

Handout 13. Workplace education scenarios

Scenario 8

An experienced education provider approaches management at a non-unionized factory about setting up a workplace education program. A large majority of the factory's workers are recent immigrants who speak little or no English. The factory's top management, desperate to reduce turnover and improve rocky relationships between supervisors and workers, agrees to do a workplace needs analysis and set up ESOL classes for workers. They agree that workers will receive 50% paid release time to attend classes.

During the first round of recruiting, dozens of workers sign up for classes. The education provider meets with the factory's General Manager and Human Resources Director. They discuss possible policies and procedures for how to deal with the large sign up list. They decide that they will assess all workers on the list, and those with the most need will be placed first. They also decide that to minimize interruption of production, only a certain number of workers per department will be allowed in classes each cycle.

A few weeks into the first round of classes, the teacher calls to report that attendance is very low. He says he's heard from students that supervisors are ignoring the placement policies and hand-picking who can attend classes. Some supervisors are not releasing any of their workers. He also reports that during initial assessments, many workers refused to take the placement test. He heard from students that workers think supervisors will use placement results against them.

Discuss these questions with your group:

- *What issues surface in this scenario?*
- *What is your experience with situations like this? How have you handled them?*
- *Why might this situation have happened? What might have caused it?*
- *How could the education provider respond to this situation?*
What are some possible ways to handle this situation?
- *What roles might the education provider play here? What is management's role?*
If the work site were unionized, how might the situation be different?
- *How could you prevent something like this from happening?*

Prepare to share your ideas with the whole group.