

## **RESEARCH REPORTS/RAPPORTS DE RECHERCHE**

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### **A SURVEY OF ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH IN CANADA**

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#### **Abstract**

The 1986 Membership of CASAE was surveyed to ascertain the extent and nature of adult education research in Canada. Analysis of data suggests that two variables, whether or not the member is affiliated with a university and whether or not they are expected to publish, account for much of the difference regarding the extent and nature of research.

The major findings are that only 10% of university affiliates perceived research as their primary job, only 4% of the respondents spend more than 40% of their time on research, that time and financial support were constraints for the majority of respondents, and that the research areas in which researchers are working is exceedingly diverse.

#### **Résumé**

Pour établir l'ampleur et la nature de la recherche en éducation des adultes au Canada, on a fait un sondage auprès des membres de l'ACEEA de l'année 1986. L'analyse des données suggère que deux variables surtout rendent compte de la différence dans l'ampleur et la nature de la recherche. Ces variables sont: le fait que le membre est affilié ou pas à une université et le fait qu'il doive ou non publier.

Les résultats les plus importants sont les suivants. Dix pourcent des membres affiliés à une université perçoivent la recherche comme leur principal travail; seulement 4% des répondants

consacrent plus de 40% de leur temps à la recherche; le temps et le support financier sont des contraintes pour la majorité des répondants; finalement, les champs de recherche sont extrêmement variés.

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While the importance of research to the development of adult education may not be seriously challenged, the current status of adult education research activities in Canada and its contribution to the knowledge base is not well understood. Convinced that discussions regarding the state of Canadian adult education research would benefit from an empirical base, the authors undertook a survey of research practices and publishing problems experienced by Canadian adult educators.

From a Canadian perspective the history of adult education as a field of study is short. Griffin and Roberts report that:

...it was not until 1961 that Coolie Verner was named the first full-time professor of adult education at The University of British Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Since that time it would appear that the cadre of adult educators interested in research has grown. The membership of the Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education, established in 1980, is not over 350. The question remains as to how many of these individuals actively are engaged in doing research, what is the extent and nature of that research, and what issues and problems are being confronted.

Courtney has stated that "it is not in the nature of the adult education enterprise to socialize new generations of researchers".<sup>2</sup> If this statement is true, such a situation could be problematic for the development of a body of knowledge associated with the field of adult education. The question, according to Courtney, is whether there is a sufficiently large cadre of researchers to "advance the cause of adult education according to the tenets of systematic enquiry".<sup>3</sup> Insufficient numbers of researchers may represent a major obstacle to the growth of adult education as a field of study and the ability to generate the knowledge and understanding necessary to guide practice. In turn, the growth of a knowledge base will say much about the credibility and the prestige of adult education as a distinct field of educational practice.

A second obstacle in conducting research in adult education is that the multidisciplinary nature of the endeavour results in a fragmented research effort. Cross<sup>4</sup> believes that the multidisciplinary and applied nature of the field is one of the stumbling blocks to theory building. The multidisciplinary approach may result in an eclectic approach to conducting research with the consequence that few areas of study receive attention sufficient to develop coherent theories that will inform practice. Additionally, a critical mass of researchers is unlikely to converge on any one area of research.

The applied nature of the field also creates an obstacle in terms of the ability to do both basic and applied research with limited human and financial resources. As Deshler and Hagen state,

the gap or tension between basic and applied research priorities is long standing and fundamental to the composition of adult education research.<sup>5</sup>

Are we encouraging and nurturing new generations of researchers or are adult educators still preoccupied with the pressing issues of practice? What should be our priority?

It would seem to be time to determine the state of adult education research in Canada if we hope to understand and encourage research efforts. Only recently have we gained an understanding of the extent of Canadian adult education participation from *One in Every Five: A Survey of Adult Education in Canada*,<sup>6</sup> the only comparable survey having been conducted in 1935.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps now is the time to assess the current involvement of Canadian adult educators in conducting research activities and their contribution to the knowledge base of the field.

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the extent and nature of adult education research activities in Canada. A secondary focus was to identify obstacles encountered by adult education researchers. Encouragement and improvement of basic research activities can be only logically approached with an awareness of its current state and existing barriers. It is to this end that we attempt to provide a baseline as to the nature of adult education research activities in Canada.

## Methodology

Data were gathered from members of the Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education (CASAE) using a pre-tested survey. This is perhaps the most comprehensive organization of those interested and involved in adult education research in Canada. Of the 247 CASAE members sent questionnaires in 1986, 150 or 60.7% were returned. This response rate was achieved by sending one reminder and is regarded as acceptable.<sup>8</sup>

By examining completed forms - which indicated that the respondent wished to receive the results of the study - against the membership list of CASAE, it appeared that there was a greater representation of those known by the authors to be active adult education researchers than those known to be primarily practitioners. We suspect, therefore, that the final response had a greater representation of active researchers than in the CASAE membership as a whole.

To ensure adequate reliability and validity, two pretests of the instrument were conducted on five adult education researchers. Following each self-administration, the trial test subjects were interviewed to determine question clarity and to ensure consistency of meaning. To avoid contamination between administrations the minimum time between trial tests was one month.

The instrument pre-tests also provided assurance of acceptable face-validity. Test subjects were queried as to the construction and meaning of each questionnaire item. As well, comparison of responses between test respondents indicated consistent responses to each item.

To the authors' knowledge, this was the first time data had been collected to assess the extended nature of problems confronted in adult education research in Canada. Our research strategy, therefore, was to gain a basic understanding and data base. This called for an instrument which would gather the broadest range of information possible including unanticipated responses. Thus, most items asked for factual data and were nominal or open-ended in nature. Only one question, barriers to publishing, asked for ordinal responses. Although the results of the study may not be surprising, it does provide a beginning base and confirmation of previous common-sense impressions upon which more extensive studies may be built.

A further difficulty was faced when it became apparent that graduate students, who are student members of CASAE, may have responded as either "university affiliates - expected to publish" or as "non-university affiliates - expected to publish". There was no concise method to compensate for this contamination. Seven or 44% of non-university affiliates who were expected to publish identified themselves as graduates.

## **Findings**

Preliminary examination of the data suggested that institutional affiliation and whether or not the individual was expected to publish were critical factors. Respondents' affiliation was determined by means of a close-ended question which asked with what type of institution they were associated: university, college, secondary school, government, and other. It was not determined whether respondents worked on a full-time or part-time basis. The first classification compared university affiliation with non-university affiliation. Each of these classifications was further subdivided into those expected to publish and those who were not expected to publish. While there were numerous possible comparisons, it is felt that the presentation of findings in this manner is maximally revealing while being as parsimonious as possible.

## **Demographic**

Demographic data related to age and sex are presented in Table 1. The findings suggest that for university affiliates, those expected to publish are older than those who are not expected to publish. On the surface this would appear to be somewhat of an anomaly. One might surmise that younger university personnel would be expected to publish to a greater extent than older individuals. Older individuals might be expected to have tenure and perhaps hold administrative responsibilities, and therefore have less need to publish.

A second explanation pertaining to age is related to the nature of the appointment and concomitant academic qualifications. Seventy-two percent (16) of the university affiliated respondents who were not expected to publish held administrative or programme development responsibilities. The "university affiliations" category seems to be comprised of two groups: continuing education unit members whose primary responsibilities are in programming, and those who are teaching in (primarily) education divisions or departments. Those not expected to

publish appear to have considerable teaching or programming responsibilities and typically have a master's degree. It may be that university associates who are expected to publish are older because adult educators typically may obtain their doctorate later in their careers and along with this assume responsibility for research and publishing.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Data**

Age	University(72)				Non-University(78)			
	Expected To Publish(50) <sup>1</sup>		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(16)		Not Expected To Publish(62)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
30	0	0.0	1	4.5	0	0.0	2	3.2
30-39	7	14.0	11	50.0	7	42.0	27	43.5
40-49	19	38.0	4	18.2	5	31.4	14	22.4
50-59	17	34.0	5	22.8	3	18.9	14	22.4
60+	4	8.0	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	1.6
No Res- ponse	3	6.0	0	0.0	1	6.3	4	6.5
<b>Sex</b>								
Male	30	60.0	11	50.0	6	37.5	26	41.9
Female	19	38.0	11	50.0	10	62.5	35	56.5
No Res- ponse	1	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.6

In terms of gender, 60% of university affiliates who are expected to publish were male. There was no difference on gender for those not expected to publish. For non-university affiliates, the reverse pattern was found; that is, 62.5% of those expected to publish were female. Further exploration of the data revealed that most of the females expected to publish were either graduate students or consultants. Apparently there is a greater proportion of females in these groups. However, the data does not permit an explanation of why this may be so.

### Academic Background

Seventy-four percent of university affiliates who are expected to publish held doctorates. On the other hand, there were few

<sup>1</sup> Number of subjects shown in parenthesis.

doctorates in the non-university group regardless of expectation to publish.

When asked which route was pursued to qualify as an adult educator, only 46% of university affiliates who were expected to publish reported a doctorate in adult education. This discrepancy between 74% of those who have doctorates and 46% who have doctorates in adult education would suggest a significant cross-over from other disciplines to adult education in the university setting. While there was no difference across expectancy to publish for university affiliates, 75% of non-university affiliates who were expected to publish had specialized in adult education. Eighty percent of university affiliates expected to publish had specific training in adult education but this was lower than those not expected to publish and lower than either of the publication categories for non-university affiliates. The fact that 20% of university associates are expected to publish but have no training in adult education would again suggest significant cross-over from other disciplines.

### **Affiliation, Responsibility and Experience**

The two largest categories of non-university respondents were "college" and "other". The "other" category included individuals who were consultants or affiliated with hospitals, school boards, and churches. The findings also indicate that 50 or 60% of the 72 university affiliates are expected to publish while only 16 or 22% of the 78 non-university affiliates are expected to publish.

Only 82% of university affiliates who were expected to publish were presently doing research for publication; and 36% of those university affiliates not expected to publish were presently doing research. This pattern was similar for non-university affiliates, with figures of 87% and 36% respectively. While caution must be taken in interpreting these data, there would seem to be considerable individual discretion in doing research for publication amongst the CASAE membership.

Within the university affiliate group 72% of those expected to publish had from 6 to 20 years experience, while 55% of those not expected to publish had from 0 to 10 years experience. This would probably reflect the differences between career expectations and continuity of university professoriate and university continuing education personnel. Fifty percent of those who were expected to publish and were in a non-university setting had five or less years experience in adult education, compared to 8% of

those in university settings. These results are consistent with the demographic findings discussed previously concerning age.

## Job Description

The primary job description classification is presented in Table 2. It was derived from the self-reported estimate of time devoted to various job activities.

**Table 2**  
**Primary Job**

Primary Job	University (72)				Non-University (78)			
	Expected To Publish(50) <sup>2</sup>		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(16)		Not Expected To Publish(62)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Research	5	10.0	1	4.5	5	31.3	5	8.1
Teaching	22	44.0	4	18.2	3	18.8	15	24.2
Administration- Management Program	13	26.0	15	68.2	2	12.5	24	38.7
Development	5	10.0	1	4.5	2	12.5	4	6.5
Other	4	8.0	1	4.5	4	25.0	10	16.1
No Response	1	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	6.5

Of the university-affiliated group who were expected to publish, 54% reported their primary functions as either research or teaching. A surprising 36% of the university group who were expected to publish saw their primary responsibility as administrative-management or programme development. One is left with an impression that even those who are expected to publish in university settings carry a range of responsibilities. Only 10% of the respondents perceived their main duties as that of research. Turning to those affiliated with universities but not expected to publish, the largest percentage (68.2%) were involved primarily in administrative-management functions. As one might expect, this group appears to be comprised of those associated with university continuing education programming roles. In the non-university group a significant percentage (31.3%) are expected to publish. This group seems to be comprised of graduate students and consultants.

<sup>2</sup> Number of subjects shown in parenthesis.

To try to ascertain the amount of research activity, the percentage of time devoted to various job responsibilities was analyzed and calculated. While the great majority of university affiliates spent some time doing research, most devoted less than 40% of their time on research and half spent less than 20% of their time on research. For non-university affiliates there was an even distribution of those involved in research in terms of time spent. With the exception of non-university administrators and university affiliates not expected to publish, few respondents stated that they spend more than 80% of their time on any one job responsibility.

### **Barriers to Publishing**

Respondents were asked to what degree various factors were perceived to be barriers to publishing in adult education. Across all groups, time and financial constraints were the most frequently cited barriers to publishing. Time constraints were reported as a "considerable" barrier by 49% of the university expected to publish group and by 53% of the non-university expected to publish group. When the "considerable" and "somewhat" categories are combined, a large percentage of respondents in all groups felt institutional recognition was a barrier. While institutional recognition was less of an issue for the university expected to publish group, nonetheless, 39% of this group stated that lack of institutional recognition was "considerable" or "somewhat" of a barrier. For a university group expected to publish, the question arises as to why 39% of this group felt a lack of institutional recognition. Perhaps universities are giving mixed messages regarding publishing. That is, they expect individuals to publish but do not provide the time and resources to do an adequate job.

Fifty-four percent of the non-university expected to publish group reported that institutional recognition was considerable or somewhat of a barrier. In fact, lack of institutional recognition of the not expected to publish group was seen as a barrier for 52% (combined categories) of these respondents. These results suggest that there may be mixed signals regarding expectations and perhaps some conflict between research and practice in institutions that have an orientation to practice.

Another finding across all groups relates to publishing standards, mentoring and confidence. Over 40% of the expected to publish group, and very close to this figure for the not expected to publish group, identified unknown publications standards, lack of

mentoring, and lack of confidence as "considerable" or "somewhat" barriers to publishing. The dominant barrier was unknown publishing standards with 46% of the university expected to publish group seeing this as a barrier. It should also be noted that a similar barrier, unclear style guidelines, was reported by over 35% of all the respondents. Given these findings, it would seem fair to speculate that there is an opportunity and need to inform those wishing to publish as to the expectations and to assist them in gaining confidence to write and submit work for publication. Perhaps part of the solution is the identification of colleagues and mentors who could work with the novice researcher.

### **Areas of Research**

In addition to identifying barriers to publishing, the respondents were asked to specify the area(s) in which they were presently conducting or planning to conduct research. The most obvious finding was the immense diversity of research interests. There were few common areas of research among the respondents. The results were loosely classified into 19 areas of research and the frequency of identification for each area ranged from one to six individuals. The most frequently identified areas of research (six individuals each) were adult education, adult learning, and administration.

The adult education category encompassed issues such as history, philosophy, research, and adult education professionalization. The adult learning category included issues surrounding andragogy, motivation, and support services. The administration category included such topics as change, organizational development, and management styles. There were six categories each in which four individuals were doing research: adult educators; continuing education; distance education; international education; special interest groups; and women's education. Other categories in order of frequency were: gerontology; adult development; literacy; computers; the chronically ill; second language learning; religious education; retraining; dropout; and miscellaneous.

### **Number and Type of Publication**

Concerning the number and the type of publications reported, the results are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. Because of the relatively large number of individuals who either did not answer the question, or who responded in an inappropriate manner, some

caution is required in interpreting these data. University affiliates are clearly responsible for the majority of publications.

**Table 3**  
**Number and Type of Publications: University Affiliates**

	Journal Articles				Conference Proceedings			
	Expected To Publish(50) <sup>3</sup>		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	21	18	6	3	24	16	8	3
6-10	7	5	3	0	6	0	2	0
11-20	3	3	0	0	2	1	0	1
20+	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	1
No Response	16	22	12	19	17	33	12	17

	Book Reviews				Book Chapters			
	Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	12	10	5	1	12	10	6	1
6-10	4	0	0	0	3	1	1	0
11-20	5	3	1	0	2	0	0	0
20+	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
No Response	27	37	15	21	33	39	15	21

	Books				Other			
	Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	16	9	2	2	7	7	2	0
6-10	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
11-20	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
20+	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
No Response	33	41	19	20	39	41	19	22

<sup>3</sup> Number of subjects shown in parenthesis.

**Table 4**  
**Number and Type of Publications: Non-University Affiliates**

	Journal Articles				Conference Proceedings			
	Expected To Publish(50) <sup>4</sup>		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	1	2	14	17	4	1	13	5
6-10	1	1	2	2	0	0	1	1
11-20	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
20+	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
No Response	14	13	43	47	12	14	47	56

	Book Reviews				Book Chapters			
	Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	2	0	5	0	3	0	5	1
6-10	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
11-20	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1
20+	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
No Response	14	16	55	61	13	16	55	60

	Books				Other			
	Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)		Expected To Publish(50)		Not Expected To Publish(22)	
	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other	A.E.	Other
1-5	0	0	4	5	0	2	3	3
6-10	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
11-20	0	0	3	1	1	0	1	0
20+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
No Response	16	16	53	56	15	14	58	58

<sup>4</sup> Number of subjects shown in parenthesis.

There appear to be only a few whose publications exceeded five. This lack of published productivity might support the contention that there are few individuals dedicated to doing research in adult education in Canada. As a benchmark, the publication record of North America's 17 most prolific adult education researchers averaged 38 articles, 9 book chapters, 4 books and 6 monographs.<sup>9</sup>

As might be expected, journal articles and conference papers were the most common forms of publication. It is also worth noting the large proportion of publications in areas other than adult education. Again it would appear that adult education has attracted a number of individuals who have done considerable research in other disciplines. With this multidisciplinary focus, one might expect considerable borrowing and reformulating of ideas -- a notion which seems to be born out in these findings.

## **Discussion**

The major findings of this survey are that only 10% of university affiliates have stated that research is their primary job and only four percent of the respondents spend more than 40% of their time on research. Time and finances were constraints for the vast majority of researchers and it would appear to be a rare exception to find two researchers working in the same area.

If the findings of this survey are generalizable, then adult education research in Canada faces two serious problems. The first is that only a small proportion of time is devoted to research activities by those who would appear to have an active interest in research given their membership in CASAE. With a 1989 membership exceeding 350 there appears to be considerable interest in research but much less actual research activity. The second problem reflected in the data is the broad range of research interests and the resulting fragmentation of research efforts. Without the contribution and stimulus of a critical mass of researchers in a particular area of endeavour, adult educators largely are dependent upon creative individuals working in relative isolation with the hope of making a significant breakthrough or contribution to the field.

Without critical analysis of research findings by others working in similar areas of study, the body of knowledge associated with the field of adult education is not likely to develop very rapidly. It is therefore essential that through our own initiatives and those of CASAE we support and encourage the involvement of greater

numbers of adult educators in research activities. Because of our small numbers in Canada, it is equally important to work cooperatively with adult education researchers in other countries. Thus, such forums as the Trans-Atlantic Research Exchange in Leeds in 1988, and the annual Adult Education Research Conference in North America figure prominently in the encouragement and development of competent Canadian researchers.

This study adds emphasis to the recent observation by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) that while adult education is an emerging field of research, the composition of CASAE, which includes both researchers and practitioners, will tend to diffuse its move to a heightened level of scholarly pursuit. At the heart of encouraging research efforts is the very issue of the nature of CASAE, and whether it is really a scholarly society or a forum for researcher-practitioner interaction. The possibility of addressing practitioner needs and of still being able to meet the criteria established for SSHRC support will be a serious challenge.

The issue of practitioner-researcher concerns was noted previously when Deshler and Hagen<sup>10</sup> state that there is an inherent tension in adult education between basic and applied research. While in the best of all worlds we should do both basic and applied research, limited resources and qualified researchers do not make it realistic to expect significant contributions in both areas. In short, further fragmentation of our research efforts will result.

Before those committed to research in adult education even can consider the quality of research, we must ensure that there are sufficient numbers of researchers engaged in research activity. This demands more than tacit support of research activities. Researchers must be given the time and financial support to conduct their research. Courtney<sup>11</sup> suggests that good research will flourish with adequate support, but in "the absence of such support ... no amount of agenda-setting will contribute a single jot to the advance of adult education as a serious discipline".<sup>12</sup>

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