

SYNTHESIS: WHAT THIS REPORT TELLS US

The 2009–2010 *State of Learning in Canada* provides the most current information on the Canadian learning landscape, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how Canadians are faring as lifelong learners.

As in previous *State of Learning* reports, this update reflects CCL's vision of learning as a lifelong process. Our research affirms time and again that the skills and knowledge that citizens bring to their families, their workplaces and their communities help determine a country's economic success and overall quality of life.

It is this core value that continues to guide our research and our commitment to fostering a learning society, in which all members can develop their full potential as active, engaged learners and contributing members of their community.

This update takes a lifecourse approach, beginning with learning in the early childhood learning and school-based education through to the formal and informal learning of adults. Highlights from the recently released report on the *State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* (2009), which introduced the first application of a comprehensive approach to measuring Aboriginal Learning in Canada, are also included.

HIGHLIGHTS

Early Childhood Learning

Learning in the first five years of childhood has critical implications for well-being and later success in school, at work, and in the community—more so than learning in any other stage of life. It involves the development of a range of skills, including physical, cognitive, language and communications, and emotional and social. Early learning is influenced by the quality of the education and/or care environment.

Physical development:

Physical development during the early childhood years can affect play, exploration and interpersonal interactions. The development of fine-motor skills is necessary to prepare young children for common school tasks, such as controlling a pencil or turning a page.

Research indicates that the majority of Canadian children three years old and younger have average or above-average fine-motor skills.

Cognitive development

Cognitive development includes mental processes such as thinking and reasoning. According to the most recent results of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), the majority of Canadian children aged four and five display an average or advanced level of cognitive development. They are able to recognize and use geometric shapes, use symbols like letters and words, and comprehend numbers.



Language and communications skills

Recent data show that most young children in Canada demonstrate average communication skills—they are able to vocalize and understand oral speech and convey a message to someone else.

Being read to daily also plays a critical role in developing language and communication skills. Encouragingly, a higher proportion of young children in Canada are being read to daily than was the case a decade ago.



Emotional and social development

Most young children in Canada are developing at an average or above-average rate in personal and social skills. Levels of physical aggression improved slightly from the previous year, while indirect aggression (such as taking revenge or spreading gossip) was unchanged.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The education and care environment a child experiences plays a critical role in their overall development. However, a recent report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) ranked Canada at the very bottom of 25 developed countries in the quality of ECEC programs in terms of access, financing and policy.

Learning in School

During the elementary and secondary school years, children and youth develop the skills they need to make the successful transition to adulthood. Young learners' performance in science, mathematics, problem solving, reading and other competencies is linked to later achievements, such as participation in post-secondary education, better-paying jobs, and more stable employment.

Science and environmental awareness

A growing number of jobs today call for the technical competence and complex problem-solving skills provided by science courses offered during the formal years of education. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), knowledge and skills in science are critical to economic progress in an increasingly technology-based society.

The most recent data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicates that a higher proportion of Canada's 15-year-olds are top performers in science compared to students of the same age in other OECD countries.

Further, our schools are successfully educating children and youth about personal and social responsibility related to environmental issues ranging from air pollution to energy shortages to nuclear waste. However, research indicates that only a minority of students believe that environmental issues will improve in the next 20 years.

Costs associated with non-completion of high school

Research has shown that high-school graduates are more employable, have a wider selection of jobs to choose from and earn more money than those who leave school before obtaining their diploma.

Non-completion of high school has been shown to have enormous social and economic implications, including costly expenditures on social services and programs, education, employment, and criminality, and lower economic productivity and health. Students who drop out cost Canada's social assistance programs and criminal justice system more than \$1.3 billion annually.

Encouragingly, over the last 20 years, fewer students are dropping out.

Post-secondary Education

Post-secondary education is the cornerstone of a skilled workforce, which is linked to higher productivity, innovation and economic growth, and to the strengthening of communities through higher civic engagement and social cohesion. It also offers widespread benefits to individuals including: higher wages and job satisfaction, fewer periods of unemployment and improved health and quality of life.

Data show that younger Canadians are generally more educated than their older counterparts and that they are more inclined to choose a university education over a college diploma or trades certification.

Enrolment in the trades

Enrolment in the trades appears to be on the rise, perhaps in response to labour market demand. More individuals were enrolled in apprenticeship training programs in 2007 than in 2006, more than double the level recorded a decade before, in 1997.

Further, more Canadians completed their apprenticeship training in 2007 than in the previous year, the fastest rate of yearly growth in the last 10 years.

Multiple pathways to PSE

Many young Canadians are participating in and completing post-secondary programs along different pathways than students from previous years. Some students still follow the traditional linear pathway through PSE, while many follow less direct routes, which can include attending more than one post-secondary institution or switching programs of study, and often while combining both work and study.

Results of Statistics Canada's 2007 National Graduates Survey indicated that a higher proportion of 2005 graduates followed an indirect pathway to, and through, their post-secondary studies compared with graduates from the Class of 2000. Approximately one-half of the graduates surveyed did not enter PSE directly from high school. In addition, more 2005 graduates had pursued previous post-secondary studies.



Monitoring student debt load is important to understanding issues of persistence in PSE. The 2007 National Graduates Survey (Class of 2005) indicated that nearly one-half of all graduates in 2005, who did not pursue further education, had incurred a student debt upon graduation.

Although most post-secondary students in Canada are between the ages of 18 and 24, participation rates for older learners in education, particularly post-secondary education, must be considered if Canada's approach to lifelong learning is to move forward. According to Statistics Canada's Access and Support to Education and Training Survey (ASETS), in 2008 a notable proportion of Canadians aged 25 and older participated in an education program.

Adult Learning

Adult learning can take many forms, including a return to formal education and non-formal and informal learning activities. Learning plays a critical role in enabling Canadian adults to maintain the skills and knowledge needed to make informed decisions and lead successful lives. Research has shown that individuals with higher levels of education tend to lead longer and healthier lives, are more engaged in their community, and express greater personal satisfaction with their lives.

Learning and health

An individual's health literacy—their ability to perform health-related tasks such as reading nutrition labels, following medication directions, or understanding safety instructions—can have a direct bearing on their health. Research has shown that an individual with more education is better able to gather and interpret health-related information, which has implications for their health.

The 2008 Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning (SCAL) showed that Canadian adults relied on multiple sources of information on health and well-being, but those with more education were more sceptical about the reliability of certain sources.

Work-related learning and training

Learning for work can involve the acquisition, upgrading and updating of job-specific skills, as well as the strengthening of soft skills, such as communication, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The learning can be formal, non-formal, or informal (including self-directed) and can take place on-site or away from the workplace. The availability of on-the-job training is especially important to Canadian workers who want to improve their skills but may not be able to access the training they need outside of work.

According to ASETS, in 2008 the participation rate for working-age adults in job-related education or training increased significantly from 2002. For the most part, this increase is attributable to an increase in job-related training while participation in job-related education programs remained unchanged.

Volunteering in the community

Participation in activities such as volunteering in the community can foster a sense of community engagement that can support the sharing of information and knowledge. Research has suggested that adults who are more active in community organizations, as volunteers or as non-volunteers, are more likely to participate in adult learning.

Almost half of Canadians aged 15 and over volunteered during 2007, a rate that has largely remained the same since 2004.

Aboriginal Learning

Highlights from the State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada are presented in this update. They include updates of standard indicators such as high-school completion rates but also data that highlight new information about how Aboriginal people learn, derived from new data sources, such as exposure to Elders, use of traditional skills, participation in Aboriginal cultural activities, and participation in extracurricular social activities.



Elders

New information shows that in 2006 approximately four in 10 off-reserve Aboriginal youth interacted with Elders at least once a week (outside of school). Inuit youth reported the highest interaction with Elders followed by First Nations youth living off-reserve and Métis youth.

Use of traditional skills

Learning from the land—through the use of traditional skills such as hunting, fishing, trapping and camping—is an essential aspect of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning. Acquiring these skills entails a significant amount of experiential learning—a purposeful mode of learning that is most often associated with activities that occur outside the classroom.

According to Statistic Canada's Aboriginal People's Survey (APS), half of all Aboriginal youth and adults living off reserve had taken part in hunting, fishing, trapping or camping in 2006. The proportions were much higher for Aboriginal youth and adults living in rural communities, particularly Inuit living in northern communities, compared to those living in smaller towns and large cities.

Participation in cultural events

Despite reports of often limited cultural opportunities, in 2006 more than one-quarter of all off-reserve Aboriginal children aged five and under participated in or attended a culturally-related activity such as singing, drum dancing, fiddling, gatherings or ceremonies in the preceding year.

High-school non-completion rates

Academic success among Aboriginal youth can vary tremendously—among Aboriginal groups, across geographic regions and between communities. Existing indicators of academic success must be approached with a degree of caution, and the urge to over-simplify resisted.

In 2006, three times as many Aboriginal young adults aged 20 to 24 had not completed high school, compared with the rate for non-Aboriginal adults.

The rate of non-completion was even higher for First Nations living on reserve and for Inuit living in remote communities. These numbers are distressing given the importance of a high-school diploma in the pursuit of further education, training and employment.

Participation in extracurricular activities

In 2006, off-reserve Aboriginal youth aged 6 to 14 participated in extracurricular activities at rates equal to or above the rate for Canadian youth. Almost one in three reported participating in social clubs or groups on a regular basis, while more than one-third participated in art or music activities and more than two-thirds were active in sports.



Participation in post-secondary education

From 2001 to 2006, university attainment among Aboriginal people increased but still remained well behind university attainment rates for non-Aboriginal people. However, research shows that the majority of Aboriginal people who participate in PSE attend either a college or trade school, rather than a university. The proportion of Aboriginal adults who had completed a college diploma was on par with non-Aboriginal adults.

Canada's vast geography can play a role in the ability of many Aboriginal people to participate in PSE. Distance education—or the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to support formal learning—is increasingly being looked to as a means of supporting Aboriginal people living in remote areas. In 2006, almost one in five Aboriginal people aged 15 to 64 took some form post-secondary programming via distance education.

CONCLUSION

While Canada has much to celebrate with regard to its formal education sector, we cannot afford to remain complacent. Lack of progress in lifelong learning threatens to undermine the development of our greatest asset—the potential of our people.

As this update indicates, Canada has made little, if any, progress in lifelong learning over the past several years.

We remain in a holding pattern that contradicts what we profess to know is true – that securing a sustainable future and quality of life depends on the development of our people.

If left unchecked, lack of progress in learning at every stage of life could soon translate into increased pressures on many sectors of Canada's economy including social assistance programs, the health care system and the criminal justice system. Importantly, these pressures also diminish Canada's economic competitiveness.



Economics is but one part of the equation that defines the success of Canada. As CCL has often stated, the very future of Canadian society depends on our willingness to invest in lifelong learning in all its dimensions, to build on our solid foundation of formal education, while also addressing systemic weaknesses that undermine our current and future success.