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# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

January 26, 2022

## Adult Education— Unearth this Buried Treasure

*Previously published in the Winnipeg Free Press, January 26, 2022*



**A**dult education in Manitoba is a largely buried treasure. Outstanding work is done throughout the province, but the full potential is not being realized. A re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy would produce many important benefits, including strengthened families, enhanced employability, and an important step toward reconciliation. Adult education in Manitoba is comprised of Adult Learning Centres offering the mature grade 12, and adult literacy programs for those with literacy levels too low for high school. The system is abysmally underfunded—frozen for years at a level not remotely close to meeting needs. Numbers of adults enrolled, of graduates and of programs have all declined steeply. There were 40 adult literacy programs in 2009/10; in

2019/20 there were 30. Yet the 2013/14 Annual Report of the Province’s Adult Learning and Literacy branch stated there were 192,600 Manitobans between the ages of 16 and 65 whose literacy levels were too low to enable them to participate fully in society.

The adult education system is also full of inequities. Some programs get reasonable financial support from the school divisions with which they are affiliated; others get no such support, and are, as one rural adult educator put it, “in dire straits” financially. Teachers in some programs get the same salaries as teachers in the K-12 system. Most adult education teachers are paid less than K-12 teachers, creating high teacher turnover, which adversely affects students.

Manitoba does not treat adult education as an important part of the educational

there is an alternative.

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continuum, on a par with K-12 and post-secondary education. It's an afterthought, the poor country cousin of the education system. Adult education programs get less than one percent of the total provincial Education budget. As a result, there is a huge unmet demand. We are losing the skills of vast numbers of Manitobans as a result. Chartered bank economists have estimated that high levels of illiteracy cost Canada "hundreds of billions of dollars in lost opportunity."

Most Canadians are now aware of the genocidal character of the residential school system. The intergenerational effects still reverberate through the province, adversely affecting Indigenous families and Indigenous education. A 2016 study found that 71 percent of Indigenous people aged 20-24 and living on reserve in Manitoba did not have a high school diploma. One northern adult educator told me that many Indigenous adults hoping to take the mature high school program come with the practical equivalent of grade 3 or 4. They cannot possibly embark upon a high school program. She cannot get the funding to establish the literacy programming they would need to be able to take the mature high school program.

Canada has failed Indigenous people educationally. Justice Murray Sinclair has often said, "Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." Yet Manitoba continues to fail to invest in the kinds of adult educational programming needed by Indigenous people who have left or been pushed out of the K-12 system. While about 18 percent of Manitoba's population are Indigenous, approximately 45 percent of those enrolled in Adult Learning Centres are Indigenous. Many more would be enrolled if the funding were there to create enough spaces.

Adult education, properly funded, would be an appropriate step toward reconciliation, given the damage done by residential schools.

Proper funding of adult education would also be an important anti-poverty initiative. Poverty is a massive problem in Manitoba. In 2018, 87,730 children were growing up in families living in poverty. Countless studies over many decades

and in many countries confirm that poverty is a primary cause, and likely the primary cause, of poor educational outcomes. Let us open up adult education to these parents, so that they can pull themselves out of poverty, and so that their children are then likely to do better in school.

*Unearth this Buried Treasure: Adult Education in Manitoba* is a new study just released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba. The study is based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 30 Directors of adult education programs in all parts of the province and lays out a roadmap for a re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy in full. Were a Manitoba government to embark upon such a strategy, many lives would be improved, reconciliation would be advanced, and the province as a whole would benefit enormously from the influx of talent into our workplaces.

*Jim Silver is Professor Emeritus at the University of Winnipeg, and a Research Associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba. [Unearth this Buried Treasure: Adult Education in Manitoba](#) can be found at [www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)*

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References available upon request.