CHAPTER 2:

Adult educators in BC public schools: Who are the students they teach?

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This report is one of a series documenting the findings of the Worklife of Adult Educators survey. For additional information, see http://www.bctf.ca/AdultEducationStudy
Chapter 2

Composition of students in adult education programs

Country/place/region of origin
- Students whose country of origin is Canada
- Students who are immigrants or refugees to Canada

Limitations to the data on country/place/region of origin

Reasons for attending adult education programs, and previous educational experience
- Student population: Reasons students are attending an adult education program
- Student population: Newcomers to Canada

Summary
Composition of students in adult education programs

One objective of the 2013 Worklife of Adult Educators survey was to provide a sense of the composition of students attending adult education programs in BC’s public school system. This section of the survey asked adult educators about the country/place/region of origin of the students attending their classes, the reasons students are attending adult education programs, and the educational experience/schooling of immigrant and refugee students prior to attending adult education classes in Canada.

Country/place/region of origin

The survey asked adult educators, “Thinking of the students you currently teach, please indicate how many are from each country/place of origin, to the best of your knowledge”. The results are presented separately for students originally from Canada, and students who are immigrants or refugees to Canada.

Students whose country of origin is Canada

The following chart shows the proportion of adult educators indicating the students they teach are of Aboriginal ancestry or are of any other ethnicity (non-Aboriginal). About the same proportion of adult educators indicated “some” of the students they teach are of Aboriginal ancestry (20.4%) as the proportion indicating “some” are non-Aboriginal (18.4%). About one-third (35.9%) of adult educators indicated having “a few” students attending their classes who are of Aboriginal ancestry. Just under one-half (44.7%) of adult educators indicated that “most”, and 22.3% indicated “all”, of the students they teach are non-Aboriginal. There are no adult educators who indicated “most” or “all” of their students are of Aboriginal ancestry.
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Students who are immigrants or refugees to Canada

The survey asked adult educators, “Thinking of the students you currently teach, please indicate how many are from each country/place of origin, to the best of your knowledge”. The chart on the following page shows the diversity of students attending adult education programs, in terms of country of origin, who are immigrants/refugees to Canada.

For all of the countries/regions of origin listed, at least some respondents indicated having “a few” students from this country of origin, ranging from a low of 9.7% for Australia and New Zealand to a high of 54.4% for Europe. As well as Europe, about one-half of adult educators indicated having “a few” students who are immigrants/refugees from South America (52.4%), Central America (49.5%), and Africa (47.6%) attending their adult education classes.

Teachers indicated “most” of the students they teach are from a country/region of origin for only five of the thirteen options listed—East Asian (52.4%), South Asia (16.5%), Middle East (11.7%), Southeast Asia (8.7%), and Africa (2.9%). None of the respondents indicated that “all” of the students they teach are from one country of origin.

“Thinking of the students you currently teach, please indicate how many are from each country/place of origin, to the best of your knowledge” (n=103)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrants/refugees from:</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom/Ireland</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia (e.g., China-Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnam, Indonesia)</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia (e.g., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia, New Zealand</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations to the data on country/place/region of origin

A closer analysis of the responses to the question regarding country/place/region of origin reveals inconsistencies in the data that limit the interpretation of the results. Based on a case summary of the responses to Q19 for all 103 respondents, 22 respondents selected “most” for two or more of the countries of origin listed when asked “Of the students you currently teach, please indicate how many are from each country/place/region of origin, to the best of your knowledge”. For example, twelve adult educators (11.7% of the sample) indicated “most” of the students are immigrants to Canada from the Middle East. However, these same twelve respondents also indicated that “most” of the students they teach are from one or more other country/place/region of origin—Africa (2), East Asia (9), and South Asia (1).
It is possible this is because some adult educators teach in more than one setting, and responded to the question on country of origin separately for each setting in which they teach. Of the twenty-two adult educators who selected “most” for two or more of the countries of origin, eleven indicated they teach in more than one school/workplace. In the comments, some adult educators noted that the program they teach in has continuous enrolment, so the composition of students changes over time as some leave and others begin the program. The overlapping responses to this question about the country/place/region of origin of students may also reflect the challenge in designing a survey question that adequately captures the varied schedules and program formats in adult education programs that respond to the unique needs of adult students.

Note: See the table on page 3 for the full range of responses to this question.
Reasons for attending adult education programs, and previous educational experience

The survey asked adult educators, “Which of the following statements describe your student population?” about two sets of characteristics. The first set is related to reasons why students attend an adult education program, and the second set is related to the educational background of students who are newcomers to Canada. The responses to this question help provide a sense of the composition of adult education classes in terms of schooling prior to adult education, length of time away from school before returning, and reasons for taking adult education courses.

Student population: Reasons students are attending an adult education program

Over eight in ten respondents teach students who are newcomers to Canada developing English Language skills (84.5%). Almost three-quarters (73.8%) of respondents teach students who are adults returning to complete high-school graduation requirements after being away from school for a long time. Many adult educators also teach school-aged and young adult students. One-half (50.5%) of respondents teach students under the age of 19 who are taking additional courses through adult education, and two-thirds (68.9%) teach young adults returning to complete high-school after recently leaving school. Six in ten (59.2%) teach high-school graduates who are upgrading their high-school standing for post-secondary education.

Fifteen respondents (14.6%) indicated “Other” student population, including newcomers seeking college/university entrance, young adults with learning disabilities, adults reading at a primary level, immigrants who are retirees, cross-enrolment in Distributed Learning, and international students. One adult educator noted, “The variety is astounding and almost daunting.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons students are attending an adult education program (n=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers to Canada developing English Language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults returning to complete high-school graduation requirements after being away from school for a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adults returning to complete high-school graduation requirements after recently leaving school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school graduates who are upgrading their high-school standing for post-secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary students of school age (under 19 years) taking additional courses through adult education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student population: Newcomers to Canada

The survey also asked adult educators questions about the educational experience/schooling of students who are immigrants, newcomers, and/or refugees to Canada. Almost all (92.2%) of respondents indicated teaching immigrant students who have previous educational experience/schooling, and two-thirds (65%) indicate teaching immigrant students with minimal or no previous educational experience in their country of origin.

Over three-quarters (78.6%) of respondents indicate teaching adult students who are new immigrants (who are not refugees). When asked about the students they teach who are refugees, 60.2% indicate teaching refugee students who have previous educational experience/schooling, and 54.4% indicate teaching refugee students who have minimal or no previous educational experience in their country of origin.

Five adult educators indicated teaching “Other” types of students who are newcomers to Canada. The descriptions illustrate the wide range of academic skills students have upon entering adult education. One teacher noted teaching students who are highly educated immigrants (with PhDs, etc.), and another teacher suggested how frustrating this is for these newcomers to Canada:

*I’ve also taught students from other countries who already have university degrees, and are upset that they have to start all over in Canada.*

Two other comments refer to adult students with little or no educational experience.
Summary

For the adult educators responding to this survey, adult education classes are comprised of a diverse student population with a mix of Aboriginal students, non-Aboriginal students from Canada, and students who are immigrants or refugees from at least twelve different countries/regions/places in the world. Eight in ten adult educators indicated teaching adult students who are newcomers to Canada and who attend adult education programs to develop English language skills. These students bring with them many cultural perspectives, and varying degrees of education, schooling, and English language learning.

The survey results also show that there is a diversity of learning needs in adult education programs. While over one-half of respondents teach students who are immigrants or refugees with minimal or no previous education prior to coming to Canada, almost all adult educators teach immigrant students with previous educational experience/schooling. Some of these adult students have advanced education and credentials that are not recognized in Canada. And six in ten adult educators teach students who are high-school graduates, returning to upgrade for post-secondary education, referred to by the Ministry of Education as Graduated Adults. One-half of adult educators also indicate having school-aged students in their class who are taking some secondary courses through adult education.

On December 4, 2014, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education issued a joint media announcement about changes to the funding of adult education programs.

As of May 1, 2015 the Ministry of Education will stop funding districts to provide tuition-free courses for graduated adults who are seeking to upgrade their academic qualifications (secondary courses in math, sciences, English) to pursue post-secondary training. This funding was provided under the Education Guarantee, a program introduced in 2008. Districts will be allowed to offer these courses for Graduated Adults on a cost-recovery basis only. The Vancouver School Board estimates the tuition fee for these courses to be as much as $500 per course.

Ministry of Education data shows that Graduated Adults as a percentage of all adult students in the public school system have increased steadily from 18.1% in 2008–09 to 55.5% in 2014–15. As these students will only be funded in the future if they qualify for a means-tested grant to attend a post-secondary institution, this policy change will likely have a significant impact on both enrolment and the composition of adult students in the K to 12 system.

School districts are currently preparing preliminary budgets for 2015–16, some of which include details on proposed cuts to adult education programs and staffing. The Burnaby Board of Education’s Public Budget Presentation on April 28, 2015 proposes a reduction of 2.0 FTE

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1 Effective September 1, 2008, graduated adults may take, tuition free, eligible courses offered at school district Continuing Education or K-12 schools through phase 3 of the ‘Education Guarantee’. Adult student is defined as a student 19 years of age or older as at July 1 of the current year.


teaching positions in Adult and Continuing Education. Surrey school district recently announced plans to eliminate the district program for Graduated Adults in 2015–16 rather than charge a tuition fee for students to take these courses. The Vancouver Board of Education’s 2015–16 Revised Preliminary Budget Proposals recommend a significant reduction in staffing for Adult Education, including 11 FTE teachers in Adult Learning Centres, 9.41 FTE instructor assistants, and other administrative and support positions. The budget recommendations, if implemented, will be achieved through a restructuring of self-paced adult education programs, closure of the Hastings and Downtown Eastside centres, a discontinuation of Collingwood and South Hill Outreach programs, and a discontinuation of Elementary Literacy Outreach programs.

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