



LABOUR MARKET STUDY OF THE LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS WORKFORCE

*Report on Key Informant Interviews –
Aboriginal, Francophone and Anglophone*

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SEPTEMBER 2013

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Adult
Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP).

Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January and August 2013, 30 key informant interviews were conducted over the phone as part of Canadian Literacy and Learning Network's (CLLN) Labour Market Study of the Literacy and Essentials Skills Workforce. The focus of inquiry was LES workers' employment backgrounds and current work arrangements, ideal qualifications, backgrounds and paths into the field, workplace environments, and forums of exchange used by those in the field.

This report summarizes the findings of these interviews. Some key points of interest include:

- Overall, attitudes and personal traits are seen as the most important qualification for being an effective Literacy and Essential Skills worker, above academic and formal training. Work experience is also highly valued.
- Generally, practitioners are working more hours than they are paid for.
- Access to professional development resources in the workplace is standard, but the resources are limited depending on the funds that the organization has.
- Partnerships with outside organizations are common, and it is often through these partnerships that practitioners are able to access resources.
- In-person forums are used to connect with others in the field. Practitioners would appreciate more opportunities to network with other workers, preferably face-to-face.
- There is no consensus on professionalizing the field. However, were the field to be professionalized (i.e. to implement standardized training or expected qualifications), some workers feel there should be a corresponding increase in funding to adequately reflect the increase in qualifications expected from workers.

1 – INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN) conducted key informant interviews as part of the Labour Market Study (LMS) of Literacy and Essential Skills workers. Although the primary data collection method for the LMS was a national survey, which was administered by Social Research Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), the key informant interviews provided additional in-depth information from Literacy and Essential Skills workers. Three rounds of key informant interviews took place at different stages of the project: Pre-Survey Release (January and February 2013), Survey Release (April and May 2013), and Post-Survey (June, July and August 2013). The key informant interviews were supplemented by three focus groups.

Personal information collected through the interviews is confidential, and participants have been assured that none of the information they provided will be associated in any way with their name or employer. The information collected during the interviews is strictly being used for the purpose of the CLLN Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce Labour Market Study. After obtaining permission, approximately half of the interviews were recorded for note-taking purposes.

1.1 – Target

The target was to interview thirty participants from different regions in the country over the project timeline. Seven individuals were interviewed pre-survey, twelve while the survey was open, and eleven after the survey closed, meeting the target of 30 interviews. Nine Francophone, three Aboriginal and eighteen Anglophone LES workers were consulted. Three Focus Groups were also conducted with Francophone, Anglophone and Aboriginal workers to supplement this data.

Executive Assistants for the project, as well as an independent contractor, were responsible for conducting the interviews over the phone.

1.2 – Goal of interviews

The goal of the key informant interviews was to gather opinions, perspectives and information from key informants to supplement the online survey findings.

Additionally, there were unique goals at each phase of the project:

- *Pre-Survey* (January and February 2013): In the first phase of the key informant interviews, it was important to gain a more in depth understanding of the concerns that Literacy and Essential Skills practitioners have. Since many key informants were unaware of the survey prior to the interview request being sent out, CLLN hoped to create word-of-mouth buzz, as well as build momentum and buy-in for the survey release.

- *Survey* (April and May 2013): Contacting practitioners at this phase in the survey was a reminder for participants to complete the survey, and to encourage their colleagues to do so. At this phase CLLN hoped to identify any challenges that participants were experiencing with the survey.
- *Post-Survey* (June, July and August 2013): The final round of interviewing allowed CLLN to ask participants about the survey, as well as generate interest in the final labour market study report.

1.3 – Key lines of inquiry

The focus of inquiry for the key informant interviews revolved around:

- Employment background and current work arrangements
- Ideal qualifications, backgrounds, and paths into the LES field
- Current workplace environments
- Forums of exchange used by those in the field

There was a mixture of open-ended, evaluative, and yes/no questions. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on answers to closed questions (*See Appendix C for full list of questions*).

2 – METHODOLOGY

2.1 – Approach

The key informant interview process sought to engage Literacy and Essential Skills workers with a variety of experiences in the field from across the country. A total of 30 participants with representation from every province and territory were consulted. Approximately one-third of the interviews were conducted in French.

Participants were told about the survey and the purpose of the key informant interviews prior to the interview, but were not provided with the questions in advance. Some participants received a list of subjects to be covered in the interview (*See appendices A and B*).

2.2 – Recruitment

Informants were asked to participate based on random selection, self-selection through a survey question, Advisory Committee suggestions, and informed advice. Key criteria for selecting participants included: geography, cultural diversity, Literacy and Essential Skills sector diversity, position (job title), length of service in field, and language/culture (French, English, or Aboriginal).

Potential candidates were emailed an invitation to participate in an interview (*See appendix A*).

2.3 – Participation

The geographic/linguistic breakdown of participants is as follows:

Pre-Survey Release January – February 2013	Survey Release April – May 2013	Post-Survey June – August 2013
Target Group Description	Target Group Description	Target Group Description
Francophone – Quebec	Francophone – Quebec	Francophone – Ontario
Anglophone – Ontario	Francophone – Quebec	Francophone – Ontario
Anglophone – Manitoba	Francophone – Ontario	Aboriginal – Ontario
Anglophone – British Columbia	Francophone – Ontario	Aboriginal – British Columbia
Anglophone – Alberta	Francophone – Yukon	Anglophone – Quebec
Anglophone – Nova Scotia	Francophone – New Brunswick	Anglophone – Quebec
Anglophone – Newfoundland	Aboriginal – Ontario	Anglophone – Yukon
	Anglophone – NWT	Anglophone – Saskatchewan
	Anglophone – Ontario	Anglophone – Alberta
	Anglophone – New Brunswick	Anglophone – PEI
	Anglophone – British Columbia	Anglophone – Nunavut
	Anglophone – Nova Scotia	
7 total 1 Francophone, 0 Aboriginal, 6 Anglophone	12 total 6 Francophone, 1 Aboriginal, 5 Anglophone	11 total 2 Francophone, 2 Aboriginal, 7 Anglophone
30 total 9 Francophone 3 Aboriginal 18 Anglophone		

2.4 – Analysis and reporting

Interviews that were recorded (approximately half) were transcribed by the interviewer and analyzed (see findings below). For those that were not recorded, results were compiled after reviewing hand-written notes. Sometimes interviewees were re-contacted when further detail or confirmation was necessary. This report offers a qualitative analysis of aggregate data. Results are presented in a qualitative format and have not been coded by analysis software.

3 – FINDINGS

Below are the findings broken down by lines of inquiry. Although this data should not be generalized to all Literacy and Essential Skills workers, as the sample is quite small, it is noteworthy that:

- Overall, attitudes and personal traits are seen as the most important qualification of being an effective Literacy and Essential Skills worker, above academic and formal training. Work experience is also highly valued.
- Generally, practitioners are working more hours than they are paid for.
- Access to professional development resources in the workplace is standard, but the resources are limited depending on the funds that the organization has.
- Partnerships with outside organizations are common, and it is often through these partnerships that practitioners are able to access resources.
- In-person forums are used to connect with others in the field. Practitioners would appreciate more opportunities to network with other workers, preferably face-to-face.
- There is no consensus on professionalizing the field. However, were the field to be professionalized (i.e. to implement standardized training or expected qualifications), some workers feel there should be a corresponding increase in funding to adequately reflect the increase in qualifications expected from workers.

3.1 Employment background, and current work arrangements

To begin the interview participants were asked in what capacity they work in Literacy and Essential Skills, and how long they have been working in this field. Of those interviewed:¹

- 18 coordinated/managed/ran literacy programs or centres
- 12 currently, or previously, taught or facilitated Literacy and Essential Skills programs
- 9 were executive directors of their organization
- 2 were educational consultants
- 1 was a liaison officer
- 1 was a professional development director
- 1 was an outreach manager/literacy specialist

These findings reveal that practitioners do not necessarily serve one role exclusively. While they may have a specific title, such as executive director, some workers performed a variety of duties. For many, this included teaching Literacy and Essential Skills in some capacity.

¹ Note that these numbers do not add up to 30 as many participants indicated that they currently hold more than one position, or hold a position that could fall under more than one of the given categories.

Those interviewed had different lengths of experience in the field, ranging from four months to over 20 years:

- 0-7 years: 9
- 8-14 years: 9
- 15+ years: 12

Employment situations for those interviewed were as follows:

- 29 out of the 30 participants were currently employed (the one individual interviewed who has left the field was not seeking employment in LES)
- 24 worked full-time
- 6 worked part-time
- 12 were employed permanently
- 17 were on contract

3.2 Qualifications, backgrounds, and paths into the LES field

Following a discussion about background and current employment situation, the next line of inquiry focused on the ideal qualifications, backgrounds, and paths into LES. Interviewees were asked to describe what they thought were *ideals* and not necessarily focus on their own history. However, many divulged personal information about their own backgrounds or those of their colleagues.

3.2.1 Credentials and formal education

Most participants feel that there should be a minimum level of education for Literacy and Essential Skills workers. Yet, there was no consensus on what form that education should take. Many participants suggested that those entering the field should at least have a bachelor's degree, with some stating that a specialized focus on education or psychology is beneficial. Other participants feel that a four-year degree is not needed, but a certificate related to human services is satisfactory. High school education is seen as the minimum requirement for LES workers.

Many participants mentioned an education degree or a teaching degree, with a focus on teaching adults, as an ideal (or currently required) credential. A certificate or training in adult education, literacy training or accreditation, as well as essential skills training, are also valued. Additionally, knowledge and training in special needs and learning disability assessment are considered beneficial.

While many participants feel that a combination of work experience and education is important, their answers reflect that once you actually get into a work environment education alone is not enough. As one participant expressed, "You can only teach teachers so much in the classroom, but the rubber really hits the road when you're in front of a group of learners or you're working one-on-one with someone who has been struggling with reading all their lives." A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant; "I have seen people with great education and they can't deal with people who have literacy issues."

The credentials required at an organization typically depend on the position. Having a university degree to work at a college is standard, but most other organizations don't have a minimum level of education as a requirement. In particular, advanced education diplomas or certificates for skills training aren't typically required, as industry experience carries more weight. Generally, the formal education sector, including school boards and colleges (who tend to be more formal in their hiring practices), require university degrees, while still giving value to attitudes and personal traits. Community-based literacy organizations tend not to be as narrow regarding formal credential requirements.

No participants identified bilingualism (which was given as an example) as a necessary qualification. One even noted that bilingualism is not necessary because French and English literacy programs are usually separate.

3.2.2 Work experience

Work experience was identified as something that is important prior to entering the Literacy and Essential Skills field. Participants indicated that practitioners come from a variety of employment backgrounds. Work experience in areas such as social services, teaching, adult education, tutoring, administering assessments, counseling, social work, psychology, volunteering in the Literacy and Essential Skills field, and previous work in the non-profit sector, were all mentioned as good backgrounds to have.

Opinions on the need for a teaching background were split. Some view teaching as ideal previous experience, while others believe that it's not necessary, as you can gain valuable work experience in other careers. One participant indicated that they prefer employees to not have teaching backgrounds because they find that teachers are "too rigid."

Experience working with local populations, especially if working in an Aboriginal community, is important. Guided practicums, peer-to-peer mentoring, and on-the-job training were all indicated as being helpful for those entering the field.

If someone does not have university or other formal certificates, years of experience in the field are often seen as a required substitute. One participant who does hiring noted, "Of course there has to be a certain minimum of education, but I would put experience far above that."

3.2.3 Attitudes and personal traits

Often personal qualities are seen as the most important indicator of success. Those frequently mentioned include:

- Personality – open minded, the right attitude, strong sense of humanity, empathy, wanting to make a difference in someone’s life
- Flexibility and adaptability
- People skills
- Communications skills
- Research and coordination skills
- Commitment to continued and lifelong learning
- Cultural awareness (especially in Northern populations and Aboriginal communities)
- Ability to think outside the box
- Understanding the adult learner
- Comfortable working with people from different socio-economic-cultural backgrounds
- Ability to set boundaries

While minimum education and work experience are seen as important, most participants identified personal qualities as the most central trait for Literacy and Essential Skills workers to have. Without a positive attitude and people skills, many participants doubt the ability of practitioners to succeed in the field. There is a feeling that “there are some people born to it.” Many practitioners noted that because of the diversity of positions in the field, different skills are needed depending on the particular job one has.

Overall, credentials are seen as less important than work experience and soft skills. Yet, one participant noted the impact that this favouring of personality and experience can have on the profession: “[Practitioners] are underpaid probably because there is no minimum level of education... If they got paid more money you could ask for a higher minimum standard of education or experience.”

3.2.4 Paths into the field

There is no consensus on an ideal path into the field. In Literacy and Essential Skills people come from a variety of backgrounds and this is generally viewed in the positive. As one participant noted, “I don’t know if there should be just a path, I think that people with various backgrounds could get into this industry.”

Specific backgrounds that were seen as useful include:

- Teaching (especially adult education)
- Nursing
- Social work
- Working with adults who have learning disabilities
- Volunteering in Literacy and Essential Skills (seen as a “test drive” for the job before committing to it)
- Life and work experience from a variety of backgrounds

It was noted that few practitioners make a choice to enter the profession, as most workers “fall into” it. As summarized by one participant, “Most people don’t ever start out saying, ‘I’m going to be an adult literacy practitioner.’ I don’t think that as a field that it’s highlighted, pursued, or even considered a specialty.”

3.3 Current workplace

Participants were asked to broadly categorize their workplace without naming specifics.

- 21 worked for a non-profit organization
- 3 worked for a school board
- 3 worked for a college
- 1 worked for the government
- 1 worked for a band council
- 1 no longer worked in the field

3.3.1 Hours worked

The bulk of the interview contained questions about the current work environment of the workers. With the exception of one practitioner who left the field, each interviewee provided answers regarding their current employer.

Participants were asked how many hours of their average work week are unpaid. The majority of participants indicated that they work more hours than they are financially compensated for. During the average week:²

- 5 participants work no overtime
- 3 participants work an additional 2-3 hours
- 4 participants work an additional 4-5 hours
- 9 participants work an additional 6-10 hours
- 4 participants work an additional 10+ hours (the highest number given was an additional 20 hours per week)
- 1 participant was required to participate in additional unpaid activities related to their job, including French classes and tutor training, outside of work hours and overtime hours.

On the whole, for those who worked extra hours, this is a regular occurrence. One participant noted that their employer expects overtime. Feelings about unpaid labour were mixed. One participant views these extra hours as “volunteering” for her organization, another views it as unfair that practitioners are not getting paid for daily expectations of their job. As one interviewee noted about working many overtime hours, “It’s unfortunate because it’s leading to burn out.” One participant mentioned that her employer does not encourage overtime because “there are no emergencies in literacy.”

Although few employers formally recognize overtime, some acknowledge these extra hours in various ways, including:

² Numbers based on 26 participants who answered this question.

- Time in lieu (however, many interviewees indicated that often they cannot find the time to actually take this paid time off)
- Verbal acknowledgment of the extra time worked
- Staff appreciation
- Additional temporary funding for extra hours

Candidates were asked if they planned to continue in the Literacy and Essential Skills workforce. Every candidate answered “yes” to this question (only one participant indicated that after 20 years in the field she might move on to another career).

The one practitioner who left the field made a conscious effort to do so 11 years ago after a lot of deliberation. The participant stated, “I really enjoyed the work and I got a lot out of it, but I realized in terms of career development and being able to better support a family, the level of compensation was just not what I was looking for. It was a tough decision because I loved the work. To be honest, as I moved around and tried other things I struggled because [LES] provided me with a level of satisfaction and fulfillment. It was a pretty tough call, but at the end of the day I couldn’t see myself, in my situation at the time, having planted roots and made a career out of [LES work]. It was a great job but I just didn’t see the career aspirations.”

3.3.2 Professional development

Questions related to professional development were presented as yes/no questions. Participants were then asked to rate professional development experiences and invited to expand on their answers if they wished.³

- Nearly all (97%) LES workers interviewed have access to professional development supports in the workplace such as training days, seminars, educational leave, development coaching, etc.
- About half (45%) feel that professional development supports are sufficient, 34% feel that they are lacking, and 21% feel that they are abundant.
- Examples of existing professional development supports available in workplaces include:
 - PD days or time in lieu to participate in professional development
 - Conferences
 - Curriculum and assessment training
 - Workshops and seminars
 - Tutor training (online and in person)
 - Reading days
 - Learning symposiums
 - Courses (on teaching Literacy and Essential Skills, online tools, assessments, etc.)
 - Online training and courses (Excel, Outlook Express, website development, etc.)

³ Note that some respondents did not answer all questions. Also note that other respondents, particularly during the Francophone interviews, answered some questions twice as they were evaluating access to both French and English resources.

- Language training (French or Inuktitut)
- CPR upgrades
- Violence crisis intervention
- Cultural awareness training
- Life coaches for staff
- Access to other specialists or professionals

Most provinces offer conferences and workshops. Thus, most of the events attended by LES workers tend to be regional, not national. Francophones noted that there are not many PD opportunities available in French, and that what does exist comes mainly from Quebec, which may not necessarily correspond to the specific needs of Francophones in other provinces, depending on the topic. Francophone respondents prefer PD in French, but will participate in English PD if necessary.

A lack of funds was cited as the biggest barrier to professional development in the workplace. As one practitioner noted, “There are opportunities, but we can’t always get in on them because of cost.” Many of the professional development activities available to Literacy and Essential Skills workers are through partnerships or institutional support.

One participant expressed the desire to have professional development specially related to her workplace, such as an evaluation of the organization’s current materials, and teaching methods. Nearly all professional development involves going outside ones organization, and there are few opportunities to participate in an evaluation of what Literacy and Essential Skills workers are currently doing in their own workplace.

3.3.3 Resources

Participants were asked to think about their current workplace, and evaluate the resources available to them to assist in the delivery of Literacy and Essential Skills programs, other than/besides the professional supports discussed earlier. Results are as follows:

- The majority (86%) of LES workers interviewed have suitable curricula and learning materials/resources. Nearly half (48%) described these resources as sufficient, while 32% described them as abundant, and 20% described them as lacking.
- The majority (86%) of LES workers interviewed have skills assessment instruments (paper based or online) or something similar available to them. Just over half (52%) described their skills assessment instruments as sufficient, while 30% described them as lacking, and 18% described them as abundant.
- The majority (86%) of LES workers interviewed have classroom facilities (space and furniture) available to them. However, two participants indicated that while they had access to classroom facilities it is restricted to specific times. For instance, one participant has to leave the office whenever a tutor needs the space, and therefore has to work from home or the local mall. Another worker can only access classroom space in the evenings because of a partnership with a local high school. Overall, 40% described the classroom space as sufficient, while 36% said it is abundant, and 14% said it is lacking. The question did not apply to 10% of participants.

- All LES workers interviewed have access to the internet in their workplace. The majority (64%) stated that it is abundant, 25% stated it is sufficient, and 11% stated that it is lacking.
- All LES workers interviewed have computers, in-class or mobile technologies, software (and upgrades), other types of hardware and technology support (IT) available to them. Half (50%) stated they are sufficient, 40% stated they are abundant, and 10% stated they are lacking.
- Participants highlighted other resources that they have access to including:
 - Library and literacy librarians
 - Technology (e.g. iPad, smart phone, projection screen, video-conferencing facilities, professional software)
 - Outreach resources (bicycles, tents, etc.)
 - Partnerships with other organizations, including access to the facilities and services they offer, such mental health and addictions counselling
 - Staff (instructional staff, admin support, co-workers)
 - Volunteers
 - Counsellors
 - Aboriginal elders
 - Educational consultant
- Participants also highlighted other resources, which they are lacking or in need of including:
 - Space
 - Administrative support
 - Time to explore resources (comes down to not enough staff)
 - Funds for transportation/field trips
 - Textbooks (updated versions)
 - Math assessment resources
 - Tests
 - Psychological support for staff dealing with learners' problems

A theme that emerged when discussing access to resources in the workplace is the importance of the partnerships that Literacy and Essential Skills organizations have, which allow them to access additional resources. Partners come in the form of non-profits, colleges, community organizations, government departments and libraries. While these partnerships give the Literacy and Essential Skills worker access to additional facilities, resources and space, the worker often indicated that they wished they had their own resources. The lack of resources is usually linked to a lack of funds at the organization.

3.4 Forums of exchange used by those in the field

Participants were asked if there was a forum for exchange of information and experiences, which they make use of (either online or in person). They were then asked to evaluate the usefulness of this forum of exchange, and what type of changes they would like to see to it. Forums used by practitioners include:

- Regional meetings
- Bi-annual/annual conferences
- Self-initiated in-person networking
- Formal local and regional networks
- Informal networks/partnerships with other organizations
- Professional development events
- Emails from the provincial coalition and provincial practitioners sites
- Colleagues within the same office

Less than a third of participants noted that they find these forums helpful, and even fewer noted that they find these forums necessary. There are some changes that participants would like to see to these forums including:

- More frequent regional meetings
- More time for meetings (i.e. two days instead of one)
- The ability for instructors to get together (typically meetings and conferences are for those in charge of a network and not necessarily those who teach)
- A dedicated monitor to encourage the use of online forums
- More training opportunities
- A greater abundance of free resources (quality and categorized)
- Networks specific to Aboriginal and Francophone LES workers
- Continuity after the networking opportunities
- More participants from different agencies during in-person meetings

The chance to connect with other practitioners, especially in person, is seen as very important and a way to break the isolation experienced by those in rural or minority language and cultural situations. Practitioners would like to see even more opportunities to connect with others in their field. However, as one practitioner noted, even though ideally Literacy and Essential Skills workers would like more time to collaborate, in reality many do not have enough time to participate in online forums. Most noted that the most popular forums were in person, and few made use of online forums.

3.5 Additional questions

In each round of interviews different questions were asked corresponding to the phase of the survey.

3.5.1 Pre-survey release

In the first round of interviews (January and February 2013), questions were added to build some momentum and buy-in for the survey release, which was one of the goals for the first round of interviews. Participants were asked about potential benefits of a Canada-wide survey of LES workers. Answers included:

- Professionalism in the field
- Equality in pay between workers across sectors and a standard wage to expect across programs
- A national picture of the Literacy and Essential Skills field, which will allow provinces to note best practices across the country and see what they can apply in their region
- Quantifiable data about unpaid labour

Potential challenges of this type of study were also identified. Participants were concerned that it will be difficult to make the study meaningful to funders, and as a result it might not lead to more funding.

3.5.2 Survey release

For the second (April and May 2013) and third (June, July and August 2013) rounds of interviews, questions were asked about survey uptake, and if CLLN and SRDC's communications efforts were having the desired impact. Their answers revealed:

- All 19 interviewees who were asked this question had heard about the survey. The sources included:
 - Email (most common)
 - Provincial literacy coalitions
 - NALD newsletter
 - Their employer

Of those interviewed in the second and third round of interviews, 60% had completed the survey; however two noted that they did not finish it. The other 40% said that they did not do the survey.

Reasons cited for completing the survey included wanting to help promote and develop the field, wanting to have a say, and giving the results more validity. One participant noted that their employer asked them to complete the survey. Those that took the time to both complete the survey and participate in an interview tended to be passionate about the field, and thought that developing a knowledge base about the field is important. Participants were also interested in seeing what issues others in the field (both provincially and nationally) are experiencing. When asked how the study results should be used to help frontline practitioners the main themes that emerged were:

- *To create a knowledge base*
Workers would like to see an overview of what is happening across the country, as well as a profile of the typical LES worker. Compiled information and statistics will confirm what many LES workers only know anecdotally. Identifying the resources needed in the field, and assessing which ones are lacking are also seen as important.

- *To recognize and advocate for the field*

There should not only be awareness about the work that is being done by literacy practitioners, especially in smaller organizations operating with few resources, but about the needs of practitioners. As one participant noted, “We’re not all volunteers, a lot of us have higher education backgrounds that bring a lot to our jobs. Sometimes we don’t always feel validated as professionals.”

Often cited was the need for increased resources and funding. Consistent funding is seen as one way to ensure a stable LES workforce. Also mentioned was the need for increased resources, in particular access to more language-specific materials for those working in French.

- *To professionalize the field*

Although many discussed this, only some directly referenced the need to professionalize the field. One participant felt that professionalization could lead to higher wages and job security, while another was unsure how to professionalize the field because there is such a wide variety of people working in Literacy and Essential Skills. While there is no consensus on professionalizing, some feel that the field should be moving in this direction. A national certification for LES workers is seen as something that could be useful – especially if it is recognized by employers and leads to a minimum remuneration. Recognition of acquired competencies and wage equity across the sectors and provinces, based on experience, is something that many desire. Professionalization is seen as one way to increase funding, and the quality of working conditions. National or regional forums for the exchange of information and resources would be a good way to start this dialogue.

3.5.3 Post-survey release

The final set of interviews (June, July and August 2013), eleven in total, took place after the survey closed. Two additional questions were asked of participants. The first inquired about current qualifications or credentials required by agencies or organizations hiring new LES workers. The second additional question asked what message or important information LES workers would like to convey to the field, policy makers and key stakeholders.

Credentials currently required of new LES worker

There is no uniformity regarding credentials currently required by Literacy and Essential Skills service delivery agencies. The baseline appears to be a minimum of post-secondary education (university or college diploma), ranging from a bachelor’s degree in either education or a related field, to social work and humanities degrees. One participant commented that organizations should not expect higher qualifications of their workers because they cannot afford to pay them the salaries that go along with a university degree in education. The participant also noted that qualified workers do not stay in LES long. In addition, a common theme among interviewees was that a degree in

education was not the best training for a literacy worker because “a teaching degree is a different world [than LES]” or “is focused on primary and secondary education, not essential skills or [adult] literacy.”

This finding aligns with the general consensus (see above) that personal qualities such as empathy, open-mindedness and understanding the adult learner are prioritized over academic credentials. At least one participant indicated that they had several excellent practitioners at their organization with no post-secondary training at all.

In terms of non-academic qualifications, several participants mentioned that workers, in addition to the personal qualities mentioned above, were expected to have facilitation experience.

Key messages

Three key messages emerged when LES workers were asked what information they wished to share with policy makers and stakeholders:

- ***The field needs to be valued and recognized***
There is a great deal of positive work being done in LES but it is not, as a field, treated as seriously as the formal education sector. The LES sector in general, and the community sector in particular, needs to be “valued and recognized.”
Participants think there should be awareness about the work that is being done by literacy practitioners, especially in smaller organizations that are operating with few resources, and about the needs of practitioners.
- ***The field needs more funding***
There is a need for stable core funding, which goes hand in hand with valuing the field. Practitioners are not paid enough for the number of hours they work. Many believe that if the field wants to professionalize, workers will expect more money and resources, as well as better working conditions. One participant noted that “at current funding levels, agencies and programs can’t afford to pay higher competitive salaries that are needed to hire and retain staff.” Additionally, increased funding translates into fewer hours spent looking for money to fund programs.
- ***It’s worth investing in adult literacy***
The third theme that emerged was related to the inherent value of increasing the literacy skills of adults. As one interviewee observed, “Literacy is related to the economic development, health, and well-being of individuals, the community and the nation. We should invest money in helping individuals increase capacity” because, as another participant noted, “LES helps people, it increases their confidence, their skills and enables them to access better jobs, or jobs period.” One interviewee remarked that there are “untapped resources in the adult population and some learners only need a short boost. All adult education should be free because it’s worth the investment.”

3.3.4 Francophone-specific issues

Many of the issues raised by interviewees are similar regardless of language or culture. However, the issue of the availability of professional development or resources in French was specifically raised by Francophone interviewees.

Whereas all Francophone interviewees have access to Professional Development (PD), one third mentioned that they believe that there were fewer PD opportunities in French, that any PD offered in French quickly filled up or tended to be in Quebec and might not correspond to their needs. At least one participant indicated that he preferred to attend PD in French, but would attend in English because there are more available in that language.

A similar issue was raised with respect to access to course materials and evaluation tools. Resources in French are few, are translated from English, and don't necessarily apply to that province's reality, or are not appropriate for adults.

In addition, outside of Quebec, Francophone Literacy and Essential Skills agencies, which are members of larger regional networks, often find themselves being the sole Francophone representative/agency in a given network. As one participant explained, out of ten agencies in the regional network, only one is Francophone.

3.3.5 Aboriginal-specific issues

The biggest issues identified by those working in Aboriginal LES programs relate to funding and the recent focus on training and employment as outcomes, rather than developing literacy skills. Literacy is seen as key to making First Nations people self-sufficient, and thus practitioners feel that there needs to be an emphasis on learning. While such issues may be faced by all LES workers, some issues are identified as unique to those in Aboriginal LES.

Practitioners working in Aboriginal LES note that the learning style of many Aboriginals is different and unique, and that instructors need to recognize and respect this difference. To ensure that the Aboriginal learning style is respected there is a need for authentic First Nations cultural resources, not just altered English ones. There are unique cultural nuances for each Aboriginal community, and the instructor must always be aware of this. Due to the uniqueness of each Aboriginal community, there should be an emphasis on local programming and local delivery.

Because Aboriginal learners often have many other issues such as those related to addiction, family violence, learning disabilities and a lack of family role models, which often are a result of Canada's Residential School legacy, instructors are expected to be more than just a teacher to learners. This can be challenging, especially as many practitioners are working in isolation (on reserve or in Northern communities) and there is no national network for Aboriginal LES workers.

The prominence of English as the primary language of instruction in Aboriginal programs is often part of funding requirements. Although, Aboriginal languages may be part of the curriculum.

4 – CONCLUSION

The findings in this report are presented in aggregate to ensure that no individual worker's identity is revealed, which was assured to all participants when they agreed to an interview. While the sample of respondents is quite small, 30 total, the results reveal a good snapshot of some commonalities among Literacy and Essential Skills workers in Canada.

Although the participants represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and expressed different opinions, some key themes still emerged. To recap the results:

- Overall, attitudes and personal traits are seen as the most important qualification of being an effective Literacy and Essential Skills worker, above academic and formal training. Work experience is also highly valued.
- Generally, practitioners are working more hours than they are paid for.
- Access to professional development resources in the workplace is standard, but the resources are limited depending on the funds that the organization has.
- Partnerships with outside organizations are common, and it is often through these partnerships that practitioners are able to access resources.
- In-person forums are used to connect with others in the field. Practitioners would appreciate more opportunities to network with other workers, preferably face-to-face.
- There is no consensus on professionalizing the field. However, were the field to be professionalized (i.e. to implement standardized training or expected qualifications), some workers feel there should be a corresponding increase in funding to adequately reflect the increase in qualifications expected from workers.

These interviews provide in-depth responses that the survey alone could not provide. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss issues of importance in detail, and the interviewer was able to ask clarifying questions. Taken in conjunction with the *Survey of the Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce*, and the three focus groups, there is now both qualitative and quantitative data on the LES workforce in Canada.

5 – APPENDICES

Appendix A – Reach out email script – English⁴

The Canadian Literacy and Learning Network is seeking a list of L/ES workers from across Canada to participate in a short and informal interview. Currently CLLN, in partnership with the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), is developing a national labour market study of the Canadian L/ES workforce and needs the help of its partners and fellow L/ES organizations.

In order to begin field testing the L/ES Workforce Labour Market Study's survey questions, as well as begin collecting preliminary information to guide the survey process, CLLN is looking for your help to in finding an L/ES worker in your organization to spend approximately 10-15 minutes in a phone interview.

We are seeking respondents for short, informal phone interviews over the next few weeks. Our goal is to test a sample of survey questions, as well as examine preliminary answers to ensure the focus of the L/ES Workforce Labour Market Study survey is on track. These interviews are to be fully confidential, with no association of name or organization with the resulting data.

The information provided will be used for the sole purpose of our larger L/ES Workforce Labour Market Study and its final report. All participation is fully voluntary and again participants' names, position and organization will not be associated with the answers and results of the interviews or larger survey.

We would greatly appreciate your help in fulfilling our research goals and your participation in our L/ES Workforce Labour Market Study survey in the coming months. This research is the first of its kind in our field and only our combined efforts will ensure we are able to collect the most accurate, detailed important and useful information about the L/ES workforce to help develop and move our field forward.

CLLN will be contacting you shortly by phone to follow up this email. It would be greatly appreciated if you would please forward this message on within your organization and perhaps provide us with a willing participant for the interview.

For any other information, questions or concerns regarding the interviews or the L/ES Workforce Labour Market Study please contact:

⁴ This e-mail was altered slightly each round depending on where we were in the survey process, and where we received the key informants' contact information from.

Appendix B – Phone introduction – English

Hello Mr/Mrs. _____

My name is _____ and I am contacting you from the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network.

If you have a pre-arranged interview:

As I mentioned in my e-mail, CLLN is currently administering a nation-wide survey of literacy and essential skills workers in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the field and its workers.

Is now a good time for us to talk for 15 or 20 minutes?

If you are cold calling:

CLLN is currently administering a nation-wide survey of literacy and essential skills workers in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the field and its workers. We hope to use these survey results in order to help develop the workplace and workforce in the years to come.

The main reason for my call is to simply make you aware of this survey as you may be, or have already been, contacted to complete it in the next month or so.

As part of the study we are also completing key informant interviews, and I would like to take this opportunity to also ask you a few questions related to the topic.

Would you be interested in answering a few questions regarding the literacy and essential skills field? It should take about 15 minutes of your time.

If you are unable at this time, is there a better time for me to contact you?

Both:

So that you are aware, none of the information given here today will be associated in anyway with your name or employer. The information collected will strictly be used for the purpose of the CLLN L/ES workforce Labour Market Study and will in no way share your information in a way in which you could be identified in its findings and report. If it is okay with you, I will be recording this phone call for my own personal records. These recordings will only be used if I am unclear about something we spoke about and want to check them for note taking purposes.

You are under no obligation to answer all or any of the following questions. If at any point you wish to conclude the phone call or wish to move onto another question please indicate your wishes to myself at any point.

Appendix C – Key Informant Interview Questions – English

1. In what capacity do you work in the literacy and essential skills field? For instance, are you a program administrator, facilitator, coordinator? Do you teach L/ES or administer assessments? Etc.
2. How long have you been in the L/ES field?
3. Currently within the L/ES field, are you employed full time, self-employed, an employer, unemployed and looking? Please describe your status in the L/ES workforce.
4. Please describe your current work arrangement: permanent, contract, casual, seasonal/sessional (works for specific academic periods during the year), other.
5. In your opinion, what do you think are the ideal qualifications for L/ES practitioners to have?
 1. Ex. Masters of Education (adult or child), bilingualism, X-number of year in the field etc.
6. In your opinion what is the ideal background of an L/ES practitioner in terms of educational or work experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.
2. What qualifications or credentials does your agency/institution request/require new LES workers to have? (*This component of the question was added in Round 3*)
7. In your opinion, what is the ideal path of a practitioner into the L/ES field?
8. If you are currently employed in the L/ES field, do you plan on continuing within this field? If not, can you please briefly describe the reasons behind your choice?
9. Within your current capacity in the L/ES field, do you have access to professional development supports in the workplace? (Training days, seminars, educational leave, development coaching) etc.
YES / NO

If so, do you feel they are: abundant, sufficient or lacking?

Can you provide examples of existing professional development supports available to you in your workplace?

10. Without needing specific names or details, can you indicate for what kind of organization do you provide L/ES services?
For example, school board, library, private organization, non-profit organization etc.
11. Thinking about an average work week, how many of your actual work hours are unpaid? *(Round 1)*
Thinking about an average work week (hours you are paid for), do you work hours more hours than you are paid? Is that a regular occurrence? Thinking about the past 3 – 6 months, how many hours on average per week do you work that are not paid for? Are those hours ever recognized by your employer and if so, how do they recognize it? For example, time off; verbal thank you for your extra hours, etc. *(Rounds 2 and 3)*
12. Thinking of your current workplace, how do you feel about the resources available to you to assist you in the delivery of L/ES besides the professional development supports discussed earlier?
Please indicate whether they exist in your workplace and whether you feel they are abundant, sufficient or lacking.
Do you have available to you, suitable curricula and learning materials/resources? Y/N
Do you feel they are: abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Do you have available to you, skills assessment instruments (paper based or online) or something similar? Y/N
Do you feel they are: abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Do you have classroom facilities (space and furniture)available to you? Y/N
Do you feel they are: abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Do you have internet access available to you in your workplace? Y/N
Do you feel it is: abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Do you have available to you computers, in-class or mobile technologies, software (and upgrades), other types of hardware and technology support (IT)? Y/N
Do you feel they are: abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Do other resources which you have access to come to mind?
And are these abundant, sufficient or lacking?
Can you think of other resources, which are lacking or in need?
13. As an L/ES practitioner, is there a forum for exchange of information and experiences which you make use of? Is there a place either in person or online where you can network with other practitioners or others in the LES field?
Do you find this forum helpful or necessary?
What changes would you like to see to this forum?

I would like to thank you so much for your time and your willingness to share with me today.

Round 1 additional questions:

1. As mentioned at the beginning of the interview, CLLN is administering a Canada-wide survey of LES workers.
2. Do you see any potential benefits for LES workers as a result of such a study?
3. Can you share any potential challenges of doing such a study?
4. Do you have any suggestions for groups we should reach or how we should reach out to LES workers in Canada?

Housekeeping

5. Would you like to be contacted directly to participate in the LMS survey? Y/N
6. Would you like to receive a notification of the survey results when they are ready in a few months' time?
7. Would you be willing to speak with the Project Evaluator, who will conduct a short evaluation interview? If so, I can I pass along your contact information to her so that she can call you to participate in a follow-up evaluation?

Rounds 2 and 3 additional questions:

1. As mentioned at the beginning of the interview, CLLN is administering a Canada-wide survey of LES workers. Have you heard about this survey from any Literacy and Essential Skills forum, or other source?
2. Have you completed the survey? If so, why or why not?
3. How do you think that the study results could/should be used to help frontline practitioners?
4. Do you have any suggestions for groups we should reach or how we should reach out to Literacy and Essential Skills workers in Canada? (*Only asked in Round 2*)
5. In your opinion, what important information about working in the LES field is important to share with the field, politicians, key stakeholders and/or policymakers (government)? (*Only asked in Round 3*)

Housekeeping

6. If you have not completed the survey already, would you like to be contacted directly to participate in the LMS survey? Y/N
7. Would you like to receive a notification of the survey results when they are ready in a few months' time?
8. Would you be willing to speak with the Project Evaluator, who will conduct a short evaluation interview? If so, I can I pass along your contact information to her so that she can call you to participate in a follow-up evaluation?

Questions asked to those working in Aboriginal Literacy and Essential Skills

1. What are the biggest challenges that Aboriginal workers face in the Literacy and Essential Skills field?
2. How are these different than challenges faced by non-Aboriginal Literacy and Essential Skills workers?
3. What is the primary language that you work in?
4. What do you want us to know about your work, about your community and about your learners?