

**Environmental Scan: Literacy Work in Canada**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**

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**Movement for Canadian Literacy**

**December 2007**

## Acknowledgments

As a field of practice, we have a great deal of knowledge about some aspects of literacy work in Canada. For example, as a result of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (2003) we know statistically the literacy levels of Canadians. We know from research and practice what makes an ideal learning environment and we know certain characteristics of adult literacy learners. What we don't have is a comprehensive picture of the field itself: who works in this field, how they got here, what training they receive, what their working conditions are like, whether the work has changed in recent years or is likely to change in the future, and what the field needs to do to prepare for the future.

These are the types of questions that a study of the field or sector attempts to answer. Sector studies, however, need to be well-focused and grounded in reality. The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) felt it was important to document what the field sees as key knowledge gaps before developing a sector study. To gather this information, we engaged Sue Folinsbee to carry out an environmental scan by reviewing the literature and interviewing key informants.

We would like to thank Sue and her research assistant, Mary Ellen Belfiore, for their work on this research. We would also like to thank the key informants (See Appendix 1) who suggested resources and identified key issues. Their perspectives and experiences helped us to appreciate, but not fear, the complexity of the work that lays ahead.

Our next stage will be to use the information in the environmental scan to identify appropriate partners and to develop a funding proposal for a full sector study. Our working group for this includes Lesley Brown, Ann Marie Downie, Candice Jackson, Janet Lane, Maria Moriarty, Marina Niks, Maurice Taylor and MCL staff.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the fall of 2007, Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) conducted an environmental scan of the Anglophone literacy field in Canada. Data was gathered through the use of key informant interviews (19) and a literature review. A cross-national working group guided the development of the scan.

### **The Need for an Environmental Scan**

The intent of the environmental scan of the literacy field or sector was to set the stage for a larger study of the sector. The need to conduct a scan prior to the study was necessary because much of the knowledge about literacy work in Canada is informal and anecdotal. There is very little research that provides a comprehensive picture of the literacy field suitable to our purposes.

For the scan, the term “literacy sector” included organizations and people who do the work in the sector. Specifically:

- Managers, coordinators, and instructors who do paid work
- People who work as volunteers in the sector
- National non-profit literacy organizations, umbrella agencies such as provincial coalitions, provincial and regional networks, and local agencies that deliver literacy programming
- Organizations that are trying to integrate literacy into the work they do, including labour organizations, employer associations and other non-profit organizations
- Practitioners, instructors, and other organizations that work with employers and unions to deliver workplace literacy programs
- Settlement agencies and other organizations that offer literacy programming specifically to immigrants and refugees.

The environmental scan has allowed us to determine that knowledge gaps exist in a number of key areas.

## **The Sector Study**

A sector study gathers information on factors such as the nature of the work; where it takes place; the size and demographics of the workforce; pay rates and other conditions of work; professional development needs, opportunities and gaps; and trends that may affect the work and the workforce in the future. This information may be collected using methodologies such as interviews, surveys and focus groups. The information collected can tell you how many people work in a field or sector full-time, how many are part-time, where they work and how much they are paid. Sector studies are also used to find out things such as the age of people working in the sector, what their education is and what kind of training they receive and the “technical” and non-technical skills needed by people working in the sector.

Some sectors use sector studies as a way to plan for the future. Will there be enough workers? Will they have the right training? Who will employ the workers? Are there policies and practices in place that may stop people from looking for work in the sector? How can we work with the educational institutions to make sure people see the field as a place to work?

Our sector study will examine many of these key questions.

## **Limitations of the Scan**

There is a deep knowledge of the literacy sector by those who work in it, but this information not usually written down. Even if it is written down, it may reside in many unconnected, and not always easily accessible places. In addition, those who have written it down may see this knowledge as proprietary information.

We found very few research reports on the literacy sector. Those reports that exist tended to focus on specific aspects of literacy work such as provincial working conditions and professional development. One notable exception is Horsman and Woodrow’s 2006 research report *Focused On Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada*. The findings from this national research provide a sketch of literacy work and issues in the sector across the country *as seen through the eyes of people who participated in the research*.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

The current environment for literacy work in Canada presents a disconnected or a contradictory picture. This contradiction arises when the social and economic imperative *for literacy* is balanced against the current investment *in literacy* and the reality in which literacy programs and literacy workers function.

### What we Know about Literacy

Findings of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS) (2005) indicate that although literacy is more important than ever in society, four out of ten Canadians do not have the literacy skills necessary for every day life. Furthermore, according to a comparison of the results of the results of the IALLS and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) there has been little change between 1994 and 2003.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in Myers and de Broucker's report *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System* for the Canadian Policy Research Network (2006) states that "a large proportion of Canada's adult population is not equipped to participate in a knowledge-based society" (p. 2). The authors contend that increasing the skills of those with the least education will lead to increased productivity.

For this reason they note that the "skills development of the least educated should be as much on the economic agenda as it is on the social agenda." Recommendations from this report include a vision for adult learning where all adults have opportunities to upgrade their basic skills with a public policy framework and funding that can make this happen.<sup>2</sup>

The findings of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)'s 2006 *Adult Literacy Forum— Investing in Our Potential: Towards Quality Adult Literacy Programs in Canada* (Faris, & Blunt, 2006) also emphasize the importance of having a highly literate population, not only to succeed in the global economy, but also to ensure social cohesion and greater participation on the part of Canada's citizenry. As described in the forum findings, "Two threads,

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<sup>1</sup> See MCL Backgrounder on the IALLS at <http://www.literacy.ca/all/backgrd/mclall.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Myers, K. & de Broucker, P. (2006). *Too many left behind: Canada's adult education and training system Executive summary*. Available from [http://www.cprn.org/documents/43965\\_en.pdf](http://www.cprn.org/documents/43965_en.pdf)

Canada's global economic competitiveness and national quality of life, were woven into virtually every forum panel and workshop presentation—and were issues underscored by key note speakers.”<sup>3</sup> In the recommendations, forum delegates call for strong federal government leadership in an approach to literacy policy and provision.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, Frank McKenna, Deputy Chairman of TD Bank Financial Group, in *Literacy Matters* stressed that the situation of low literacy in Canada is unacceptable. While he emphasizes the risk of this situation in terms of economics, he also notes:

There are even greater costs, though difficult to measure. After all, what price does Canada pay when parents cannot read bedtime stories to their children, or when citizens are unable to cast a ballot? What price does our nation pay for new Canadians who feel isolated, or students who are disengaged? (TD Bank Financial Group, 2006, p. 1)

McKenna calls for the need for literacy to be a national priority with a coordinated approach among different levels of government.<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) in its 2007 report *State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency* indicates the importance of literacy. In Chapter Four, on adult learning, the economic and social importance of literacy for the individual is underscored, as is the need for sectors to work together to address the problem of literacy.<sup>6</sup>

## **What Happens on the Ground**

Recent surveys and reports, as noted above, report that a large number of Canadians could benefit from participating in literacy and essential skills upgrading. Some reports call for a greater investment in this type of upgrading. This investment has not yet happened.

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<sup>3</sup> Faris, R., & Blunt, A. (2006). Report on the CMEC forum on adult literacy, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See TD Bank Financial Group (2006). *Literacy matters: A call for action*, p. 1, at [http://www.td.com/community/literacy\\_matters.pdf](http://www.td.com/community/literacy_matters.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/5ECA2E9-D5E4-43B9-94E4-84D6D31BC5BC/0/NewSOLR\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/5ECA2E9-D5E4-43B9-94E4-84D6D31BC5BC/0/NewSOLR_Report.pdf) pp. 46-64.



Horsman and Woodrow in *Focused On Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada* (2006) give us important descriptions of the circumstances of literacy work from practitioners on the ground. Over 500 people participated in this research study. Participants described literacy work using words such as “tentative, unsecured, work intensification, and isolation.” The report describes adult literacy as the “poorest cousin of the education system.” It also notes that the reality of the field includes “lack of recognition, minimal professional development opportunities, and insufficient funding supports.”

While this report is set in a Research in Practice (RiP)<sup>7</sup> context, it does provide a comprehensive picture of the state of literacy from a cross-national *practitioner point of view*. Based on the results, the authors feel that the work in the literacy field “has intensified and the isolation sharpened” and that there is an “increased sense that programming is shaped by decisions that ignore the realities of learners’ lives. Demands for programs to collect data to justify program existence have multiplied. Both these factors have created a field that is largely demoralized and disheartened.”

Jackson (2004) reports that, increasingly, policy and reporting frameworks for literacy discount the needs and intentions of practitioners and learners. Jackson reports that literacy worker report being “over-burdened, stressed, disillusioned, [and] burned out...” Many are leaving the field. Jackson notes that this is a phenomenon experienced by literacy workers internationally. Jackson refers to literacy reporting as “a highly complex literacy practice that remains remarkably under-examined.”<sup>8</sup>

Westell in *Literacy in a Complex World*<sup>9</sup> stresses that the issue of low literacy is determined by many social factors that go far beyond the education system and literacy programs:

To call on adult literacy programs to unilaterally move these statistics is to shift the burden on to a minor player in the system as a whole. This is

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<sup>7</sup> The Festival of Literacies web site <http://www.literaciesoise.ca/research.htm> defines research in practice as follows: “Research in practice is literacy research conducted by or with people directly engaged in adult literacy teaching and learning... Research in practice includes reading and responding to existing research; reflecting on practice in light of research; applying research findings to practice; and conducting new research about practice.”

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, N. (2004). “What Counts as Literacy Work?” *Literacies*, 3 (Spring) p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Westell, T. (2007). “Literacy in a Complex World.” *Literacies*, 7 (Fall) p.42.

not to say that literacy programs should not be held accountable for what we do, but rather to insist that we not be expected to make up for the ills of a society that result in such large numbers of Canadian adults with low literacy skills in the first place.

It is clear that many people have come to recognize and acknowledge the economic, social and political value of literacy: literacy is an essential skill on which other skills are built and on which the economic backbone of the country is built. What is missing is knowledge about the field—the existing programs, the characteristics and needs of literacy workers and learners, and the gaps that must be addressed to meet literacy challenges of the future.

## **THE FIELD OF ADULT LITERACY IN CANADA**

While there is a considerable amount of research on the *issue* of literacy, there is little research or reporting related to the people who work and volunteer in the literacy sector. In fact, researchers in *Focus on Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada* noted the difficulty in finding numbers on practitioners, programs and funding from governments or coalitions. The authors of *The ABCs of Educator Demographics: Report of the Findings of a Situational Analysis of Canada's Education Sector* report a similar finding.

Our scan did not attempt to report on numbers of programs, practitioners, and volunteers because of the unevenness in terms of the availability and/or anecdotal nature of this information across the country. The scan does report on general trends and some examples to provide a sketch of what we know about the sector in Canada.

### **Adult Literacy Programming**

Interviews with key informants for the scan revealed that the “system” of delivery is extremely complex, fragmented and diverse across the country. Informants said that it is very difficult to know and keep track of who is doing adult literacy because some of the programming is project-based and operates on short-term funding. In addition, it may be difficult to obtain information from some provincial or territorial governments on what projects have been funded.

We found that three main types of providers deliver literacy and adult basic education (ABE) programming: community-based literacy organizations, colleges, and school boards. There are also some workplace literacy programs offered by employers and unions across the country, but the extent of these programs is unknown. It is also not known how many programs operate without money from “traditional” sources of literacy funding.

Community-based organizations whose main mandate is *not* literacy may also include or integrate literacy into their work. Examples of these organizations include family and early childhood programs, native friendship centres, libraries, John Howard Societies, YM-YWCAs, food banks, and settlement agencies.

Our scan found that the community-based sector is the largest provider of adult literacy in most provinces and territories. The exceptions are the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In these two territories 90-100% of programming is provided by the college sector. In some provinces (British Columbia and Nova Scotia, for example) the community college system is the main provider. In most other provinces the college system provides some of the programming.

In Quebec, school boards are the major provider of literacy programs. In other provinces school boards tend to offer upgrading for high school credits or they focus on family literacy.

The line between which provider delivers which type of programming becomes blurred in some jurisdictions. This happens because some colleges also provide community-based programs.

## **Funding for Literacy Programming**

From interviews with key informants, it is clear that funding is variable depending on the province or territory. While core funding for institutions and some community-based organizations comes from a provincial or territorial government, there was a sense that most community-based and family literacy programs are funded with project dollars. Some key informants described the funding situation as “unstable”, and “only partial funding.”

Other key informants indicated that funding has dried up. If a provincial government is putting most of its money into institutional literacy there is a sense that there is little funding left over for community-based programs. In some cases, organizations were described as offering services with no government funding, and in some cases, no paid staff.

## Literacy Workers

What do we currently know about the field demographically? Interviews with key informants, along with the results from research conducted by the Ontario Literacy Coalition<sup>10</sup> and Literacy Alberta,<sup>11</sup> indicate some key trends in terms of the demographics of literacy workers.

The most common profile of a paid literacy worker across the country and across sectors is female, white, middle-aged (40–55 years) and well-educated with a degree, most commonly a Bachelor of Education. In northern areas there is more diversity. In Nunavut, for example, about 40% of literacy workers are Inuit. Aboriginal literacy workers can also be found in the community-based sector in NWT and in the rural areas of the Yukon.

Literacy workers can have a range of educational backgrounds from Grade 12, and/or no formal training in literacy, teaching or adult education, to diplomas in adult education, degrees in education or other areas, and master's degrees. In several provinces and territories, it was reported that a growing number of literacy workers have a master's degree or are working towards it. In Alberta, recent research on community-based literacy coordinators indicates that 38% had master's degrees.<sup>12</sup>

In four jurisdictions the average years of experience appears to be 4–6 years. However, informants also alluded to the fact that there is a core group of long-time literacy workers in many jurisdictions.

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<sup>10</sup> As reported in the 2001 survey by the OLC on pay and benefits. See Falcigno (2002) at <http://www.on.literacy.ca/pubs/pay/cover.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Norton, M. (2004). *Growing our way. A Report on the Professional Development Project*. Calgary, AB: Literacy Alberta

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Working Conditions

For our purposes, working conditions included things such as paid non-mandatory benefits (medical, dental, etc), payment for overtime hours, the work environment, job responsibilities and access to professional development.

Many people working in the community-based sector are working on short-term contracts. As a direct result of this, most literacy workers in this sector have few or no benefits. In Ontario's community-based sector, for example, 41% of agencies do not provide any health, dental or pension plan benefits to their staff;<sup>13</sup> in Alberta, 71% of staff who are responsible for coordinating the activities of volunteers receive no benefits package.<sup>14</sup>

We found that full-time, permanent (or in some cases, term) instructors in colleges and school boards are mostly unionized and as such, receive the full range of benefits including paid educational leave. However, not all of these literacy instructors are full time or permanent.

We also found that literacy workers work a great deal of over time for which they are not paid. Volunteer coordinators in Alberta work, on average, an extra 20 unpaid hours a month.<sup>15</sup>

Our scan tell us that the environment in which people work can range widely from being excellent in terms of working space, resources, and equipment, to being very poor. For the most part, however, practitioners feel isolated and lonely with few opportunities to meet with colleagues. Workers in remote, northern communities may feel especially isolated because of a lack of colleagues, lack of support, lack of resources, and the experience of a cultural divide. They tend to get their support from a distance by phone or e-mail.

Both the research on the sector and findings from interviews with key informants reveal that literacy workers are expected to have an array of skills and abilities to deal with the many different facets of their jobs. There is an increasing sense that literacy workers are expected to do more paperwork, be more accountable to funders, and provide more coordination while pay remains static.

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<sup>13</sup> Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO). Human Resource Survey Results, 2007

<sup>14</sup> Literacy Alberta. Membership Survey, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> IBID.

In many cases, literacy workers are expected to coordinate programs, instruct, deal with the paperwork and the data collection requirements of funders' accountability frameworks, and write grant proposals that will pay for their own salaries and their programs. One report reviewed noted:

“The tutor coordinators need such diverse skills as counselling, working with the community, administration, as well as a deep understanding of literacy issues, learning disabilities and a variety of teaching methods.”<sup>16</sup>

The same report indicates that instructors working with basic literacy students did not have enough time for marking and preparing class material. In fact, many literacy workers feel exhausted and disheartened with the workload and the low rate of pay they receive. There is a tension between meeting the accountability demands of funder and meeting the needs of learners.

We found that professional development supports and opportunities vary across the country and across delivery sectors. We also found that professional development *usually* takes the form of workshops and conferences. Several key informants indicated there were more opportunities, support, and paid leave for professional development for people working in the college sector.

Most provincial/territorial coalitions offer a variety of professional development opportunities such as workshops, on-line conferencing and workshops, institutes, conferences, and networking opportunities for literacy workers. The scope of the opportunities (length, variety of topics, delivery mechanisms, etc.) varies across the country.

## **Pay Rates**

Based on information from key informants we know there is a range of pay rates in most provinces and territories. People who work in the community-based sectors receive the lowest wages, while those in the college sector receive the highest. There is some indication, however, that college instructors teaching literacy are on yearly contracts and don't receive any benefits.

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<sup>16</sup> See Arneson, W. (1999). *The Working Lives of Literacy Practitioners*. The Province of British Columbia, p. v.

Most practitioners are not unionized. Those who are unionized tend to be in the college or school board sector. One key theme that arose from key informant interviews is that the wages of a literacy worker are not enough to live on and that to do this work one needs a partner who has a decent job.

Table 1 provides examples of pay rates for different sectors. These rates were obtained from research and from key informants for this scan and are indicated as such.

<b>Table 1: Examples of the Range of Pay Rates in the Literacy Sector</b>	
<b>Sector</b>	<b>Pay Rate or Range</b>
<b>Community-based Sector</b>	
Province 1 (coordinators)	▪ Average hourly rate = \$18.94 <sup>17</sup>
Province 2 (coordinators)	▪ Range \$10–\$31 with average rate of \$17.57 <sup>18</sup>
Province 3 (coordinators)	▪ Range \$15–\$34
Province 1 (instructors)	▪ Range of \$8.50–\$34
Province 2 (instructors)	▪ Average hourly rate \$17.08 <sup>19</sup>
Province 3 (instructors)	▪ Hourly rate of \$14.14 <sup>20</sup>
Territory 1	▪ Average hourly rate \$20 <sup>21</sup>
Territory 2	▪ Yearly salary range of \$45,000 to \$50,000 <sup>22</sup>
<b>School boards</b>	
Province 1	▪ Average hourly rate in 2001 \$25.36 <sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO). Human Resource Survey Results, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Literacy Alberta (2005). *Survey of coordinators*.

<sup>19</sup> Key informant interview.

<sup>20</sup> See *Focused on Practice*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Key informant interview. It should be noted that while this seems like a very high hourly rate, it is not a high wage for the north.

<sup>22</sup> Key informant interview.

<sup>23</sup> As reported in the 2001 survey by the OLC on pay and benefits. See Falcigno (2002) at <http://www.on.literacy.ca/pubs/pay/cover.htm>

**Table 1: Examples of the Range of Pay Rates in the Literacy Sector**

Sector	Pay Rate or Range
<b>Colleges</b>	
Province 1	▪ Average hour rate in 2001 \$34.81 <sup>24</sup>
Province 2	▪ \$60 an hour or more
Territory 1	▪ Yearly salary of about \$70,000
Territory 2	▪ Yearly salary of about \$75,000

### The Impact of Working Conditions

Good working conditions can grow and nurture a field. Good working conditions, and a positive policy environment for literacy could lead, for example, to exciting projects and exchanges with others that can push the boundaries of literacy work. This in turn can have a positive impact on learners.

Poor working conditions can lead to low morale, high staff turnover, inability to attract new people to the field, and the need for practitioners to take on two or three jobs to survive. In a US study of the working conditions of 95 ABE instructors, Smith, Hofer, and Gillespie (2001) found that more often than not, instructors' facilities were not satisfactory, the instructors felt isolated, and they wanted more support from administration. Smith, Hofer, and Gillespie (2001) conclude that:

System reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on conditions in which teachers can teach well. Even though numerous teachers do wonderful jobs, our findings so far indicate that we need to pay more attention to what teachers have to say about their working conditions if we are to design and deliver effective staff development, improve student retention, and professionalize the field as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, C., Hofer, J., & Gillespie, M. (2001). The working conditions of adult literacy teachers: Preliminary findings from the NCSALL Staff Development Study. *Focus on Basics*, 4(D). See <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=291>



## Volunteers

Volunteers are found almost exclusively in the community-based sector. In Alberta, for example, most of the 2000 men and women who attend community-based literacy programs are matched with a tutor and meet one or more times a week.<sup>26</sup>

Community Literacy of Ontario, in *Literacy volunteers: Value Added* (2005), indicates there is a total of 5,895 volunteers in the community-based sector in that province. The large majority of volunteers are women and the majority are over 50 years of age and have at least one degree. These volunteers play a variety of roles in the sector including tutors, board members, committee members, fundraisers, office support, and computer support. The report notes that even though the number of volunteers was declining in Ontario's community-based literacy agencies, the economic value of these volunteers was calculated at \$12,505,290 annually.

Overall, however, there was little information to be found on the profile of volunteers and the training they receive. Only a few key informants were able to report on the profile or numbers of volunteer tutors in their jurisdictions. One informant said that it is difficult to find out the numbers and profile of volunteers as programs find it threatening to share this information. We found that training for volunteers is variable—from a preliminary orientation session to a couple of days of training.

Moriarty (2007) writes that “volunteers make up a large part of the literacy workforce in Canada.” According to Moriarty there has been little examination of the role of volunteers or the result of volunteering and the impacts on programs. In two studies on volunteers, one Canadian and one American, that analyze the role of volunteers, there is a call for more research in this area.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Norton's 2004 report *Growing our way. A report on the professional development project*. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Literacy Alberta.

<sup>27</sup> Moriarty, M. (2007) Examining unpaid literacy work. *Literacies*, 7(Fall). p. 29

## DEVELOPING THE LITERACY FIELD AS A PROFESSION

It is necessary to make a distinction between professionalization of the literacy field and professional development. Professional development has been described as an *individual approach* to enhancing practitioner skills. Professionalization, on the other hand, refers to a *systemic approach* to build the capacity of the literacy field as a whole. In other fields, professionalization has included concepts such as licensing, certification, assessment and evaluation, and professional development.<sup>28</sup>

While no one working in the field would question the need for professional development, the topic of professionalization is contested ground. While professionalization can be seen as a way to raise the profile of literacy and as a way to ensure that learners receive the best instruction possible, some practitioners are concerned. They argue that attempts to systematize or regulate the field may result in placing another hard to meet demand on already overburdened practitioners.

A 2003 article in MCL's newsletter *literacy.ca* entitled "Our Development as a Profession: What Will it Take?" states that there has been little movement on "professionalizing the field," and stresses that a framework for developing the field as a profession and developing human resources is an integral component of a pan-Canada literacy strategy.

Literacy practitioners and others who gave input into MCL's National Literacy Agenda highlighted professionalization as a key issue. They noted that "employment standards, opportunities for professional development for staff and volunteers, standards for certification of literacy workers, ways of sharing new knowledge and best practices, adequate compensation, and increased social recognition"<sup>29</sup> are key issues that need to be addressed.

What is clear, is that a strategy for professionalization cannot be one size fits all. It will need to be tailored to fit the different approaches to literacy programming offered across the country. MCL notes there have been attempts to initiate systems to train literacy workers but they have not come to fruition.

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/KnowledgeCentres/AdultLearning/OurWork/Projects.htm> for a project description.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

## **Training Certification Programs in Adult Literacy**

At the time of our scan we found training certification for literacy workers available in two provinces: in Manitoba the provincial government has a three-level certificate program; in Ontario, three community colleges use the Internet to offer the Teacher of Adults: Literacy Educator Certificate Program. One of the main differences between these two certificates is that the Ontario certificate is not required for employment in the literacy field by employer or funders.

We found that certification programs were available in Nova Scotia for workplace literacy and in Alberta and British Columbia for family literacy. However, no research on how these programs impact the status of practitioners, learners, quality of programs, or pay and working conditions could be found.

## **CONDUCTING THE SECTOR STUDY**

Conducting the study will allow us to Determine (1) characteristics of people working in the sector (e.g., gender, aged, education, work experience) (2) characteristics of the sector (e.g., number or organizations and types, number of people working in the sector—paid and volunteer, who funds), and (3) examine the working conditions (e.g., number of full-time and part-time workers, rates of pay, availability of non-mandatory benefits).

In addition to gathering information about the field as a whole, the sector study will also take a look at professionalization and certification. We will (1) examine the models of certification in other fields and similar sectors in other countries, (2) identify present qualification requirements of literacy workers, (3) examine what qualifications are needed, and (4) identify what kinds of standards should there be for literacy delivery, along with how they could be developed and supported.

We asked key informants to provide us with their thoughts on they types of questions that the sector study should examine. The following list does not represent a definitive list of questions to ask. Rather, it reflects the range of possible questions suggested by key informants.

- Who are the literacy workers in Canada?
- Where do they work?
- What is their pay and what are their working conditions?
- Do they get sick leave and other benefits?
- How many hours do they work that they are not paid for?
- What kind of training do they get?
- What kind of professional development is needed?
- Who is funding literacy work?
- What are the challenges in the sector and how can they be addressed?
- How does literacy and ABE compare across provinces and territories?
- What kind of work is being done in organizations that do not have literacy as a mandate, or are not funded through traditional sources?
- What is the role and future of volunteers?
- How can we look at progress in a different way than just literacy rates?
- What can the capacity of the field be built to?
- What are the relationships between policy and practice in the classroom?
- What are the conditions of unionized workers?

The study needs to be seen as credible and legitimate by both decision makers and the literacy field. We need to be clear about the purpose of the research, its parameters, and how the results of the study will be used.

## Appendix A: Key informants

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## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What is known about literacy work through research in your province/territory/jurisdiction with respect to:
  - paid workers versus volunteers
  - literacy workers in different sectors—community-based, school board, college, other
  - length of time literacy workers stay in the field—why they stay, why they leave
  - unionized versus non-unionized workers
  - demographics of paid literacy workers and volunteers —age, gender, education, etc.
  - pay rates for literacy workers
  - sources of funding and funding allocations (e.g., % on admin, salaries, overhead; fundraising)
  - types of programs offered (1-2-1, small group, classroom) and hours of instruction
  - types of literacy workers: program managers, instructors, information and referral, assessment (direct service delivery versus service support)
  - professional development received by literacy workers (frequency of opportunity, type, paid or unpaid)
  - overall working conditions—real hours of work, benefits, latest increase, work load, number of students, etc.
  - impact of working condition (positive and negative) on the lives of literacy workers
2. Can you refer me to research reports or statistics that focus on these areas? How abundant are these research reports?
3. Is this knowledge formalized through research reports or mostly informal?
4. What organizations are focusing on research related to the literacy sector?
5. What are the most important findings to date from research on the literacy sector?

6. What models of professionalism and certification from other fields would be useful to explore for the literacy field? What are the pros and cons of certification and professionalism?
7. What are the most serious gaps in knowledge about the literacy sector that you would like to see explored in a comprehensive sector research study? What questions should be asked?
8. What would be the most effective way to design and carry out this type of sector research so that it reflects the knowledge of the literacy community but also pays attention to current political realities?
9. What minefields, if any, should MCL be wary of when moving on to design the proposal for the sector study?

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