

Media Analysis Report of Adult Literacy



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Partnerships in Learning
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Introduction and Methodology

As a second theme of the National Literacy Secretariat funded project entitled “Informal Learning and Media Perceptions of Adults With Low Literacy Skills,” this report summarizes the work that was done from January to July 2004. The report sheds light on the question — How does the media portray adult literacy?

In December 2003, Bowdens Media Monitoring firm was contracted to gather news clips from the national English language dailies and community newspapers. Community newspapers are regional papers that are circulated once a week. In addition, radio and television broadcast summaries on the topic were also collected for the same period of time. One of the first steps in the gathering of information was to identify the descriptors to be used in the media search. During December, a trial run was set up to see what types of clippings and broadcast summaries would be collected given a certain range of descriptors. Based on this trial, it was decided that to capture as much information on the topic of adult literacy, various phrases and words should be used. The final set of descriptors used for the media coverage search included:

- ◆ adult literacy
- ◆ adult literacy learning
- ◆ adult literacy education
- ◆ essential skills training
- ◆ workplace, community, family literacy
- ◆ adult basic skills training
- ◆ adult learning
- ◆ adult learning centers

A second step in the process was to identify categories from the first grouping of clippings and broadcast summaries. As part of the service with Bowdens, print copies of the news clips are collected over a two-week period using the descriptors and sent to the client. Faxes of the actual broadcast texts are sent to the client within 24 hours of the coverage. A research assistant was trained to read and screen the clips and broadcast summaries. Once they were gathered and read they were immediately logged into a SPSS database for classification and analysis. For the month of January, to ensure inter-rater reliability, the project director and research assistant read and screened the clips and summaries independently so as to identify similar content categories. A total of 11 major categories were used to classify the content of the media coverage. For the purpose of this report, the news clips and broadcasts are presented separately. Categories for the analysis included:

- ◆ Province/territory and number of newspaper clippings/broadcasts
- ◆ City/town and type of newspaper (daily or community)
- ◆ Circulation of newspaper/broadcast audience
- ◆ Dates of news clips/broadcasts
- ◆ Types of literacy providers
- ◆ Literacy skills and jobs
- ◆ Sources of literacy funding
- ◆ Types of specific curriculum content by province
- ◆ Use of adult literacy statistics by province
- ◆ Types of identified learner groups
- ◆ Percentage of news clips by region in Canada

Frequencies and cross tabulations were performed on the different variables where possible. In total, 133 news clips and 62 radio and TV broadcast summaries were collected, logged and analyzed. In the following pages, this information is summarized through figures, tables and commentaries that help answer the question — How does the media portray adult literacy over a period of time in 2004?



Newspaper Articles

Figure 1

Percentage of Newspaper Clippings by Province and Territory

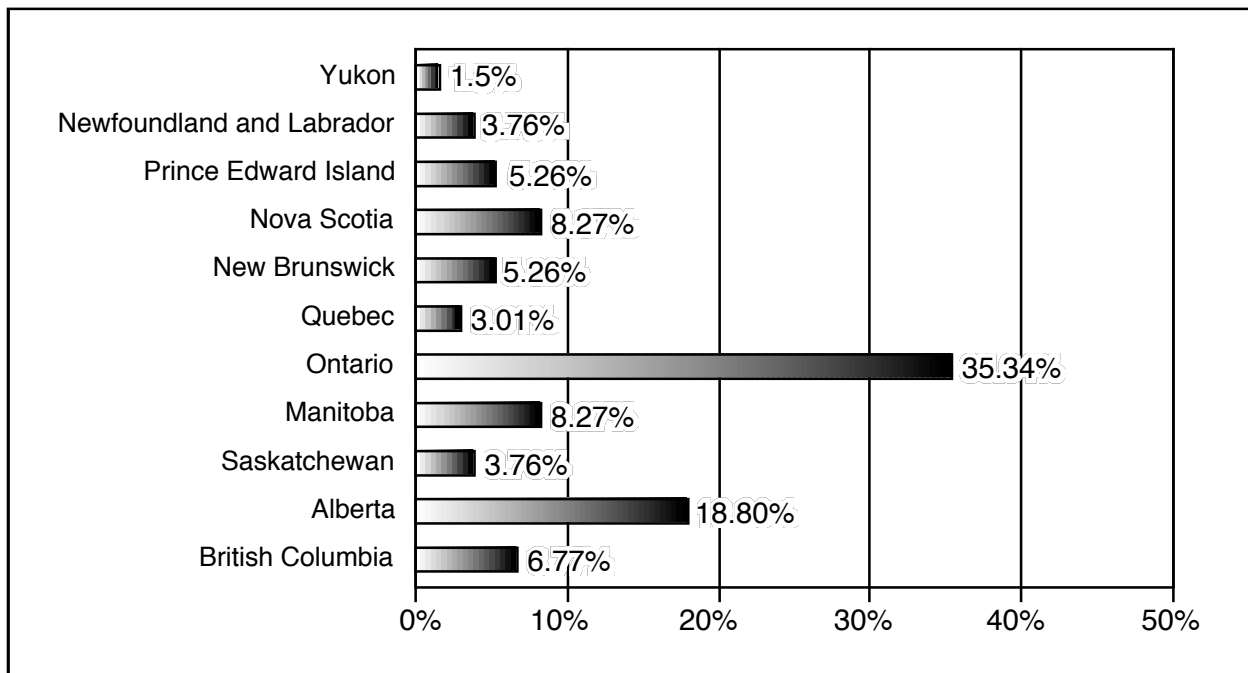


Table 1

Number of Newspaper Clippings by Province and Territory

	Frequency	Percent
British Columbia	9	6.8
Alberta	25	18.8
Saskatchewan	5	3.8
Manitoba	11	8.3
Ontario	47	35.3
Quebec	4	3.0
New Brunswick	7	5.3
Nova Scotia	11	8.3
Prince Edward Island	7	5.3
Newfoundland and Labrador	5	3.8
Yukon	2	1.5
Total	133	100.0

 **Commentary**

For the period January 2004-April 2004, a total of 133 newspaper clippings were collected that referred to the topic of adult literacy as presented by the various search descriptors. Forty-seven newspaper articles appeared from the province of Ontario, 25 articles from Alberta, two articles from the Yukon territory and five articles from both Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador. The four articles from Quebec were from the English language newspapers.

Table 2

Number of Clippings from Daily or Community Newspapers

	Frequency	Percent
Daily	70	52.6
Community	63	47.4
	133	100.0



Commentary

Approximately the same number of news clips appeared in both the dailies and community papers. Information was also logged in as to which city or town and province published the article. For example, for the province of British Columbia, articles appeared from the city or town of Courtenay, Burnaby, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Duncan, Vernon, and Williams Lake. The number of times a city or town featured an article and the date of publication was also recorded. For example, seven articles appeared in Sudbury, Ontario, six in Toronto, Ontario, five in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and four in Fredericton, New Brunswick and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

Table 3

Total Circulation of the Newspaper

Circulation Potential	Number of Newspapers
Less than 4,500	22
4,501 – 14,000	31
14,001 – 26,999	17
More than 27,000	30

 **Commentary**

This variable has four values and estimates the potential readership by the circulation number of each newspaper. The circulation total of all newspapers that published an article on the topic was 4,111,363. The date when each article was featured was also recorded. Two important trends were noted. Eleven percent of the articles were featured around Family Literacy Day in late February in Ontario and Prince Edward Island while the topic of adult learning received some coverage during the national political leadership campaign in January and February, and a recent change in government in the province of Ontario during the same months.

Figure 2

Types of Literacy Providers

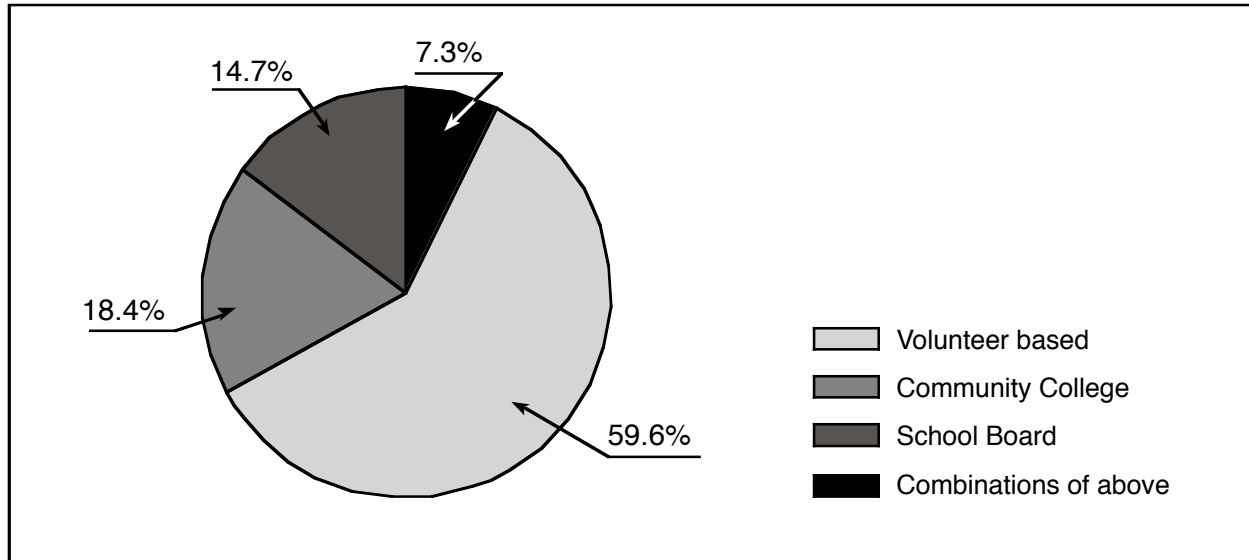


Table 4

Frequency of Literacy Providers

	Frequency	Percent
Volunteer-based	65	59.6
Community College	20	18.4
School Board	16	14.7
Combinations of volunteer-based, community college, school board	8	7.3

 **Commentary**

Out of the 133 articles 109 of them referred to the variety of service providers in the community. Both the figure and the table indicate that the volunteer-based literacy provider was most often referred to in the

article. This was followed by the community college and the school board. In eight of the articles mention was made of any combination of the three main providers. It seems that adult literacy is firmly placed inside the volunteer sector by the media.

Figure 3

Literacy Skills and Jobs by Province and Territory

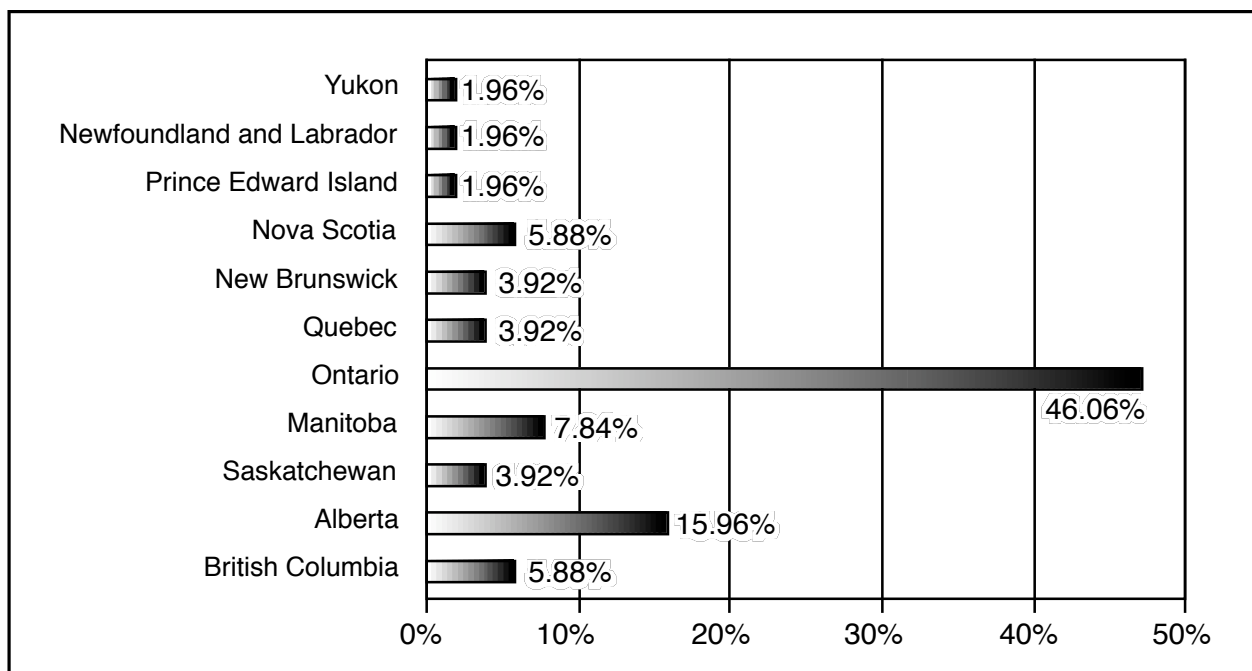
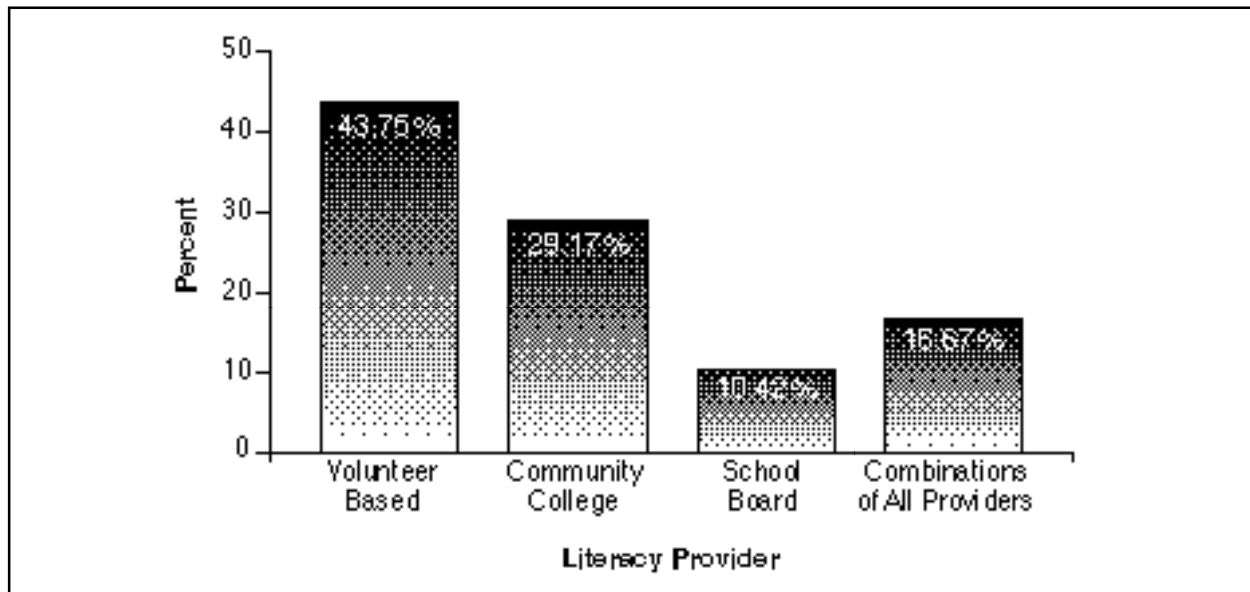


Figure 4

Literacy Skills and Jobs by Service Provider



Commentary

The second most cited variable across the news clips was the category of literacy skills and jobs. These words were used together in 51 out of the 133 clippings. As indicated in Figure 3 Literacy Skills and Jobs by Province, 24 articles (46%) appeared in Ontario while provinces such as Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Yukon published one to two articles referring to literacy skills and jobs. Across all clippings, literacy is used as a job-related skill needed for adults who want to enter the work force or to further their career development or to find another type of employment. What is interesting about Figure 4 Literacy Skills and Jobs by Service Provider is that the volunteer-based provider is now being perceived as one of the main service providers that work in the area of literacy skills and jobs. Not too long ago, this seemed to be the main focus of the community college literacy provider.

Figure 5

Sources of Literacy Funding

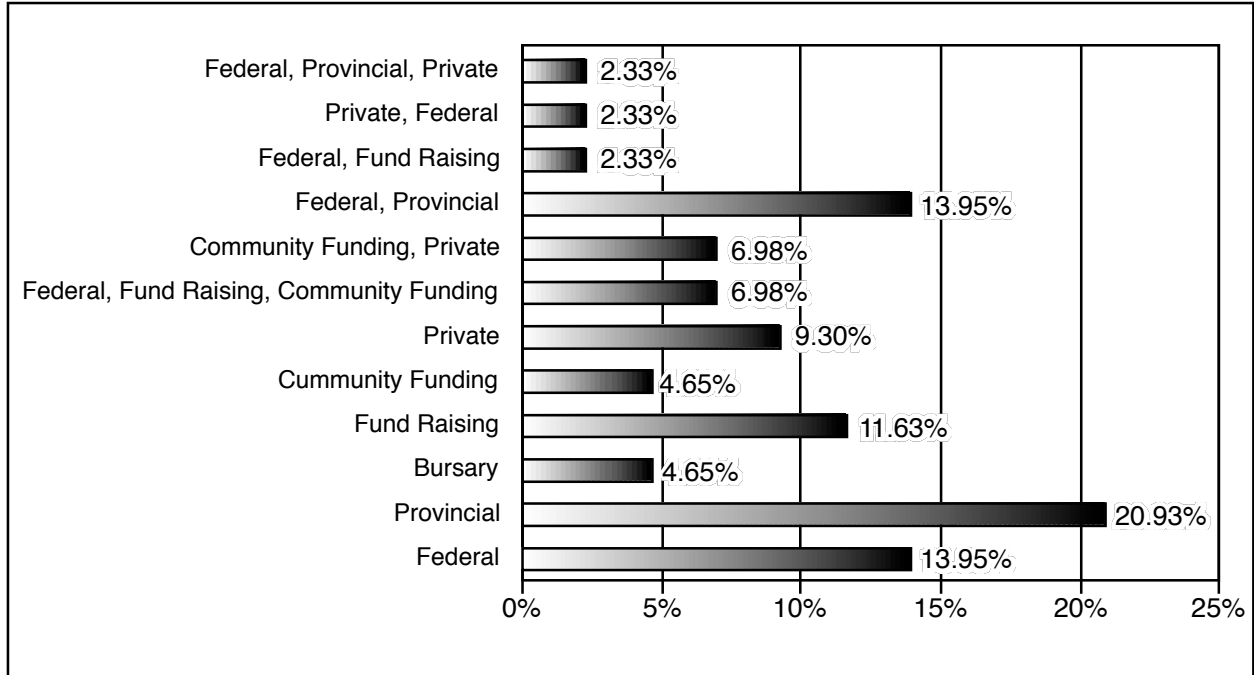


Table 5

Frequencies in Sources of Literacy Funding

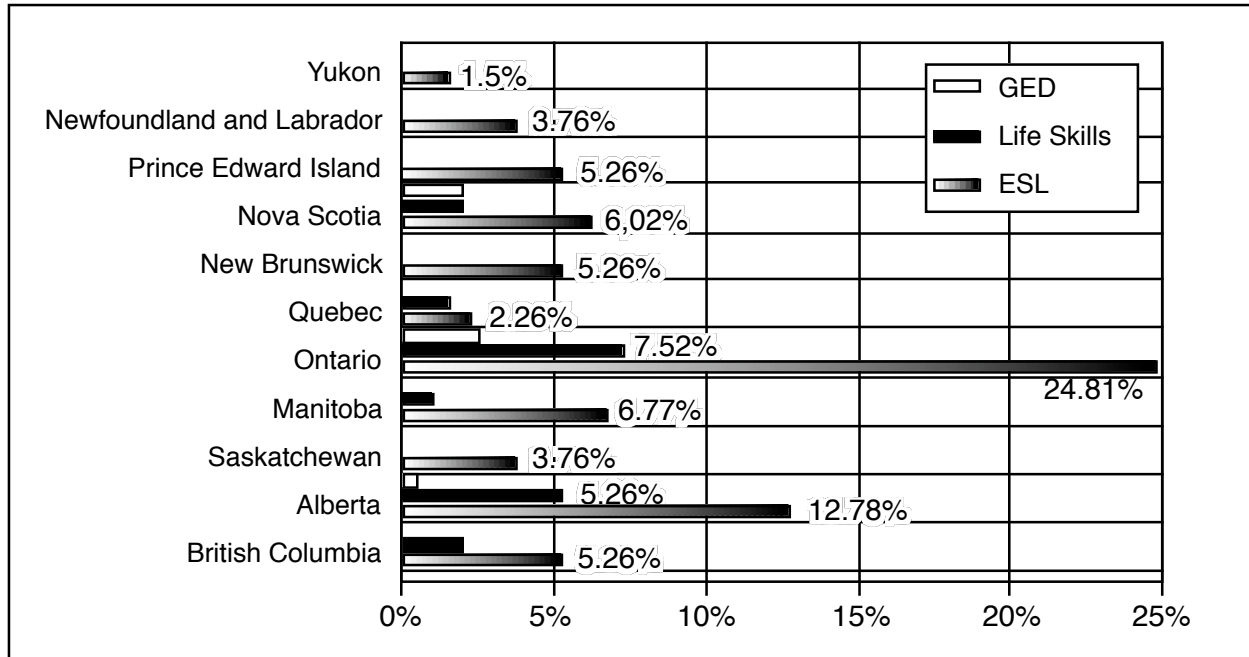
	Frequency	Percent
Federal	6	14.0
Provincial	9	20.9
Bursary	2	4.7
Fund Raising	5	11.6
Community Funding	2	4.7
Private	4	9.3
Federal, Fundraising, Community funding	3	7.0
Community funding and Private	3	7.0
Federal and Provincial	6	14.0
Federal and Fundraising	1	2.3
Private and Federal	1	2.3
Federal, Provincial and Private	1	2.3
Total	43	100.0

Commentary

Sources of literacy funding was another major category with 43 articles discussing this topic. There were many values for this variable as 12 different sources and combination of sources were mentioned. For example, six articles mentioned that adult literacy was both a federal and provincial funding issue while nine articles mentioned it as a provincial funding concern. Community funding referred to municipal government sources. Various combinations in the same article such as private and federal sources or federal, fundraising and community funding were also mentioned. Media perceptions of the funding issue seem to focus on the two levels of government and community efforts.

Figure 6

Types of Specific Curriculum Content by Province

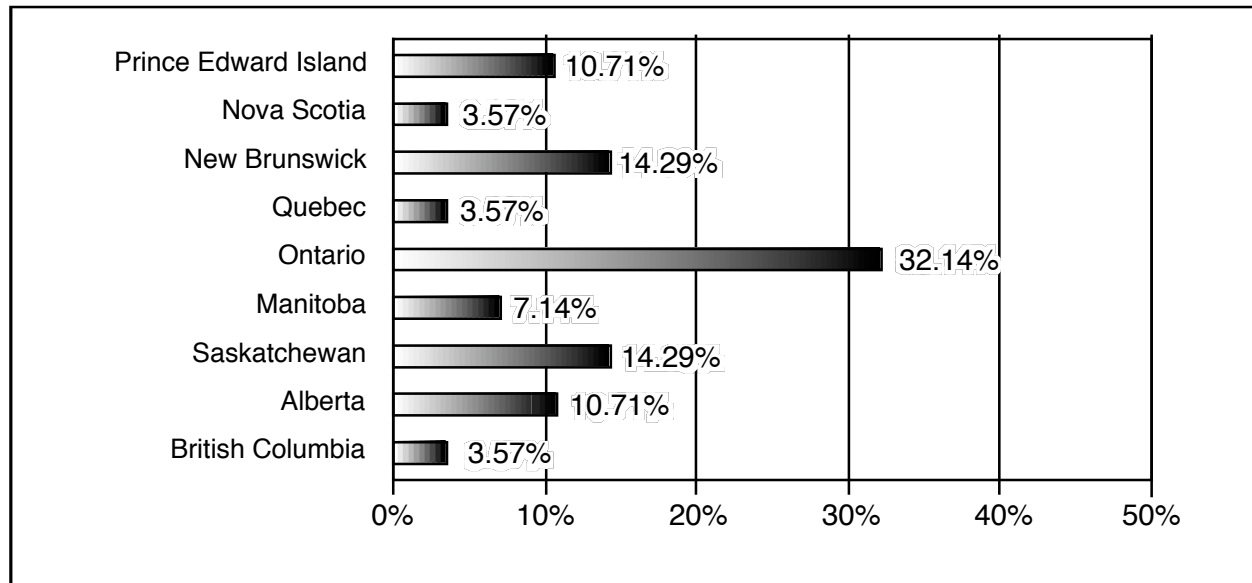


Commentary

A number of articles focused on the overall purpose of an adult education program that is often associated with basic education. The three variables — English as a second language (ESL) life skills and general educational development (GED) were collapsed into one category. As one single category these three types of specific curriculum content areas were mentioned in 36 articles — 12 articles for each category. Frequency counts for each type of curriculum by province were then calculated and appear in Figure 6. For example, in British Columbia, articles mentioning ESL and life skills content was a total count of 6.8%. In Alberta, ESL, life skills and GED articles were a total count of 19.04%. For Ontario, total count of the three variables was 35.3%.

Figure 7

Use of Adult Literacy Statistics by Province



Commentary

In a number of news clips (28) the individual writer used or referred to a range of adult literacy statistics. These statistical reports usually included information from IALS, provincial statistics drawn from associated IALS studies or studies conducted by individual associations or interest groups such as the College of Physicians. This figure indicates that provinces like British Columbia, Quebec, and Nova Scotia published one or two article or 3.6% of the total using some type of adult literacy statistic. Ontario, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick were the provinces that used statistics most often when writing about adult literacy.

Figure 8

Types of Identified Learner Groups

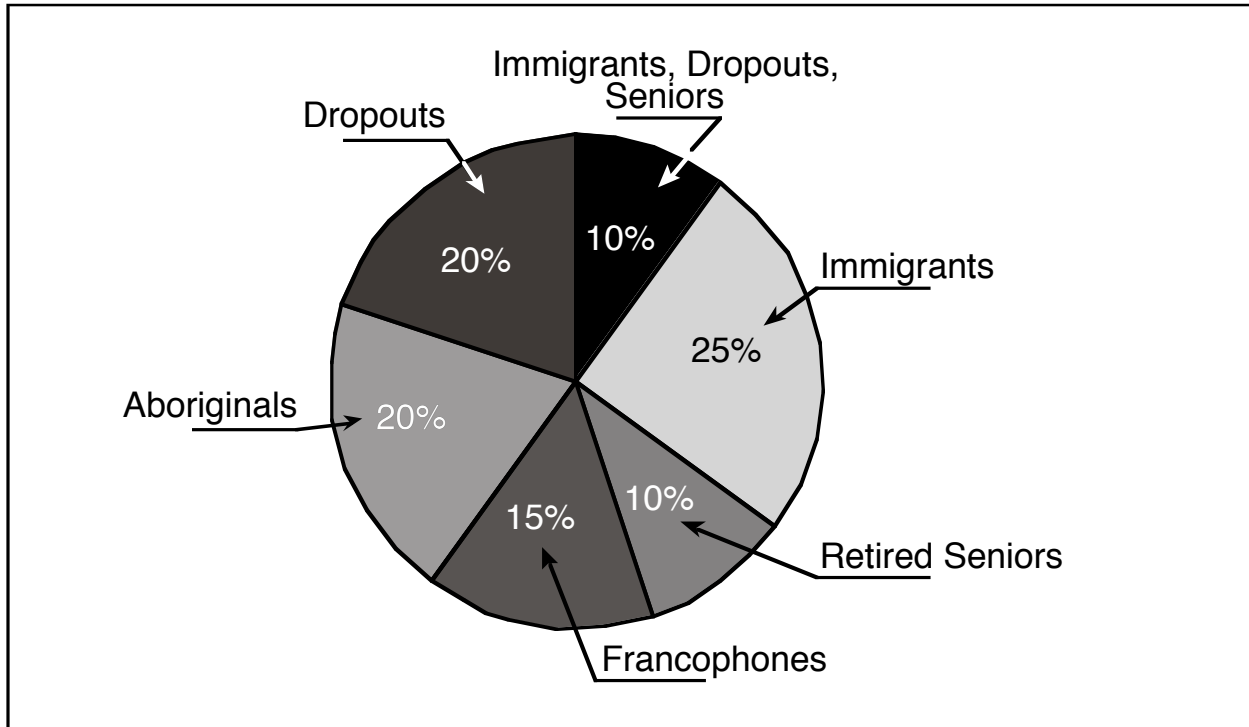


Table 6

Frequencies in Identified Learner Groups

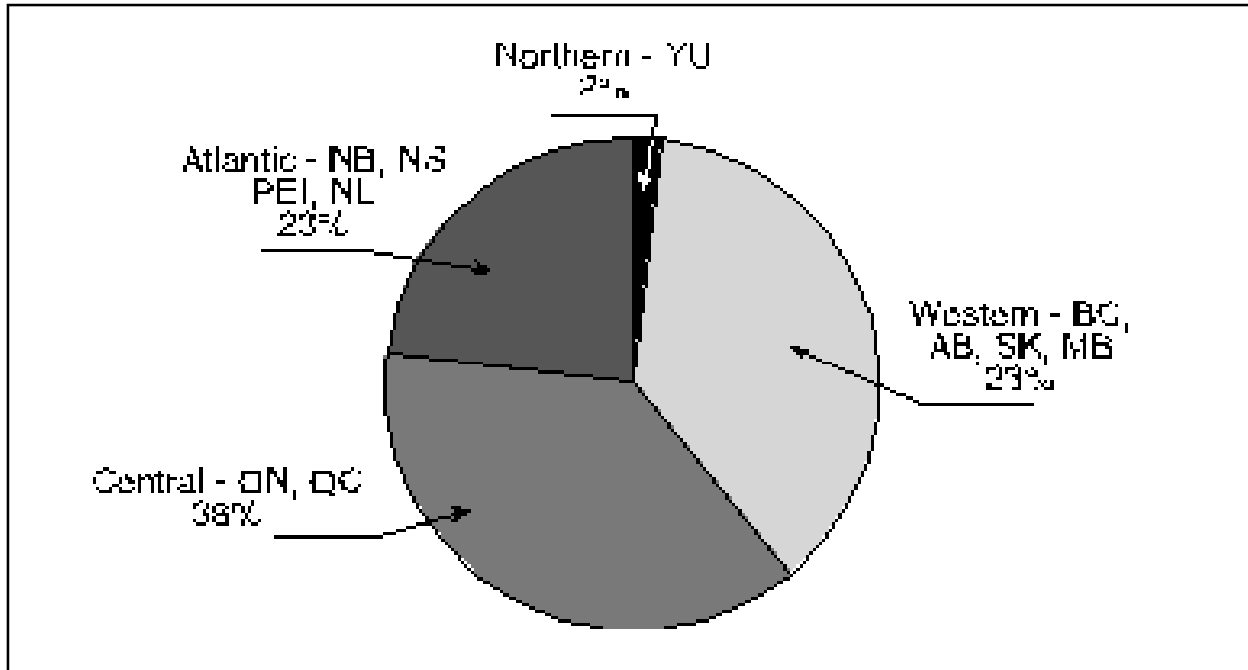
	Frequency	Percent
Immigrants	5	25.0
Aboriginals	4	20.0
Dropouts	4	20.0
Francophones	3	15.0
Retired Seniors	2	10.0
Immigrants, dropouts, seniors	1	10.0
Total	19	100.0

 **Commentary**

Out of the 133 articles, 19 mentioned specific types of literacy learner groups. Immigrant groups were associated with ESL program content and literacy skills and job categories, while dropouts were linked with volunteer-based providers. Other types of variables such as literacy tutors were found in 11 articles while reference to actual learning environments like the penitentiary, church and community center were referred to in seven articles.

Figure 9

Percentage of News Clips by Region in Canada



Commentary

Out of 133 articles, 38% of them were published in the Central Canada region. This was followed by the same number of articles in the Atlantic region and the West.



Radio and TV Broadcasts

Table 7

Types of Broadcasts

	Frequency	Percent
Radio	35	56.5
TV	27	43.5
Total	62	100.0

Table 8

Number of Broadcasts by Province and Territory

	Frequency	Percent
British Columbia	4	6.6
Alberta	4	6.6
Saskatchewan	4	6.6
Manitoba	6	9.8
Ontario	25	41.0
New Brunswick	2	1.6
Nova Scotia	11	18.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	4.9
Northwest Territories	3	4.9
Total	62	100.0



Commentary

For the period of January 2004-April 2004, a total of 62 radio and TV broadcast summaries were collected that referred to the topic of adult literacy as presented by the various descriptors used to categorize the newspaper clippings. Many of these broadcast summaries coincided with the dates of the news clips and acted as a means to verify the content and importance of the event or activity. As with the clippings, it was possible to track which cities and towns aired the media coverage, the frequency and the date. For example, during this period there were six broadcasts from Timmins, Ontario, six from Antigonish, Nova Scotia, four from Winnipeg, Manitoba and three from Yellowknife. Several broadcasts occurred around Family Literacy Day.

Table 9

Total Group Audience of the Broadcasts

	Frequency
5400 or less	16
5401 to 9999	14
10000 to 37999	13
38000 or more	16
Total	59
Missing	3
Total	121



Commentary

This variable has four values and estimates the potential group audience of the broadcasts. The total group audience for the broadcasts was 2,737,800 potential viewers or listeners.



Types of Specific Curriculum Content

A total of eight broadcasts mentioned some aspect of ESL, Life Skills or GED training. In this form of media, there seemed to be more attention given to the broader area of adult education with 22 logs counted from the database. Most of the content of these broadcasts related to types of training programs for adults and career development. No categories were created for use of adult literacy statistics nor types of identified learner groups.

A further analysis of the information contained in this report is provided in the policy brief titled “Connecting Research with Policy” which is also a product from this project.

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