

Briefly Noted

by **Maria Moriarty**

Vulnerable workers in Canada

The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) has recently released two reports focused on vulnerable workers. They define vulnerable workers as those who "...experience a combination of low pay, lack of benefits, insecure working conditions, and lack of opportunity to improve their situation" (CPRN Press Release March 18, 2005). The reports analyze the situation faced by vulnerable workers and point out that their numbers are growing. In these reports, CPRN argues for a complex multi-faceted approach to improving their lives and states that action would require a public policy debate that honestly looks at the reality of work in Canada. Each report is worth close reading in light of increasing demands by policy makers and funders for literacy programs to focus on employment. These reports are available on the CPRN website, www.cprn.com/en/.

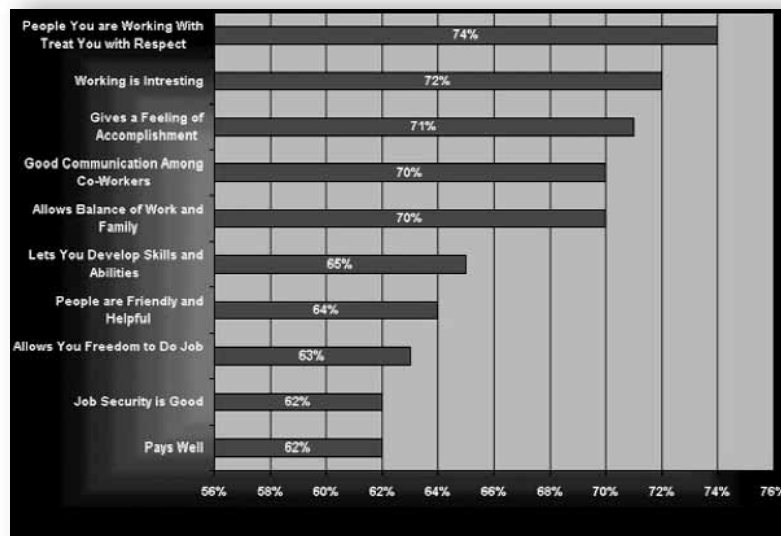
Non-standard Work and Economic Vulnerability (March 2005) examines the prevalence of low pay, the types of employment and the conditions of employment that are experienced by vulnerable workers. (www.cprn.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=1192)

Towards Enhancing the Employment Conditions of Vulnerable Workers: A Public Policy Perspective (March 2005) looks at a range of options to increase vulnerable workers' access to minimum employment standards and benefits. (www.cprn.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=1193)

More recently, CPRN published **Does a Rising Tide Lift All Boats? Low-paid Workers in Canada**, by Ron Saunders. (Document No. 4, Vulnerable Workers Series, CPRN. May 2005. 51 pages.) The report profiles those, other than full-time students, who work full-time for less than \$10 an hour. It found that while Canada's standard of living has increased by 43% in twenty years, the number of full-time workers paid poverty-level wages has remained steady at one in six people. The report outlines which groups are most

likely to get stuck in low-paying jobs, and points out that persistence of low pay is at odds with the rhetoric surrounding Canada as a 'knowledge economy.' This report is available online at www.cprn.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=1242.

Another interesting project by the CPRN is **JobQuality.ca**. A national survey asked working Canadians what they value in a job. The majority said that respect, interesting work, meaningful work and good communications with co-workers were key ingredients of a good job. To read more, go to www.jobquality.ca/indicator_e/rew001.stm.



Literacy in the world...

The UNESCO website dedicated to the Literacy Decade (2003-2012) says,

Literacy is a human right. Basic education, within which literacy is the key learning tool, was recognised as a human right over 50 years ago, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a scandal that this right continues to be violated for such a large proportion of humanity. (<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en>)

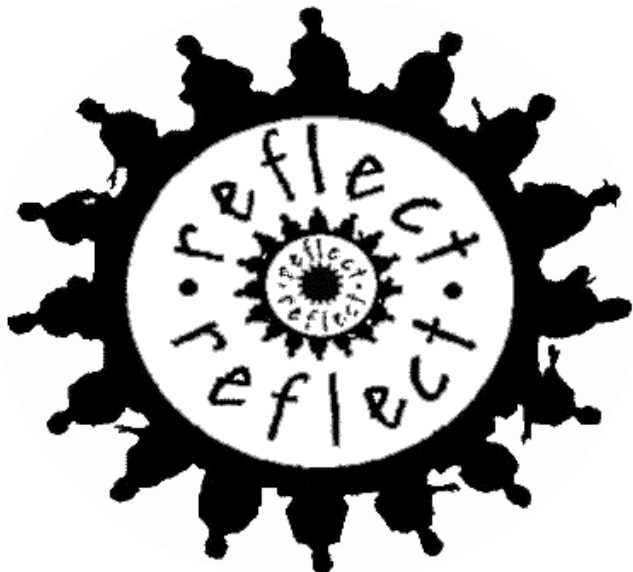
Each year UNESCO awards literacy prizes to organizations that further the cause of literacy. In 2005 their theme was Literacy and Sustainable Development.

Briefly Noted... *continued*

They awarded prizes to three organizations:

- GOAL Sudan for its Women's Literacy Programme in Displaced Communities, which helped thousands of war-displaced women take action to improve basic living conditions for their families and communities. For more about GOAL, go to www.goal.ie/newsroom/unesco0705.shtml
- The Associação PROGRESSO for its literacy programme aimed at empowering communities, structures and networks in two provinces in Mozambique
- The AULA Cultural Association, a neighbourhood movement in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, for tailoring education activities to suit a range of social groups who were in danger of social exclusion. UNESCO praised AULA for the way its active and flexible programs "foster development, intercultural understanding and citizenship"

GOAL Sudan uses the REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach to literacy, which combines the theory of Paulo Freire and the group methods of Participatory Rural Appraisal. In this approach, adult learners are active decision-making participants who assess their own needs, develop appropriate learning programs and generate learning materials. For more information, visit the REFLECT website at www.reflect-action.org. ■



Coming Soon...



Literacies #7 promises to be provocative and far-ranging. The editorial committee has already received a number of articles that explore the realities of working for a living in adult literacy. Some of the titles we're reviewing include:

- The historical roots of literacy as a vocation
- Opening Doors...ten years later
- Literacy workers are vulnerable workers
- Working online in literacy
- How new accountability measures have changed literacy work
- Appreciative Inquiry can transform the stories we tell
- Why I left literacy work

We also expect to include a number of articles that deal with assessment and the Canadian Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey data.

Issue #7 of Literacies promises to be wide-ranging and provocative. Don't miss it!

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Don't miss this next issue!