

# Introduction

*“Workers say that the most important thing they get out of classes is realizing there are other people out there and they’re facing the same problems. It creates solidarity. The classes bring people together.”* — Workplace Educator

This manual is for workplace educators and others interested in creating worker-centered education programs. While there are many resources out there for workplace education, this manual is special because it looks at education in unionized work sites. It helps teachers and others unfamiliar with unions understand the unique benefits, complexities and challenges of labor-management workplace education. While unions are often key players in developing literacy and basic skills programs for workers, many workplace education resources focus on businesses’ needs and priorities, and leave out the union. This training includes union priorities and goals, and highlights the union’s unique role as an effective advocate for worker education. It also finds common ground in union and employer goals.

Some models of workplace education focus on workers’ skill ‘deficits.’ They lay the blame for companies’ decreased productivity, poor product quality or dwindling profits on workers’ lack of skills. These models promote workplace education as a way to ‘fix’ workers’ skill gaps and boost the bottom line. They define workplace education narrowly, as teaching workers discrete skills needed to perform specific job tasks. They don’t acknowledge many factors beyond workers’ skills that affect the workplace and workers — working conditions, staffing, managerial practices, communication channels and equipment. They take into account what employers say they need, but they may not take into account what workers or unions say they need.

This training encourages educators and others to go beyond a fix-the-worker approach to workplace education. It encourages people to consider the complex realities workers face, and the many factors that influence worker and workplace effectiveness. It encourages a worker-centered approach that looks at issues of power and control over work, along with multiple and sometimes conflicting agendas for worker education. It includes workers’ and unions’ concerns and priorities, not just the employer’s. It encourages educators to develop programs that help workers to empower themselves.

We wrote this manual after interviewing dozens of workplace educators, program coordinators and union representatives in labor-management workplace education programs around Massachusetts. Their stories, successes, frustrations and advice shaped the manual and gave it life. In many cases, these stories became the scenarios, quotes and handouts you’ll find inside. This manual reflects the creativity and hard work of many people.

### Our focus

We wrote this manual based on our experience with labor-management and union-based basic skills workplace education programs. When we talk about “workplace education,” we mean basic skills education offered to entry-level workers at their work sites. By “basic skills,” we mean English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) which includes reading, writing and computation below the high school diploma level. In basic skills workplace education, teachers develop curricula that address not only workers’ job and union-related basic skills needs, but also their work and union-related issues — and even personal goals (e.g., participating more fully in community life or their children’s education).

While this manual focuses on basic skills workplace education, many activities can be adapted for educators and others involved in job training, pre-employment classes, higher education preparation for workers, union leadership education, or workplace education in non-union settings.

### What’s inside

This manual offers **over 50 hours of training activities** designed for educators and others, new to the field or experienced, who want to learn more about workplace education. The manual has **five sections**. Each section focuses on a particular theme in workplace education — overview, needs analysis, labor-management setting, curriculum development, and assessment and evaluation. Each section has a series of **activities and accompanying handouts** that address various points of the theme. Activities sometimes include readings. These are found in the **Readings Collection** that accompanies this manual.

**The manual’s five sections are:**

- **Overview** gives a broad picture of workplace education, its funding sources, and benefits and challenges of work site-based education programs.
- **Workplace needs analysis** describes how to conduct a needs analysis to discover workers’ skill needs, issues and interests.
- **Labor-Management Setting** explores employer, union and worker goals and concerns for workplace education, and advantages and challenges of labor-management workplace education.
- **Classrooms and Curriculum** explores worker-centered teaching and curriculum development, and benefits and challenges in workplace classrooms.
- **Assessment and Evaluation** addresses how to assess workers’ needs, and evaluate a workplace education program’s impact on workers, the work site and union.

Each section starts with the following: a description of overall section **goals**; a list of section **objectives** (each activity is designed to accomplish 1-3 objectives); a description of **key themes** that the activities are designed to convey; an **activities list**, with the approximate time needed for each activity; a description of the section's **handouts, readings and materials**; and suggested **mentoring activities**.

Next, each section has a **series of activities**, starting with a warm-up, designed to address various points of the section's main theme.

**Handouts** and **cutouts** to use with that section's activities are located at the end of each section. (Cutouts are handouts designed to be cut up.)

**Each activity includes the following parts:**

- **Objectives** that the activity is designed to accomplish.
- An approximate **time needed** to complete the activity (the clock in the box). These times are conservative, and are based on a group of 9-12 participants total. The time it takes your group to complete an activity may be quite different.
- A **What you need** list that names all the materials (i.e. flip chart paper, magic markers, Post-Its), handouts and readings you'll need to do the activity.
- A **What you do** description of how to do the activity.
- **Facilitator notes** which describe "tips" for doing the activity, "key ideas" the activity is designed to convey, and in some cases, "ideal and real" notes on the less-than-ideal realities that many workplace education programs face.

## **Mentoring activities**

In addition to the training activities in this manual, you can set up mentoring activities for participants. We provide broad suggestions for mentoring activities for each section. You'll have to tailor the activities for your group and its needs. Before your training, identify mentors — experienced workplace education providers or others involved in labor-management workplace education — who are willing to work with participants. Mentors can provide access to their programs' stakeholders, classrooms, committee meetings, or curriculum for participants to interview, observe or analyze. In some cases, you may have participants who can serve as mentors for others in your group.

## **Readings Collection**

Most of the readings you'll need to complete activities are in the Readings Collection accompanying this manual. Many authors and publishers have generously given us permission to photocopy their work free of charge, provided that photo-

copied materials are used for educational (non-commercial) purposes only. In cases where publishers require a fee to photocopy, we have listed the article but not included it in the Collection. We've provided the publishers' contact information so that you can obtain permission and pay the necessary fees.

## Methodology

This training uses learner-centered activities that engage people in discussion, elicit and build on their experience and encourage critical analysis and strategies. Activities include small and whole group discussions, scenarios, skits, and readings.

Activity directions encourage you to record people's ideas on flip chart paper. You can type up these ideas and give them to people as important records of the group's work. While handouts can also provide important information, we start with people's ideas and experience, and then provide handouts as additional information to what the group has generated.

This manual has many scenarios, work site descriptions and situations created from real people's experiences in the field. They pose important issues for discussion and analysis. But it's important for people to work from their own experience and needs. Whenever you can, you should use your group's own issues or situations in addition to, or instead of, the ones we provide. This training encourages educators to use a *participatory* approach to teaching workers. In a participatory process, participants analyze and develop strategies for issues that they have identified together. The facilitator creates a structure for this to happen. You can use this training to create your own participatory process.

Workplace educators often work in isolation. Having the chance to hear from other practitioners is invaluable. Leave plenty of time during your workshops for people to share experiences, problems, strategies, materials and ideas.

## Participants and facilitators

We designed this training with teachers and education program coordinators in mind, both those with experience in workplace education and those new to it. But this training is also appropriate for union representatives and others involved in labor-management worker education. We assume that facilitators of this training are experienced in labor-management workplace education, believe in a worker-centered approach and support union involvement in worker education.

## Using this manual

This manual is only a guide. You'll need to adapt activities for your group and its needs. You can offer this training in its entirety, do one or two sections, mix and

match activities from different sections, or simply choose one or two activities. Each section focuses on a particular aspect of workplace education, but important themes overlap and run throughout the sections.

Activities are designed to give people many ways to participate — whole group discussion, small groups, pair work, and individual reflection. Depending on your group, you may choose to change the suggested activity format. If people are tired of working in small groups, you can change a small group activity to a whole group discussion. If your group is very large, you can change a whole-group discussion to small group work.

Activities are sequenced to build on each other, but you may choose to change the order. For example, scenario activities appear midway or towards the end of each section. For some groups, however, it may work well to start with scenarios to pose issues and spark discussion.

## Workshop tips

In addition to using the activities in this manual, for effective workshops you'll need to :

- Determine participants' **backgrounds, interests and needs** before the training, by sending out a questionnaire or calling people. Use this information to select and adapt activities.
- Include time for **introductions and sharing**. Ask people to share why they are here, and what they hope to get out of the training.
- Establish **ground rules** as a group. Ground rules might include: everyone contributes their experience and expertise, brings a sense of humor, tolerates different opinions, does not tolerate oppressive practices, and comes on time.
- Tell everyone about workshop **logistics** (bathrooms, parking).
- Provide **refreshments** (drinks and food) for longer workshops.
- Schedule **breaks, energizers** and **check-ins** to keep people's energy up and make sure everyone is O.K.
- Leave time near the end for **wrap-up** and **evaluation**.

If you're doing several small group activities, think of different ways to divide people into small groups. People can count off, pick from a hat, or group themselves according to backgrounds or interests. It's also important to give people choices. In some cases, you'll want to assign scenarios or work site descriptions randomly. In others, you should let people choose what they want to work on. In one workshop, we enlarged scenarios onto 11" x 17" paper and posted them around the room. Participants walked around and read all the scenarios, chose the one they wanted, and grouped themselves with others who had chosen the same scenario.

## Evaluation

You'll need to give people time to evaluate your training. You can simply ask people what worked well, what didn't and what could improve, and record people's ideas on flip chart paper. Or you can design an evaluation questionnaire. (Some people express opinions more freely in writing and anonymously.) Informal evaluation can also happen after each activity. You can ask people what they thought of the activity, what they liked or what was hard about it. You can also do informal evaluation during check in times.

**Please let us know how your training went.** You can contact the Roundtable at the address and phone number in this manual.

## Definitions of terms

Some terms we use in this manual may be unfamiliar to those new to workplace education. We've provided basic definitions of such terms in Handout 3 of the Overview section (page 55) and Handout 5 of the Assessment and Evaluation section (page 435). These handouts accompany Overview Activity 2 (Workplace Education Vocabulary) and Assessment and Evaluation Activity 3 (Assessment and Evaluation Vocabulary). These activities give participants the chance to define and discuss key workplace education terms and concepts together.

## Quotes

The quotes in "Telling It Like It Is" activities handouts, and throughout the activities descriptions, were collected during interviews with workplace educators, program coordinators and union representatives in labor-management workplace education programs around Massachusetts. We site the quotes anonymously, with only the person's position noted.

## About the Roundtable

The Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable is a statewide network of unionists, educators and labor-management education programs. Our mission is to promote and provide high quality education programs for Massachusetts union members. To this end we are involved in policy around workplace learning, and we provide technical assistance to unions and their employer partners who are interested in establishing learning programs at the workplace. We also provide professional development opportunities for educators in workplace education, particularly those teaching in unionized workplaces.

We work closely with the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and are members of the national Association of Joint Labor-Management Education Programs. We also participate in discussions of policy and practice in the adult education and workforce development communities, in such venues as the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, Boston Workforce Development Coalition and Massachusetts Workforce Alliance.

Our focus is on basic skills, including adult basic education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, computer literacy and GED preparation. Some programs in the network offer other classes such as career ladders, technical training, leadership skills, communication skills or writing. While most of our programs serve incumbent workers at their place of work, some also work with unemployed workers, dislocated workers or offer classes at the union hall or in the community.

## About the author

Jenny Lee Utech has fifteen years of experience teaching adult ESOL and basic skills and developing curricula, at both labor-management workplace and community-based programs. She has also served as director of two programs, one a labor-management workplace program and the other a community-based program. Over the years Jenny has developed and taught a variety of workshops and courses for workplace educators at SABES (the System for Adult Basic Education Support in Massachusetts), NETWORK (the annual conference of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education – MCAE), and the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute's Professional Development Day.

As an educator and trainer, Jenny works to provide a forum for people to critically examine issues and problems, develop strategies and skills, and take action to address the issues. She bases her teaching on the principles of Brazilian educator Paulo Friere, for whom literacy learning was a context for critical thinking, and literacy a tool for addressing problems and creating social change.