

Re-Framing the Conversation:

Respecting Adult Basic Education in British Columbia

Lynn Horvat

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by Lynn Horvat

The responsibility for the content and organization of the material in this publication rests with the author.

For more information about *Re-Framing the Conversation: Respecting Adult Basic Education in British Columbia*, contact the author at lhorvat@vcc.ca or 604-871-7000 ext. 7371.

Contents

Introduction	4
Acknowledgements	5
What is Fundamental ABE?	6
ABE Learner Profiles	7
Erosion of Public Safeguards Impacting ABE Students	9
Literacy: An Interdisciplinary View	19
Destabilized Adult Basic Education	27
Essential Skills Training: A Narrow View on Education	30
Adult Basic Education: A Basic Human Right	32

Introduction

This work was prompted by concerns of widespread and deep funding cuts to national literacy organizations throughout Canada, and announced BC government cuts to developmental programming, specifically to ESL and the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) during the spring of 2014. It became an immediate priority of developmental educators to understand from what plan the BC government was operating. By the end of this year, the BC Ministry of Advanced Education announced direct cuts to ABE programming in BC post-secondary by withdrawing \$5 million in provincial funding and allowing colleges to charge tuition fees for ABE courses. Additionally, the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG), announced at the same time, demonstrated a low-level of potentially short-term funding for ABE in the province, especially for fundamental level ABE students who often face multiple barriers to education and require additional time to complete a basic education.

In light of these events and funding withdrawals, and with knowledge acquired to-date, it is possible to draw two conclusions. One, the BC government is in the process of devolving responsibility for post-secondary ABE. Two, decisions to cut ABE funding in the province took place without consultation and, therefore, without considering the needs of this vulnerable group of adult students.

In carrying out this work, I undertook the following educational and research activities:

- Conducted a detailed literature survey of over 250 documents and reports relating to literacy (provincially, nationally and internationally), interdisciplinary fields related to adult literacy and ABE (e.g., health, crime prevention, economics), BC post-secondary, education, government policy and priorities, trades, union, and labour market and employment training information.
- Developed of a timeline of literacy events of the past 200 years and detailing the past two decades.
- Attended meetings on the future of developmental programming, at Vancouver Community College, with college leaders and faculty, provincial fundamental ABE articulation committee members, and province-wide delegates from BC's post-secondary system at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives conference (November 2014) on this same issue.
- Developed and conducted a survey of fundamental ABE student work-study arrangements to gather data about financial and employment constraints faced by fundamental ABE students as they strive for a basic education.
- Conducted a formal interview with a long-term fundamental ABE instructor to get a first-hand account of the ebb and flow of ABE programming and funding over the last two decades.
- Produced the following package of advocacy tools on issues affecting ABE students and programming in British Columbia.

The detailed literature survey revealed plainly that the case for literacy education and adult basic education has been made over and over and has been endorsed at all levels of government as an urgent priority going forward into the 21st Century. (Almost half of Canadian adults, with respect to literacy¹, and over half for numeracy² do not have the levels required to function well in today's modern knowledge-based society.) Now, with adult basic education under attack in British Columbia, there is an urgent need to communicate to leaders and decision-makers again, about adult literacy and ABE, its value to students, to society, and the importance of this educational area in BC post-secondary. With all this in mind, the end product of this work is a package of advocacy tools, *Re-Framing the Conversation: Respecting Adult Basic Education in British Columbia*.

It's time to re-frame the conversation. No one disputes the value of adult literacy and a basic education. Attention needs to focus on the erosion of public safeguards for vulnerable adult students, and the destabilization of adult basic education programming, and how this has resulted in a denial of the fundamental human right to a basic education. The following advocacy tools are designed to inform individuals who are involved and interested in issues facing ABE students. These individuals include public post-secondary leaders and decision-makers, educators, unions, student organizations, community organizations, interdisciplinary partners, government officials and the media. Since students, educators and other partners have been left out of discussions affecting the existence of public ABE in the province, it is imperative that we share our experiences and information, consolidate our efforts, and urge the BC government and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education to reconsider provincial cuts to public post-secondary Adult Basic Education. It is vital that the BC government reinstates and protects access to quality and stable programming for many of BC's most vulnerable citizens.

Acknowledgements

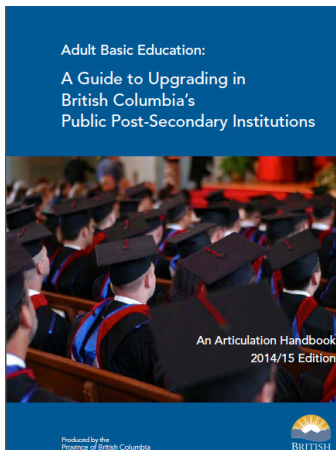
I am grateful for the support and contributions of the following individuals over the course of this work: Vancouver Community College, Education Leave Committee members (June 2014). Jan Weiten, Department Head, Basic Education Department, for supporting, reading and valuable comment on drafts of this work. Basic Education Department colleagues: Linda Rider, Andrew Candela, Mary Thompson-Boyd, Jo Lemay, Tara Mollel, Rene Merkel, Shantel Ivits, Cynthia Bluman, Edie MacKenzie and Nada Kawas, Program Assistant, for facilitating the survey of Basic Education Department students on working and going to school. John Shayler, ABE educator and former ABE student, for encouragement on the focus and direction of this work.

1. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*, 2013, <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/315/Canadian-PIAAC-Report.EN.pdf>, p. 16.

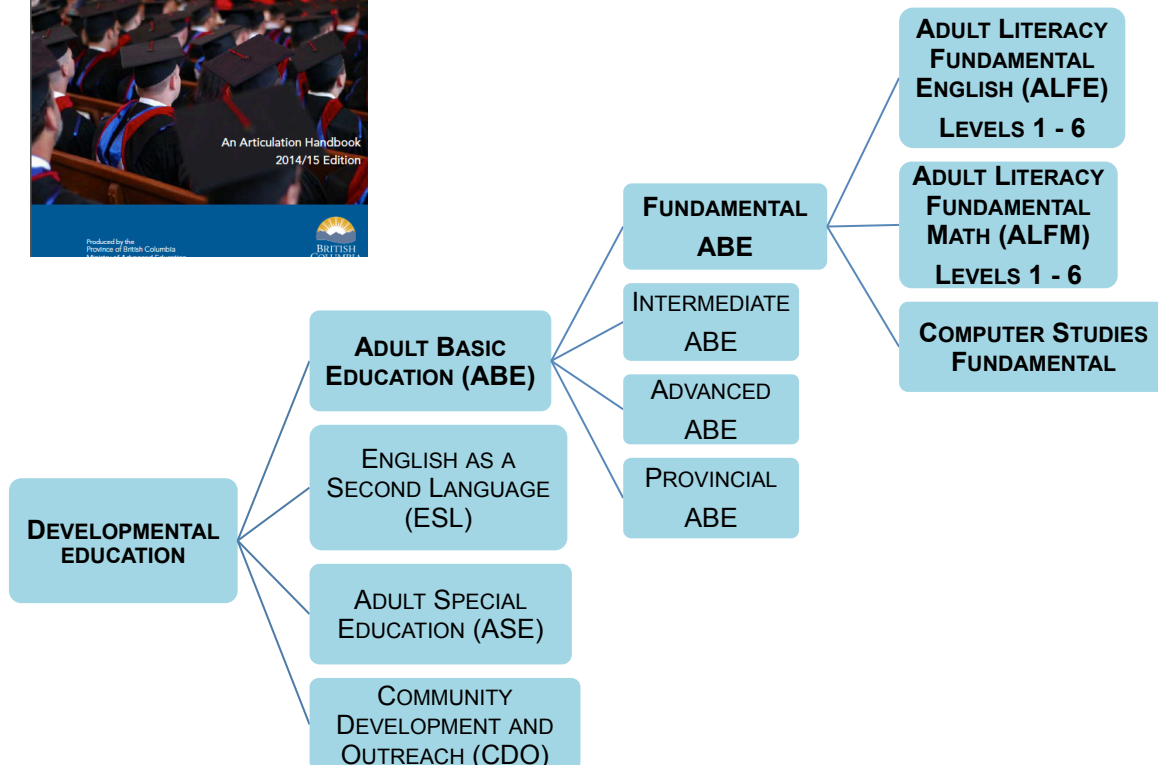
2. Ibid, p. 20.

What is Fundamental ABE?

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) is one area of Developmental Education.
- Fundamental ABE often includes students from all developmental education fields (see below ABE, ESL, ASE, CDO).
- At Vancouver Community College, placement is determined by an assessment tailored to the unique needs of fundamental level students. Students are comfortable with spoken English.
- Fundamental ABE in British Columbia is one of four levels of ABE. Fundamental Level is articulated into six levels, and these levels correlate roughly with English and Math skills up to and including Grade 8 in the K-12 system.
- At Vancouver Community College, Fundamental ABE is offered by the Basic Education Department (School of Access) in group and self-paced classes at the Broadway and Downtown campuses, and in community outreach locations.



- Fundamental ABE has a long history of articulation in BC (see Articulation Handbook <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe/docs/handbook.pdf>).



Fundamental ABE Learner Profiles

- An understanding of this diverse student group needs to be considered in decisions affecting educational pathways for fundamental ABE.
- Students may be marginalized and/or individuals for whom schooling has not come easily.
- The lives of fundamental ABE learners also correlate with deep courage, dedication and resiliency. We must exercise caution in viewing fundamental ABE students from a deficit perspective.

LEARNERS COME FROM:

INTERRUPTED EDUCATION
FAILURE IN K-12
POVERTY
ADDICTIONS
MENTAL HEALTH
LEARNING DISABILITIES
ABUSE
VIOLENCE
TRAUMA

While sorting through family documents, Donna's mother finds paperwork from the 80's that shows Donna has a documented learning disability. Her mother gives her these documents when she is in her mid-thirties and attending school for fundamental reading, writing and math. This is Donna's first knowledge of a documented learning disability. She is both relieved to know but puzzled by this latent news. While at VCC, Donna hears about the auto trades program and is starting to see herself in this area of work.

Taylor, who has lived on the street and been involved in the sex trade, now has stable housing and is being encouraged to go to school.

THEY ARE DIVERSE:

AT-RISK YOUTH
GENERATION 1.5
INDIGENOUS
CANADIAN BORN
CANADIAN SCHOOLED
NEW CANADIAN
SETTLED IN CANADA
ENGLISH AS A FIRST LANGUAGE
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
SINGLE PARENTS
THE WORKING POOR
HEADS OF FAMILIES

Emily immigrates to Canada with her family when she starts high school. In high school, she is in a special program. After high school completion, she attends adult classes for fundamental reading, writing and math. Emily struggles to find part-time employment and is finally happy to be working at a fast-food restaurant. She continues with her upgrading but worries about her future.

Tanis is trying to get her life on track. She wants to get her child out of foster care. Life seems to conspire against her. She has not been able to come to school recently because she is trying to find stable housing, and there was a recent violent death in the family. After she upgrades her basic academic skills and gets her prerequisites, Tanis would like to take the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program at VCC. She wants a good job so she can raise her child.

Syad's first experience with education was growing up in a refugee camp in Pakistan where he learned to speak English. Syad tries to juggle casual labouring jobs with attending reading, writing and math classes. Sometimes he works graveyard shifts as a security guard. During these periods of employment he is often exhausted. For now, Syad wants a stable job so he can get to classes regularly.

Carmen has three grown children who live at home and work at casual and part-time jobs. Carmen works full-time as a kitchen helper in a seniors' centre and does part-time cleaning to supplement her day job. She is in the middle of a separation, and hard physical work and stress take its toll on her health. Despite this, she attends night classes for basic reading, writing and computer skills. She does this because she wants to show her kids a good example. Also, Carmen feels she won't be able to do hard physical work all her life. She believes education is the way to get ahead.

As a boy growing up during the Rwandan genocide, Jean saw things he says a child should never have to see. He and his remaining family live in Canada now. He is being treated for severe anxiety. He works at casual jobs and attends Basic Education reading and writing classes. Jean sees himself working in a trade.

Learner Snap Shots

Kevin gets involved with drugs and alcohol in high school and drops out. By 19 he is in rehab. Now he is in his mid-twenties and about to become a father. He works full-time in construction while refreshing basic math and taking high school biology at VCC. After that, he plans to take the other courses he needs to get into a nursing program. Kevin is encouraged by his progress; previously he worried that he had done some brain damage in his youth and wouldn't be able to learn. He feels his goals are within reach.

Oscar has been out of prison for 10 years now, and has been working days and studying nights for several years. He is a gregarious and sensitive student who explains he never learned to read and write and got good at faking, didn't have a happy life growing up, and hopes to be reunited one day with his children. He passes up opportunities at work because he is afraid of the reading, writing and computers involved. He wants to improve these skills for himself, as well as to prepare for a promotion.

Kali takes university transfer courses at a college. She wants to transfer into a program that requires Grade 12 math. An assessment shows that she needs to improve her basic math skills in order to take high school level math. She enrolls in fundamental basic education.

Kirk is injured on the job and needs to go back to school. He has not attended school since he dropped out in Grade 10, and he is very anxious about being back. His assessment shows that he needs a bit of a brush up before taking high school English and math courses. While in Basic Education English classes, he has access to computers and starts to think about transitioning to this area of work.

After years of caring for her children and aged parents, Brenda wants to go back to school. Her assessment shows she needs some basic skills in reading, writing and math. She also wants to learn about computers.

Sheri lives in a large extended household. She works full-time in a restaurant kitchen, and travels a long distance home by bus, often after midnight. Because she speaks English, she is in charge of taking her disabled sister to frequent medical appointments. Sheri also attends Adult Basic Education classes and hopes to get an adult graduation diploma.

School wasn't an option for Steve growing up, so he went to work early on in life. As a young man, he came to Canada, got a good paying union job and raised his family here. Now that his children are educated and successful in their lives, Steve feels it is his time to go to school. He studies basic reading, writing and math, and especially wants to learn how to use the computer.

Erosion of Public Safeguards Impacting ABE Students

Fundamental ABE students are often the most marginalized citizens in Canada.

For more than a decade in British Columbia we have been experiencing an erosion of public safeguards that are diminishing the possibility of a second chance for adult learners.

Education alone is not enough, and “investments in education can be inefficient if they are not backed up by investments in the social sphere.”¹

Since 2001, the BC Liberals’ policy to keep taxes low means shifting the burden to other areas, usually in the form of cuts, funding freezes, deregulation and privatization.²

Public safeguards that impact ABE students

- **PUBLIC FUNDING**
- **GOVERNMENT POLICY**
- **SOCIAL SERVICES AND FINANCIAL AID**
- **CHILDCARE**
- **EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS**
- **EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**
- **WORKERS’ COMPENSATION**

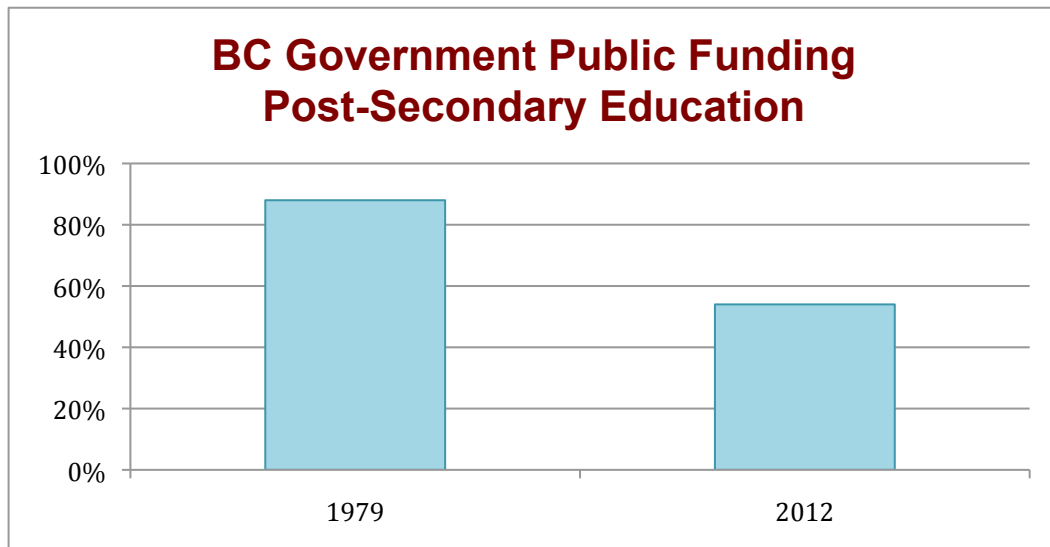
How are public safeguards for ABE students being eroded?

1. Esping-Andersen, Gosta, *A Welfare State for the 21st Century: Ageing societies, knowledge-based economies, and the sustainability of European welfare states*, <http://www.nnn.se/seminar/pdf/report.pdf>, (p. 2)

2. *Dismantling and Deregulating, The BC Liberal Record on PSE*, (FPSE) http://www.fpse.ca/files/uploads/BC_liberalrecord-April_2005.pdf

A SHIFT AWAY FROM PUBLIC FUNDING FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

- A steady withdrawal of BC government support for post-secondary education.
- In 1979 the BC government funded 88% of post-secondary education. In 2012 the BC government funded 54% of post-secondary education. BC has the highest student debt levels in Canada.³ This trend continues.⁴
- Deep cuts to ABE and ESL education in BC's post-secondary system.
- On December 4, 2014, the BC government withdrew \$6.9 million in funding for ABE and shifted \$1.9 million to Adult Upgrading Grants. The \$5 million core funding shortfall came abruptly and without consultation, and has left institutions reeling.
- As of December 2014, the BC government granted public post-secondary institutions the right to charge tuition fees for ESL and Adult Basic Education.
- The BC government is focused on internationalization and *marketization* of K-12 and post-secondary education and targets international student increases by 50% over next 4 years.⁵
- Existing and stable programming of ABE in BC post-secondary is in jeopardy (e.g., 40 years of ABE at Vancouver Community College).



3. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), Vancouver Conference, Exploring Post-Secondary Education and Training in BC, Funding Trends by Igljika Ivanova, November 7, 2014

4. 2014 BC Budget Backgrounder, http://www.fpse.ca/files/news_files/2014%20Budget%20Backgrounder.pdf

5. BC Jobs Plan, International Ed major stakeholder, <http://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcjobsplan/files/2014/09/BC-Jobs-Plan.pdf> (p.19)

GOVERNMENT POLICY SHIFTS

Destabilizing effects on educational programming

Provincial level

- Governance shifts at all levels of education result in education cuts, funding freezes and shifts, privatization and deregulation.
- *School Amendment Act of 2002 (Bill 34)*. Shifts responsibilities for education with strict controls over to boards.⁶
- Government appointed boards and governance changes in public post-secondary institutions since 2001.^{7,8}
- Decreased representation of post-secondary educators at the ministry level.⁹
- Industry, Trades, and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) is disbanded in 2002 and replaced by Industry Training Authority (ITA). Results in de-skilling of the workforce.¹⁰
- Deep cuts to Developmental Education funding for ABE and ESL in the form of reduced funding and tuition fees. Resulting in shifting \$5 million away from ABE (Dec 2014).

Federal level

- National Literacy Secretariat (from 1988) disbanded and the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) opened in 2006 with a focus on literacy for the workplace.
- In 2014, deep cuts to national and provincial literacy organizations.
- The federal government cancels Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) that fund provincial employment training programs (2014).
- The LMDA and LMA shift, from funding to the provinces, to the federal Canada Job Grant program not only represents a funding and service cut to provincial employment training programs, it also appears to be a political strategy looking to the 2015 election year.¹¹

6. BC Liberals promote a “need” to restructure education and sway public support with rhetoric around “choice”, “efficiency”, and “accountability”, and make key educational policy changes without consultation. *Devolution, Choice, and Accountability in the Provision of Public Education in British Columbia: A Critical Analysis of the School Amendment Act of 2002 (Bill 34)*, (Fallon, Paquette, 2008) <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/fallonpaquette.html>

7. Dismantling and Deregulating: The BC Liberal Record on PSE, (FPSE), http://www.fpse.ca/files/uploads/BC_liberalrecord-April_2005.pdf, (p. 2)

8. *Charting a new Course 2.0: Renewing PSE in BC, 2013*, <http://www.fpse.ca/files/attachments/Charting a New Course 2pt0 130522.pdf>, (pp. 3, 14)

GOVERNMENT POLICY SHIFTS

Impacts on ABE student access to stable quality education

- A shift from literacy and education (NLS) to worker skills (OLES) reduces access to low barrier education for individuals that need more time and a variety of pathways to complete a basic education. Also, cancellation of BC's GED program and deep cuts in developmental education areas (ABE, ESL, CDO) leave fundamental ABE vulnerable.¹²
- Government leveraging of choice, efficiency, accountability and business models, over social cohesion, active citizenship and personal development, results in financial pressures on programs and a narrow focus on training for the workplace.
- Vancouver Board of Education, regulated to balance its budget despite shortfalls in funding, close one and reduce another Adult Learning Centre's capacity, and begin transitioning Continuing Studies to the college system.^{13, 14}
- Cancelling provincial employment training programs that served the hardest to employ populations result in a loss of educational and employment pathway for many youth, people with disabilities, aboriginal people, immigrants, social assistance recipients, long-term unemployed and older workers.
- Project-based and Request-for-Proposal (RFP) funding models add to destabilization of programs and reduced access for learners. Smaller community initiatives are at risk of being left out due to fewer resources for proposal writing, staffing, and no funding for curriculum and professional development.
- Widespread and deep funding cuts mean loss of access to small community-based literacy programs responsive to needs of specific groups within their communities.
- Deregulated and destabilized trades in BC result in ABE students not having access to clear pathways to trades training and a living wage.

9. A Global Literacy Leader? British Columbia's Pathway to 2010, Judith Walker, UBC, CASAE 2006 National Conference, http://casae-aceea.ca/~casae/sites/casae/archives/cnf2006/2006onlineProceedings/CAS2006Judith_Walker.pdf (p. 242)

10. Government hands over governance of apprenticeship to employers – privatized and deregulated with no education and labour representatives. *Trades Training and Rebuilding BC's Apprenticeship System*, BC Federation of Labour, 2012, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/BCFED/1000-11bre-sim-trades.pdf>

11. LMDA and LMI funds will be funneled back to the Feds and to the Canada Jobs Grant program; a program that appears to be more political than based on sound labour market information. MacLeod, Andrew, *Canada Job Grant a 'Boondoggle', Say Critics*, <http://theyee.ca/News/2013/09/27/Canada-Job-Grant/>

12. Smythe, Suzanne, *Policy changes and cuts to adult education programs in the Lower Mainland, BC: A situation report*, SFU, Faculty of Education, October 2014, <http://decoda.ca/wp-content/uploads/adult-education-policy-cuts-Oct-3-1.pdf>

13. *Adult education centre axed in Vancouver's West End*, CBC News, April 8, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/adult-education-centre-axed-in-vancouver-s-west-end-1.2601888>

14. *VSB 2014/2015 Preliminary Operating Budget Proposals*, VSP, May 1, 2014, <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/VSB%202014-2015%20Preliminary%20Operating%20Budget%20Proposals.pdf> (p.3)

SOCIAL SERVICES CUTS AND PRECARIOUS FINANCIAL AID

The policy picture

- Restrictive BC income assistance policy since 2002 prohibits ABE recipients from attending school, denying access to basic education and a chance for a better life.
- Income assistance rates in BC have not changed since 2007.¹⁵
- Free ABE tuition policy from 1998. Removed in 2003. Re-instated in 2007. Removed in December 2014.
- Increasing “administrivia” promotes systemic discrimination in social services administrative procedures,¹⁷ and navigating StudentAid BC for funding is beyond the literacy levels of most Fundamental ABE students.

“In light of the trend towards a knowledge-based economy in BC, there is a strong economic argument to be made for encouraging individuals on income assistance to enroll in adult basic education.... The government’s current income assistance policy does the exact opposite.”¹⁶

– Canadian Federation of Students, BC

THE PUBLIC FUNDING CUTS PICTURE¹⁸ AND ABE STUDENTS

- Cuts to income assistance schemes in BC
- 28% reduction in student support programs since 2009

Cuts to:

- programs for persons with disabilities
- mental health
- healthcare
- community health
- housing
- programs for women
- programs for children and families
- legal aid

Addressing the issues

STOP OUT not drop out

Juggling paid-work, unpaid work, family responsibilities, and circumstances related to poverty, health, mental health and disability, with school is not always possible. Adult students return to their basic education classes as their situations permit. For ABE students, it’s stop out, not drop out.

Low enrollment and financial resources

60% of ABE participants surveyed by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education cited non-participation reasons linked to financial resources.¹⁹

- Financial reasons
- Returning to work
- Personal circumstances (e.g., lack of childcare)

15. BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, *Increases To Income Assistance Rates*, last updated July 31, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2007/increase.htm>

16. *Adult Basic Education, a Gateway to Post-Secondary Success*, Canadian Federation of Students-BC, Factsheet, <http://cfs.bc.ca/index.php/section/50>, (Nov 27, 2014)

British Columbia ABE funding picture – December 2014

- BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) announces on December 4, 2014 abrupt changes to ABE funding in the post-secondary system, resulting in a cut of \$6.9 million in funding. At Vancouver Community College this represents 30% of core funding. Public post-secondary institutions plan to charge tuition fees for ABE.
- At the time of this writing, at Vancouver Community College, January 2015 tuition fees for ABE are set at \$1,600 per term for full-time studies.

“A \$10 to \$20 increase in student fees is enough to deter a fundamental student from enrolling in classes.”

– Nadia Kawas, Program Assistant, Basic Education Department

“Many of our students are too poor to come to school, even when it’s free.”

– Jan Weiten, Department Head, Basic Education Department

ABE Student Profile

- Juggles paid or unpaid work with attending school
- Low-wage earner
- In precarious employment
- Working poor
- Head of family
- Faces multiple barriers to education and employment
- Needs additional time to complete a basic education

- The Ministry of AVED channels \$1.9 million in funding to financial aid in the form of Adult Upgrading Grants (AUG). Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP), which used to fund students for books, school supplies, Student Union fees and transit fees (UPass), is now called AUG.
- If a student earns above \$24,000, they are not eligible for funding through Adult Upgrading Grants. This means that students below the living wage threshold will be denied funding.
- Adult Upgrading Grant funding will be drastically cut (by 50%) or denied to ABE students who are “In Progress”.
 - ⇒ It takes time to complete a basic education.
 - ⇒ Often ABE students face multiple barriers to education and need additional time to complete a fundamental level course.
 - ⇒ A fundamental level ABE student is In Progress (IP) until the skills for a particular level are developed. These skills and levels are articulated in provincial courses.

A living wage for Metro Vancouver is roughly \$35,000 to \$40,000/year²⁰.

Under the present scheme, ABE students will have unrealistic tuition fees, eligibility criteria and time limits tied to funding.

17. Vancouver Board of Education Community Literacy Reports, DTES, <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/Annual%20Literacy%20Plan%202014.pdf>, (p.10)

18. *The Cuts*, The Coalition to Build a Better BC, <http://www.betterbc.ca/the-cuts/> (Nov 27, 2014)

19. *Adult Basic Education, a Gateway to Post-Secondary Success*, Canadian Federation of Students-BC, Factsheet, <http://cfs.bc.ca/index.php/section/50>, (Nov 27, 2014)

20. *Working for a Living Wage, 2014 Update*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC_Office/2014/04/CCPA-BC_Living_Wage_Update_2014_revJul15.pdf

CHILDCARE NEEDS ABE STUDENT ACCESS, SUCCESS AND RETENTION

ABE students and their children need access to quality childcare

The facts

- In literature surveys, difficulty around childcare consistently ranks high as a barrier to student access, success and retention.²¹
- For many families, childcare is the second highest expense after housing.²²
- 71% of ABE students live below the poverty line.²³
- 20% of ABE students surveyed have children.²⁴
- BC has the second highest child poverty rate in Canada.²⁶
- A third of Basic Education Department students at Vancouver Community College juggle unpaid work (e.g., childcare, eldercare) with going to school. 91% of these students report that this kind of unpaid work interferes with attending school.²⁷

“In BC, a single mother living on Income Assistance with one child receives \$11,628 per year, which works out to \$969 per month; \$520 of which she can use for housing and \$449 for other needs such as food, clothing and transportation. After her child turns three, she must look for work or go back to school, and is then faced with the high cost of child care.”²⁵

One of the federal Conservatives “first acts in power was to cancel agreements with the provinces and territories for early learning and care and cut \$1 billion in funding.” They “replaced it with a monthly payment directly to parents – an amount that barely covers a couple of nights of babysitting.”²⁸

21. Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), *Question Scan Summary Report – What are the most effective strategies to enhance learner access to ABE and literacy programs, especially for individuals from groups with special barriers?* http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/ccl_question_scans/documents/29-Enhancing_Access_to_ABE.pdf

22. Rethink! Child Care, *Learn the Issues*, <http://rethinkchildcare.ca/learn/> (Dec 1, 2014)

23. *Adult Basic Education, a Gateway to Post-Secondary Success*, CFS-BC Factsheet, <http://cfs.bc.ca/index.php/section/50>, (Nov 27, 2014)

24. *BC AVED 2013 Developmental Student Outcomes Survey findings*, <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe/docs/2013-Developmental-Student-Outcomes-Survey-Report-of-Findings.pdf>, (p. 14)

25. Myles, Merissa, *Affordable Housing and Quality Child Care: Essential Resources for Young Families*, BC Council of Families, Spring 2007, <http://www.bccf.ca/all/resources/affordable-housing-and-quality-child-care-essential-resources-young-families>

26. *BC Campaign 2000 - 2012 Child Poverty Report Card*, November 2012, http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EconomicEquality/FirstCall_BC_Child_Poverty_Report_Card_2012.pdf, (p. 2)

27. Horvat, Lynn, *Working and Going to School: A survey of Basic Education Department students*, October 2014

28. Rethink! Child Care, *Learn the Issues*, <http://rethinkchildcare.ca/learn/> (Dec 1, 2014)

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT ABE STUDENTS – THE WORKING POOR

The working poor struggle for a basic education

Well over the majority of ABE students work and live below the poverty line.²⁹

A survey of Basic Education Department students at Vancouver Community College shows, not only that the majority of fundamental ABE students' work situations are precarious; but that they also interfere with participation in a basic education:³⁰

- 74% are employed. Of these, 37% have full-time jobs, 38% have part-time jobs, and the remaining 25% do on-call, temporary and seasonal work.
- Almost 30% of fundamental ABE students have more than one job.
- Income is unstable: 46% do not work the same number of hours every week.
- Schedules are uncertain: 49% work different days from week to week.
- 56% report that their work schedules interfere with attending school.

Sauder School of Business professor emeritus Mark Thompson calls the changes to the Employment Standards Act “the biggest roll back of worker rights in Canadian history.”³¹

- The Tyee, 2010

For ABE students with children, complex work schedules add to childcare difficulties.

BC Employment Standards Act changes³²

- Overall, 42 changes to the Employment Standards Act since 2002, most aimed at reducing employee rights and protections (complaint process³³, online Self-Help Complaint Kit³⁴ – ineffective for vulnerable workers with low literacy, closure of 50% of branch offices).
- Other changes to the Act include: minimum daily shift reduced from four to two hours, 24-hour notice of shift change eliminated, longer shifts instead of consecutive days.
- Bill 29 allowed the largest mass layoff of 8,000 female health-care workers in Canada; it outsourced their jobs to lower paying private companies (2002).
- Low-wage policy. In 2001 minimum wage frozen at \$8 for 10 years; the \$6/hour training wage for the first 500 hours of work was finally abolished in 2011. (In 2014, BC has one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada at \$10.25/hr³⁵ and the highest cost of living).

29. *Adult Basic Education, a Gateway to Post-Secondary Success*, CFS-BC Factsheet, <http://cfs.bc.ca/index.php/section/50>, (Nov 27, 2014)

30. Horvat, Lynn, *Working and Going to School: A survey of Basic Education Department students*, October 2014

31. Sandborn, Tom, *Biggest Rollback of Worker Rights in Canadian History*, Sep 7, 2010, <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/07/DecadeofLabour/>

32. Fairey, David and Griffen Cohen, Marjorie, *Why BC's Lower-wage Workers Are Struggling: The case for stronger employment standards after years of roll-backs*, Apr 24, 2013, The Tyee.ca, <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2013/04/24/BC-Employment-Standards/>

33. *Employment Standards Complaint Submission*, https://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/forms/esb_comp.htm, (Dec 1, 2014)

34. *Employment Standards Act: Self-Help Kit*, https://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/self-help/self_help_kit.pdf, (Dec 1, 2014)

35. *Minimum Wage by Province*, 2014, <http://www.retailcouncil.org/quickfacts/minimum-wage>

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND VULNERABLE WORKERS

ABE students often face obstacles to employment as well as Service Canada Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. Among these vulnerable workers are:

- Youth
- Single income families
- People with disabilities
- Aboriginal people
- Immigrants
- Long-term unemployed
- Older workers

EI rules make it difficult for vulnerable unemployed adults to get a basic education and begin a path to improving their lives and making a living wage.

- Over 60% of fundamental ABE students surveyed are involved in precarious work³⁶ and may not meet EI benefits criteria even though they pay EI premiums during periods of insurable employment.
- EI rules favour training assigned by Employment and Social Development Canada, rather than workers who go to school on their own initiative.³⁷
- ABE students collecting EI commit to looking for work and being available for work. This impacts the amount of time and when unemployed students can participate in a basic education.

36. Horvat, Lynn, *Working and Going to School: A survey of Basic Education Department students*, October 2014

37. *Employment Insurance and courses or training programs*, Services Canada, Aug 8, 2014, <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/ei/information/training.shtml - Who>

WORKERS COMPENSATION IN BC AND VULNERABLE WORKERS

Changes to the BC Workers Compensation Act since 2002 have resulted in decreased compensation and further erosion of protections for vulnerable workers.³⁸

Vulnerable worker safety has not been a top priority in BC as the business lobby has successfully influenced government decisions around employer responsibility in cases involving:

- working alone overnight
- safety for farm workers, miners and forestry workers^{39, 40}

In BC, "legislative and regulatory initiatives ...revamped Employment Standards legislation, the functioning of Worksafe BC... and the Labour Relations Board, all in ways that critics say privilege the agendas of management and employers over worker's rights."⁴¹

Threats to labour unions and overall reduction of the unionized workforce in BC⁴² diminish vulnerable workers' opportunities to safer jobs and a secure living wage.

38. Geunther, Stan, Patterson, Janet, O'Leary, Sarah, *Adding Insult to Injury: Changes to the BC Workers' Compensation System 2002-2008, The Impact on Injured Workers, A Summary Report to the BC Federation of Labour*, Apr 22, 2009, [http://bcfed.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/1520-09br-Insult to Injury.pdf](http://bcfed.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/1520-09br-Insult%20to%20Injury.pdf), (pp. 2-4)

39. Hoekstra, Gord, *WorkSafeBC has little recent experience preparing cases for court*, July 3, 2014, <http://www.vancouversun.com/business/WorkSafeBC+little+recent+experience+preparing+cases+court/9991079/story.html>

40. Sandborn, Tom, *The Decade's Top Labour Stories In BC*, Sep 6, 2010, <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/06/TopLabourStories/>

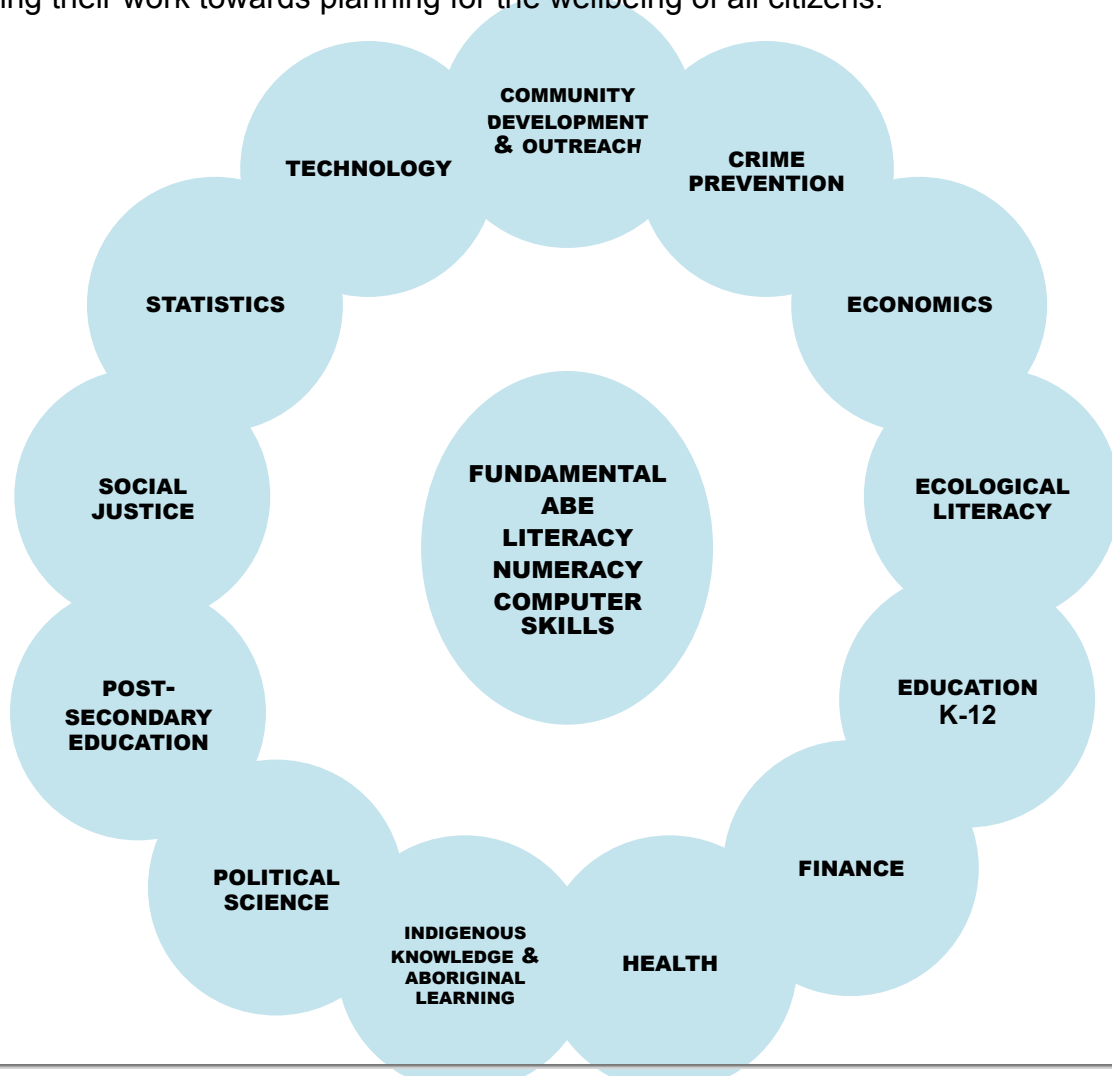
41. Sandborn, Tom, *Biggest Rollback of Worker Rights in Canadian History*, Sep 7, 2010, <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/07/DecadeofLabour/>

42. *ibid.*

Literacy: An Interdisciplinary View

A LARGER CONVERSATION

The case for literacy education has been made over and over in recent decades and centuries, and – for that matter – millennia.¹ Nowadays, few will dispute the value of a basic education for the individual and for society. Increasingly, disciplines outside the literacy field are weighing-in. From these various perspectives, a holistic picture of literacy and adult basic education emerges where interconnectedness reveals both a larger value and constructive points of discussion. While governments promote their agenda of cuts, funding freezes, funding shifts, deregulation and privatization, and citizens demand resources and services; it is worthwhile understanding how the different fields relate. In this way, too, different arms of government may find common purpose in refocusing their work towards planning for the wellbeing of all citizens.



1. Quigley, Allan B., *Learning From Landmarks: To Re-shape Adult Literacy Policy in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 82-92, in *Building on Critical Traditions – Adult Education and Learning in Canada*, Eds: To Nesbit, Susan M. Brigham, Nancy Taber, Tara Gibb. Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., Toronto. 2013

Community Development and Outreach (CDO)

Community Development and Outreach organizations by nature strive to respond to the dire and immediate needs of citizens who are falling into widening social services gaps.

“There are many urgent and important community issues and literacy is a tool for addressing DTES community priorities. Literacy is at the heart of democracy, social justice and wellbeing.”²

- Downtown Eastside Adult Literacy Roundtable

- In urban centres, CDO organizations serve the most marginalized citizens and deal with issues of poverty, housing, health, justice, education and employment.
- In rural areas, CDO organizations fill in gaps where services are scarce or non-existent.

Funding cuts to community development organizations further diminish resources, social supports, pathways to a basic education, and improved quality of life for citizens who are among the most vulnerable in society.

Crime Prevention

Police departments observe a link between low literacy and crime, as well as a link between low literacy and the costs associated with crime and the criminal justice system.³

- Offenders are three times as likely to have low literacy skills.
- 65% of people entering correctional facilities have less than a Grade 8 education or literacy skills.
- Inmates with low literacy are less likely to access rehabilitative services and programs available to them.
- Low literacy in Canada (42% of citizens), and memory and thinking patterns associated with low literacy, affect the criminal justice system’s ability to serve fairly, accurately, expediently and efficiently. Offenders, suspects, witnesses and victims with low literacy have difficulty coping with all aspects of the criminal justice system, including: answering questions, filling out forms, providing statements, and reading documents.

“The economic and social returns [of literacy], far outweigh the cost of providing literacy training...”

- The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

2. Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable, *Plan for Strengthening Literacy in the DTES*, 2010, https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8Y64xYGAufFZWVvINjJiYzktYWZmZS00MGY5LTk3NTUtNzk3ZjU5ZWVmNDFi/edit?hl=en_US&pli=1, See also, Ivits, Shantel, *Navigating Education in the Downtown Eastside*, prepared by the DTES Literacy Roundtable, November 2014, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxkk9NpvR1L8aDRfQnF4NzVVCV2M/view?pli=1>

3. Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, *Literacy and the Police: Target Crime with Literacy, Literacy Facts*, Dec 9, 2014, <http://policeabc.ca/literacy-fact-sheets/Page-5.html>

Economics

One area in which economics has traditionally been interested is in measuring the effects of education on labour productivity. In recent times, the field of economics has been expanding its perspective to include the effects of education on:

- Voting and democratic participation
- Health and mortality
- Criminal behaviour

Economists are also interested in cost-benefit analysis of improving adult literacy.

- An Example: to improve literacy levels by 10%, for 9 million people, a cost of \$35.5 billion and a \$197 billion benefit over 10 years.⁵

“A growing body of work suggests that education offers a wide-range of benefits that extend beyond increases in labor market productivity.”

- Lance Lochner, Department of Economics, University of Western Ontario

Ecological Literacy

Ecological literacy,⁶ or environmental education, is another area that intersects with literacy. A basic education provides adult learners with the skills needed to access information and understand our relationship to the natural world:

- How human behaviour modifies the natural environment
- How, in our role as consumers, we impact the environment
- Chemical product use and safety

Education K-12

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) recognizes that some students need more time to complete a basic education and recommend:⁷

- Quality, publically funded adult basic education
- Self-paced programs for adult students
- Adult learner supports such as access to counseling, psycho-educational testing, and learning-support specialists.

Quality, articulated public adult basic education, with student supports in place, has a long history in BC's public post-secondary system. For example, Vancouver Community College has over 40 years of Adult Basic Education.

4. Lochner, Lance, *Non-Production Benefits of Education: Crime, Health, and Good Citizenship*, University of Western Ontario, Dec 15, 2010, http://economics.uwo.ca/cibc/workingpapers_docs/wp2010/Lochner07.pdf

5. Hyslop, Lucy, *Adult Literacy Learning on the Line*, BC Business, July 1, 2008, <http://www.bcbusiness.ca/careers/adult-literacy-learning-on-the-line>

6. Hayward, Karen, Pannozzo, Linda, and Colman, Ronald, *Developing Indicators for the Educated Populice Domain of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing*, Document 2, August 2007, https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/sites/ca.canadian-index-wellbeing/files/uploads/files/Historical-Educated_Populace_Literature_Review_Doc2_August_2007.sflb_.pdf

7. *Graduation Requirements Review*, Dec 2012, BCTF, <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/Briefs/GraduationRequirementsReviewBrief.pdf>

Finance

Canada's below average score for numeracy on the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*⁸ was not well received by Canada's financial community who say the results do not bode well for the future.⁹

- Canada's 2012 score for numeracy is lower than it was in 2003.
- 6 in 10 Canadians do not have numeracy levels required for a knowledge-based economy.
- 23% of Canadians scored at or below level one.
 - **Level 1** – can perform simple mathematical operations involving a single step such as counting or ordering.
 - **Below Level 1** – can cope with very simple concrete, familiar and explicit tasks.
- Low numeracy skills of youth, Aboriginal and immigrant populations point to future skills problems.

Canada's numeracy results have "...serious implications for financial literacy outcomes. It also raises concern about the ability to build technical skills".

- TD Economics, Special Report, December 2013

Health

To be health literate is to be able to access and understand the information required to manage one's health on a day-to-day basis.¹⁰

- Literacy, education and income are proven determinants of health in Canada.
- 60% of Canadians do not have sufficient literacy to understand and act on health information.
- Low literacy and education has a negative impact on health, quality of life and healthcare costs.

"Education is the best economic development and health promotion program ever invented. In tight economic times, it is only smart to maintain and expand educational investments."¹¹

– Steven Point, Lieutenant Governor of BC, Speech to the Throne, 2009

8. *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*, 2013, <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/315/Canadian-PIAAC-Report.EN.pdf>, (p. 18)

9. TD Economics, Special Report, *Canada's Literacy and Numeracy Challenge Worsens*, December 12, 2013, <http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/CanadaLiteracyAndNumeracyChallengeWorsens.pdf>

10. *An Inter-sectoral Approach for Improving Health Literacy for Canadians*, Public Health Association of BC, 2012 <http://www.phabc.org/userfiles/file/IntersectoralApproachforHealthLiteracy-FINAL.pdf>

11. Point, Steven, *Speech to the Throne, 2009*, https://www.leg.bc.ca/38th5th/Throne_Speech_2009.pdf, p.11

Indigenous Knowledge and Aboriginal Learning

Indigenous knowledge is part of the larger area of Aboriginal learning that is holistic, lifelong, experiential, spiritually oriented, community-based, rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures, and an integration of Aboriginal and western knowledge.¹²

Post-secondary education is “The New Buffalo”.

– Stonechild, Blair, *The New Buffalo: The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, University of Manitoba Press. 2011

Adult Basic Education is along the educational pathway for many Aboriginal post-secondary students.¹³ Approaches to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students include:

- strategies and services aimed at improving Aboriginal student retention and success¹⁴
- demonstrated respect for indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal learning
- reliable funding mechanisms

Aboriginal post-secondary learners often get caught in funding gaps and accreditation issues that are complicated by federal-provincial-Aboriginal jurisdictions and the competing responsibilities of federal Aboriginal Affairs (on-reserve) and provincial (off-reserve) Education.

Political Science

The political ideology of neo-liberalism¹⁵ explains much about the direction the BC Liberals have taken with respect to education and public safeguards for vulnerable citizens since they took power in 2001.

There is an important distinction between political liberalism and economic liberalism.

- Political liberalism is associated with being progressive as opposed to being conservative or right wing.
- Economic liberalism, or neo-liberalism, focuses on maximizing profits and efficiency by reducing or eliminating services, regulations, laws, standards, and other measures that are deemed restrictive to the flow of capital and investment.

In BC, the neo-liberal economics of the BC Liberals have resulted in massive funding cuts, freezes and shifts in public K-12 and post-secondary education. In a political climate of hyper-economic efficiencies and profit, there is widespread erosion of a public safety net for vulnerable citizens and the working poor – groups that face multiple barriers to ABE, a living wage and improved quality of life.

12. *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success*, Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-Fact-Sheet-Final_EN.PDF

13. “Secondary school data (2004-2009) identifies the rate of First Nation graduation at approximately 36% compared to the Canadian graduation rate of 72%....” 61% of First Nation young adults (20-24) have not completed high school, compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada.” *A Portrait of First Nations and Education Factsheet*, Chiefs Assembly on Education, October 2012, http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/events/fact_sheet-ccoe-3.pdf

14. MacKinnon, *Neo-Liberalism and the Aboriginal Second-Chance Learner: Stifling development and reinforcing exclusion*, June, 2012, <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2012/MacKinnon.pdf>

15. Shah, Anup, *A Primer on Neoliberalism*, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/39/a-primer-on-neoliberalism>, December 9, 2014

Post-Secondary Education

When public funding is respected and in place, public BC Post-Secondary institutions have the capacity to provide quality and stable adult basic education throughout the province.

- ABE is well defined in provincially articulated post-secondary courses.
- Qualified and professional post-secondary ABE instructors are supported by professional development and curriculum development. They are skilled at developing curriculum, planning stable and innovative programming, and are committed to the education of BC's most vulnerable, diverse and hard to reach populations.
- Adult students who face multiple barriers to a basic education have access to student supports and individualized programming.
- Curriculum is tailored to student needs, and schedules are flexible.
- There are socialization benefits for students who engage in a basic education in the post-secondary system; they become part of a broader community that promotes active citizenship and lifelong learning in a respectful and safe adult learning environment.
- There is shared and efficient access to up-to-date information technology and equipment for delivery of quality education and learning.
- ABE in the post-secondary system provides pathways to further programs, training, practicums, employment and a better life.

"I am always amazed by how courageous, dedicated and resilient our students are. I am even more impressed now because students lives are getting harder and harder. It takes a special kind of instructor who can thrive, grow and stay in ABE."

*– Jan Weiten, Basic Education Department,
Vancouver Community College, Nov 21, 2014*

Teaching, and usefulness of what was learned, course materials, equipment, and course schedules were given very high ratings by the vast majority of ABE students in the post-secondary system.¹⁶

*– BC Ministry of Advanced Education,
Developmental Students Outcomes Survey, 2013*

16. BC Ministry of AVED, 2013 *Developmental Students Outcomes Survey: Report of Findings*, <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe/docs/2013-Developmental-Student-Outcomes-Survey-Report-of-Findings.pdf>, (p. 18)

Social Justice

Due to the diverse characteristics and needs of Adult Basic Education learners, ABE interests intersect with the work of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on all issues affecting BC's most marginalized citizens: health care, education, social programs, taxation, government spending on public services, and quality of life.

“An effective and well-resourced government is not a barrier to a healthy economy. In fact, it is often government spending that creates the conditions for businesses and communities to thrive – for example, spending on staff who create and enforce appropriate regulations, and who protect the health and improve the education of all citizens.”¹⁷

– Iglia Ivanova, Economist and Public Interest Researcher

Statistics

Statistics provide an informed picture of the barriers that exist for ABE learners. They describe a pathway that is getting narrower and narrower for citizens as they struggle with poverty and strive to improve their quality of life.

BC Statistics (previously reported in this document)

- Continuing and alarming trend in reduced public funding to both K-12 and post-secondary education and other social safeguards.
- Among the lowest minimum wages in Canada, highest cost of living.
- Second highest child poverty rate in Canada. Many ABE students are parents.
- Most ABE students live below the poverty line, are the working poor, and juggle both paid and unpaid work.

“Ten years ago, it was clear that there was an essential skills problem in Canada. With the release of the PIAAC results, it is clear that the problem has clearly not gone away – and if anything we are heading in the wrong direction.”¹⁸

- TD Economics, Special Report, December 2013

Current levels of funding and educational policies are not achieving the results needed to improve adult literacy levels in Canada.

17. Ivanova, Iglia, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative, Public Interest Research Project, 2014, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/projects/public-interest-research-project>

18. TD Economics, Special Report, *Canada's Literacy and Numeracy Challenge Worsens*, December 12, 2013, <http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/CanadaLiteracyAndNumeracyChallengeWorsens.pdf>

19. *The Best Place on Earth*, Province of BC Strategic Plans, 2006, <http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2006/stplan/>, and 2011-2014, http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2011/stplan/2011_strategic_plan.pdfBC

Statistics (continued)

Statistical information can be useful in deciphering political promises and hyperbole that surround education, training, jobs and employment.

“Make BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.”¹⁹

- Top goal of the BC Government’s Strategic Plan, 2006 and 2014

- The Auditor General for Canada confirmed statistics, and economists exposed the myth of a serious skills shortage in Canada. This finding calls into question the federal Canada Job Grant program.^{20, 21} The Canada Job Grant program shifts funds away from the cancelled federal-provincial Labour Market Agreements and creates a gap in employment preparation programs for hard to employ populations.
- The facts question the BC government’s labour forecast data and timeline around liquid natural gas (LNG) development, and its associated sweeping plan to re-engineer education in order to meet the needs of uncertain prospects and exaggerated projections for LNG in the province.²²

From the Employment Impact review for LNG development in BC:

The employment estimates “are not forecasts and this report is not intended to attribute any probability that they will occur....” and they “do not reflect the actual or expected total impact on the overall BC employment outlook...”²³

– Grant Thornton, Employment Impact Review, February 2013

Technology

Adult Basic Education students need access to computer courses tailored to their literacy skills.

- Computer Literacy is foundational to living and working in today’s world.
- Developing critical thinking and strategies around Internet safety and financial security are important benefits to learners in adult basic education.
- Public post-secondary institutions are equipped to provide articulated computer courses using up-to-date technology.

20. “Auditor General Michael Ferguson confirmed...the federal government was using unreliable statistics...”, Goar, Carol, *How the myth of a Canadian skill shortage was shattered*: Goar, May 13, 2014, http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/05/13/how_the_myth_of_a_canadian_skill_shortage_was_shattered_goar.html

21. Drummond, Don, *Wanted: Good Canadian Labour Market Information*, IRPP Insight, No. 6, June 2014, <http://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/insight-no6.pdf>

22. Schreck, David, *As Jobs Dive, Clark’s Natural Gas Dream Fades, Too – Does premier really expect BC to supply a quarter of the world’s LNG?*, Dec 13, 2013, The Tyee, <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2013/12/13/Clark-Natural-Gas-Dream/>

23. Grant Thornton LLP. A member of Grant Thornton International Ltd, *Employment Impact Review*, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Natural Gas, Feb 2013, http://www.empr.gov.bc.ca/OG/Documents/Grant_Thornton_LNG_Employment_Impacts.pdf, (p.1)

Destabilized Adult Basic Education

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) results¹ show that literacy and numeracy levels in Canada have not improved over the last ten years. Scholars and practitioners both point to dysfunction in the system.

Despite Canada's "well-deserved reputation for research excellence in the field of adult literacy, Canada lacks anything that could be considered a cohesive, coherent or systematic policy approach to adult literacy."²

– National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland, 2011

Why? How?

COMPETING AND OVERLAPPING FEDERAL & PROVINCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- The federal government is responsible for labour market and employment.
- Provincial governments are responsible for education.
- Federal-provincial Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) result in precarious funding for provincial employment training programs for hard to employ populations.
- Precarious federal-provincial agreements for ESL education.
- For Aboriginal students, accreditation and funding is complicated by separate federal (on-reserve) and provincial (off-reserve) jurisdictions over education.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

- A narrow focus on workplace literacy and project-to-project funding at the federal level in the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES).
- BC government shift to privatization and "marketization" of post-secondary education (high tuition fees, a shift away from public post-secondary education, *BC's International Education Strategy*).³
- Limited project-based funding for community literacy programs in BC.⁴
- Cancelled federal-provincial Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) shift federal funding to the Canada Job Grant program, which critics call a taxpayer-paid pre-2015 Election campaign.⁵
- The BC government promotes its Skills For Jobs Blueprint⁶ and shifts funding away from education sectors to uncertain job training and prospects, and exaggerated projections in liquid natural gas (LNG) development.⁷

- The BC Liberals' track record with trades training is dismal and has resulted in deregulation and de-skilling of trades in BC over the last decade. The Industry Trades and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) was deregulated to form the Industry Training Authority (ITA) along the lines of a privatized model.⁸
- BC government neo-liberal policies that keep taxes low, traditionally win support of voters⁹, but result in cuts, funding freezes and shifts, deregulation (e.g., de-skilling of the trades in BC, Employment Standards) and privatization (e.g., health care, post-secondary education); and make life harder for vulnerable citizens.

FROM 2014: FUNDING CUTS AND LACK OF CONSULTATION

2014 has seen widespread and deep cuts to developmental programming nationally and provincially.

- Federal cuts to core funding of national and provincial literacy organizations collapse network of Canadian literacy organizations.
- Cancellation of LMA agreements by the federal government destabilizes provincial employment training programs.
- Cancellation of federal funding for provincial post-secondary ESL programs.
- In December, the BC government reinstated ESL for higher-level language learners only, and with tuition fees attached. The BC government has never provided base-funding for ESL.
- At the same time, without consultation with the sector, the BC government cut \$5 million in adult basic education funding in public post-secondary institutions and encouraged them to start charging tuition fees.
- Without consultation or an understanding of the financial needs of ABE students, the BC government announces the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) to serve only a portion of low-income students. The duration of this funding is not clear.

1. Statistics Canada, *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*, 2013, <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/315/Canadian-PIAAC-Report.EN.pdf>

2. *A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies*, prepared for National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland, 2011, [https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies 110311_1.pdf](https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/A%20Literature%20Review%20of%20International%20Adult%20Literacy%20Policies%20110311_1.pdf), (p. 21)

3. A top link on the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) website, *BC's International Education Strategy*, May 2012, http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/internationaleducation/forms/InternationalEducationStrategy_WEB.PDF

4. BC Ministry of AVED, *Community Adult Literacy Program Applicant's Guide 2013/14*, http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/literacy/docs/2013-14_CALP_Guide.pdf

5. Harris, Sophia, *Ottawa's ads called a pre-election campaign funded by taxpayers*, CBC News online, Dec 9, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/news/story/1.2864611>

6. Another top link on the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) website, *BC's Skills for Jobs Blueprint*, 2014, <http://www.workbc.ca/skills>

7. Moore, Dene, *BC LNG Alliance says LNG boom for BC 'not a foregone conclusion'*, CBC News, The Canadian Press, Oct 8, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-lng-alliance-says-lng-boom-for-b-c-not-a-foregone-conclusion-1.2793160>

8. BC Federation of Labour, *Trades Training and Rebuilding BC's Apprenticeship System*, Spring 2012, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/BCFED/1000-11bre-sjm-trades.pdf>

9. Ross, E. Wayne, *Resisting the Common-nonsense of Neoliberalism: A Report from British Columbia*, University of British Columbia, Workplace – A Journal for Academic Labor, #17, 2010, <http://ois.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/182326/182364>

PROJECT-BASED FUNDING

- The federal Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) funds literacy projects through a Request-for-Proposal system.
- BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) funds community literacy projects through the Community Adult Literacy Program (CALP).
- Short-term project-to-project grants result in insecure programming.
- Community driven project resources are stretched thin by ongoing fundraising, proposal writing and carrying out audit requirements, which distract from teaching and learning.
- Uncertain funding makes program staffing and scheduling difficult.
- There is a reliance on volunteer tutors, a lack of trained instructors, curriculum development and professional development.

HELP WANTED

Reading Coordinator ¹⁰

Implement a high quality literacy program by supervising and managing a team of volunteers

Bachelor of Education Degree required

Car required

Part-time contract

15 hr/wk, \$15/hour

Closing date: December 19, 2014

DEVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

- Governments shift the burden of responsibility to governing boards (school boards, college boards) by requiring them to balance budgets. In this scenario, governments devolve themselves of risk while maintaining strict control.
- Withdrawal of support for ABE programming in the post-secondary system diminishes access to stable, quality Adult Basic Education.
- Erosion of public safeguards (publicly funded ABE, a living wage, social services, employment standards, workers' compensation) diminishes the opportunities for BC's most marginalized citizens to a basic education and a better life.

10. Job Ad, Indeed website, December 5, 2014, http://ca.indeed.com/viewjob?jk=05d2dcd8e1bfbe2a&q=Adult+Learning+Literacy&tk=198d67r4m07913os&from=ja&alid=4b8bdf1b2474dab2&utm_source=jobseeker_emails&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=job_alerts

Essential Skills Training: A Narrow View on Education

Literacy educators are not opposed to the idea of essential skills (reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, digital technology, continuous learning), as essential skills are embedded in our work. However, Essential Skills training, as dictated by the federal government through the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES),¹ promotes a narrowing of the curriculum for adult literacy and adult basic education.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION LEARNERS NEED MORE THAN ESSENTIAL SKILLS

More goes into providing a basic education:

- ⇒ removing barriers for marginalized individuals
- ⇒ allowing for the time it takes for individuals to achieve a basic education
- ⇒ meeting students where they are; self-paced and individualized instruction
- ⇒ gaining knowledge and basic skills that are not just related to a job but important for participating in society
- ⇒ developing study skills and independent learning strategies
- ⇒ personal development
- ⇒ socialization
- ⇒ active citizenship

ABE students were asked, “to what extent their courses helped them to develop five life skills – critical thinking, problem solving, group collaboration, independent learning, and self-confidence. The majority of ABE respondents said that their courses helped them develop these skills.”²

– BC Ministry of Advanced Education, ABE student survey 2013

1. Employment and Social Development Canada website, <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/funding//index.shtml>

2. BC Ministry of AVED, *2013 Developmental Students Outcomes Survey: Report of Findings*, <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe/docs/2013-Developmental-Student-Outcomes-Survey-Report-of-Findings.pdf> (p.17)

PROBLEMS WITH THE REQUEST-FOR-PROPOSAL (RFP) BUSINESS MODEL

Essential Skills training, dictated by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), is based on a request-for-proposal business model that results in reducing access to literacy education for those with the most need.

- A business model favours private service providers over community providers. Community providers lack stable funding, and have fewer resources for fundraising and proposal writing.
- Project-to-project funding creates program uncertainties for quality, stable delivery; hiring staff, and no allowance for curriculum and professional development.
- If funding is tied to short-term performance indicators
 - ⇒ Resources and energy are focused on fulfilling audit requirements instead of on learning and instruction.
 - ⇒ Providers may select participants with higher skills to ensure program success. Funds will go to who will get a job fastest; the lowest skilled, the individuals who need more time and need it most, will not get served.
- Adult basic education students, who in many cases represent the working poor or the hard-to-employ, are not likely to be working where essential skills training is occurring.
- Essential skills training along the lines of a business model represents a move away from instruction and learning to assessment and screening for the workplace.
- There is no proof that the formation of project-by-project business relationships in the provision of adult literacy education improves efficiency or quality.

“In Reading the Future, the Canadian Council on Learning projects that there will be little to no progress in our population’s level of literacy. In fact, by 2031, 47% of adults aged 16 and over — totaling more than 15 million — will continue to have low literacy skills below IALSS Level 3, or the internationally-accepted level of literacy required to cope in a modern society.”³

– Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) and BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED), report: Reading the Future, 2008

3. Canadian council on learning (CCL) and BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED), report: *Reading the Future*, 2008 <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/ReadingFuture/LiteracyReadingFutureReportE.PDF> (p.5)

Adult Basic Education: A Basic Human Right

“We’ve won the argument that literacy matters.... Now perhaps it is time to look out at the ‘margins’ again and present a vision of literacy that embraces a more holistic view. One that views literacy as integral to civic engagement, equity, participation in all aspects of life. Literacy as a human right, not a privilege.”¹

– Brigid Hayes, *Adult Literacy in Canada: Where have we been? Where should we be going?* 2013

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights resulted from the experience of the Second World War.

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.”²

– United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, 1948

Literacy is a fundamental human right.

“Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right.”³

– *Persepolis Declaration, International Symposium on Literacy, UNESCO, 1975*

1. Hayes, Brigid, *Adult Literacy in Canada: Where have we been? Where should we be going?* Saskatchewan Action Research Network, May 27, 2013 <http://sarn.ca/?p=1159>

2. The United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, Article 26, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/- atop>

3. UNESCO, *Education for All*, Global Monitoring Report, Ch 5, Why Literacy Matters, http://www.unesco.org/education/GMR2006/full/chapt5_eng.pdf

Basic Education is for all.

“Basic education for all means that people, whatever their age, have an opportunity, individually and collectively, to realize their potential. It is not only a right, it is also a duty and a responsibility both to others and to society as a whole. It is essential that the recognition of the right to education throughout life should be accompanied by measures to create the conditions required to exercise this right. The challenges of the twenty-first century cannot be met by governments, organizations or institutions alone; the energy, imagination and genius of people and their full, free and vigorous participation in every aspect of life are also needed.”⁴

– The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, Resolution 9, UNESCO, 1997

Adult Basic Education is mandated by the *BC Colleges and Institutes Act* which specifically states:

“The objects of a college include providing comprehensive Adult Basic Education.”⁵

– BC Colleges and Institutes Act, Section 5

“The statutory objects of a college are to provide comprehensive courses of study at the first and second year levels of a baccalaureate degree program, applied baccalaureate degree programs, adult basic education, training, and continuing education.”⁶

– BC Ministry of Advanced Education website

It is time to re-frame the conversation on literacy and adult basic education in BC.

4. UNESCO, *Adult Education: The Hamburg Declaration – The Agenda for the Future*, Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, July 1997, <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/con5eng.pdf>, (p.3)

5. *BC Colleges and Institutes Act*, http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96052_01-section5

6. BC Ministry of Advanced Education website under “legislation”, http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/publications/legislation.htm-public_institutions, (Dec 22, 2014)