian series *Good Reads* for the eight networks. NSBI staff made a similar contribution to six networks in 2009. Nearly \$1000 was contributed to the fourteen networks as a result of their generosity.

The Goodreads Series can be purchased online at <http://www.grassrootsbooks.net/ca/chapter/good-reads>





Nova Scotia Practitioner Training and Certification Program

This is a foundational training program for adult literacy practitioners, both paid instructors or volunteer tutors, working in a classroom or one-to one.

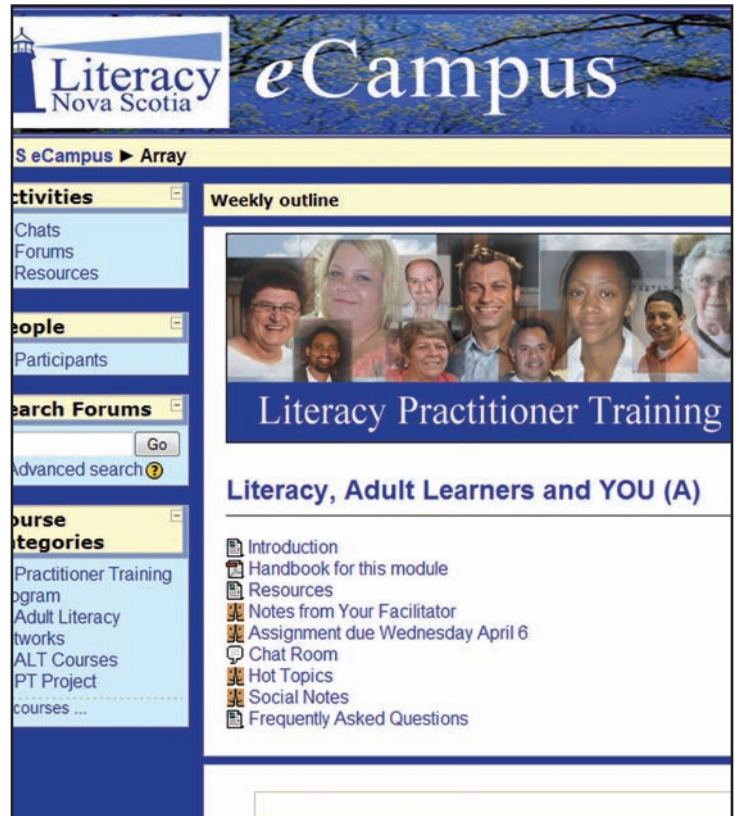
There are eight online modules, one face-to-face module delivered in a workshop format, and an additional assignment on session planning. Each online module takes four weeks to complete, approximately two hours per week. Dependent on the schedule of module offerings, a participant may complete the program in six months or less, or take up to two years or longer.

As participants work through the modules, participants will:

- recognize the strengths they already have in teaching adult learners, and develop more strengths in other areas
- make connections with other literacy practitioners in their areas and around the province
- broaden their knowledge of the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL)
- learn specific teaching techniques and strategies for working with learners
- experience a model of teaching and assessment that they can transfer to their work with adult literacy learners.

This training is provided free of charge to NSSAL practitioners and administrators through funding from Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Adult Education Division and to all others at a cost recovery basis.

Sixty practitioners have already signed up for the three online *Getting Started* Orientations and will be working towards being certified this year. LNS anticipates offering the eight online modules a number of times from now until next February. Anyone interested in taking a module or all the modules, whether for



certification or simply to enhance their skills can find registration details and a full description of the program and the modules on the LNS website at <http://www.ns.literacy.ca/ptc.htm>, or contact **Jayne Hunter**, Director of Programs at jayne.hunter@nsc.ca.

Gary Mason is the Facilitator for the Practitioner Training Program and was also the facilitator during the pilot phase. He played a key role in the testing of the program and worked closely with the project team on the final revisions. Gary has over 30 years experience in teaching, curriculum development, technology innovation in education and was the principal of the alternate and adult schools for the South Shore Regional School Board.



Gary Mason



Working Together: Furthering Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills in Nova Scotia

Literacy Nova Scotia is holding a provincial forum in Halifax to respond to a series of regional meetings it held earlier this year. Literacy and essential skills stakeholders came together to identify ways to work together to strengthen opportunities for Nova Scotians to upgrade these skills in and outside the workplace. They pointed out the gaps in literacy and essential skills delivery, identified roles for new and old partners and discussed how more Nova Scotia employers especially could be encouraged to invest in the literacy and essential skill development of their employees.

The May forum will allow participants who had attended the regional meetings, as well as others, the opportunity to meet exemplary employers, hear about what others are doing, identify ways of responding to the issues and, finally, network with colleagues.

The outcome of these meetings will be a strong strategy for LNS to move forward in supporting literacy and essential skills.

For more information, please contact Jayne Hunter at jayne.hunter@nsc.ca









Truro Roundtable Discussion, March 8, 2011, l-r: Tim Tucker, Chamber of Commerce; Bob White, Wildflower Vending; Donna MacGillivray, Department of Labour and Advanced Education



Literacy is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is often combined with other skills, such as thinking and problem solving, oral communication, numeracy, computer use, working in a team and continuous learning, to become the essential skill set needed to control our lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Our Mission: That every Nova Scotian have equal access to literacy education. Literacy Nova Scotia cares about literacy and essential skills learning opportunities being available wherever and whenever there is a need or interest. That means we support community sector programs and college and school board programs, as well as programs in workplaces. LNS supports the adult literacy field in the broadest sense. We have always known that literacy is bigger than reading and writing. We know that literacy is all those skills needed for accessing and using information that help us contribute to our communities, families and workplaces.

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