

Excerpt from

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Monday, June 5, 2006

10:00 a.m.

Waterford Room, Hilton Vancouver Metrotown
Burnaby, BC



Present: John Nuraney, MLA (Chair); Richard T. Lee, MLA; Lorne Mayencourt, MLA; Mary Polak, MLA; Doug Routley, MLA; John Rustad, MLA; Diane Thorne, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Gregor Robertson, MLA (Deputy Chair); John Horgan, MLA; Daniel Jarvis, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 10:24 a.m.
2. Opening statement by the Chair, John Nuraney, MLA.
3. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:

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| 1) Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver | Shawn Bayes |
| 2) Douglas College | Ted James, Mardi Joyce, Bob Logelin,
Carol St. Jean |
| 3) University College of the Fraser Valley | Sue Brigden, Julia Dodge |
| 4) Vancouver Community College
Faculty Association | Nina Kozakiewicz, Lyn Lennig |
| 5) Vancouver Community College
Faculty Association | Laurie Gould, Stephanie
Jewell, Ingrid Kolsteren |
| 6) Wai Ng | |
| 7) Aboriginal Mother Centre Society | Penelope Irons, Grace Tait |
| 8) Burnaby School District Parenting and Family
Literacy Centres | Doreen George, Souad Hage-Hassan,
Ben Qui |
| 9) BC Federation of Labour | Jim Sinclair |
| 10) Vaughan Evans | |
| 11) IIG - All Nations Institute | Sean Kocsis |

4. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 1:17 p.m.

**John Nuraney, MLA
Chair**

The next presenter is from the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, from the ESL program. It's Lyn Lennig and Nina. Are you both going to make a joint presentation?

L. Lennig: Yes.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Just to warn you that you have ten minutes to do what you need to do.

L. Lennig: We wish to thank the Select Standing Committee on Education for this opportunity to speak on the challenges of providing English language education to ESL adults. In addition to this oral presentation, the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association will be submitting a fuller written report to the committee.

My name is Lyn Lennig, and my colleague is Nina Kozakiewicz. We are here today as representatives of the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association. As you may know, VCC is a key provider of English language education to adult immigrants in the lower mainland. Our association represents, among others, the ESL faculty at VCC, who are professional educators widely recognized for their expertise in English language education for non-native speakers of English.

To assist the committee in their search for effective strategies to address literacy challenges in B.C., our submission will focus on how access to English language education is a literacy issue for English-as-a-second-language adults. We will outline some challenges and some strategies and actions that we think might address some of these challenges.

If the committee focuses on literacy challenges only for those who have less than eight years of education in a first language, it would exclude a large number of ESL immigrants from this discussion. Government statistics show that B.C. receives over 35,000 immigrants each year. About 64 percent are between the ages of 20 and 59. A Ministry of Advanced Education study, the 2003 ESL student outcomes survey, shows that statistically 60 percent of this group have 12 years of education or more in their country of origin.

Although this group is literate in their first language, without continuous access to comprehensive English language education, they suffer the same consequences as those who do not meet the traditional definition of literacy. They are unable to participate fully in the social and cultural and economic life of their communities. Skills and talents are not utilized, and opportunities for their families are missed or delayed. They are at an increased risk of living in poverty.

Without adequate language and literacy skills in English, ESL adult immigrants are unable to enter the workforce as skilled workers or professionals, start bridging and mentoring programs designed for the internationally educated adult immigrants to jump-start their professional careers in Canada, enter technical education programs, pursue academic upgrading programs or develop the social and cultural knowledge essential for promotion and effectiveness at the workplace.

If an English-speaking Canadian is unable to engage his society in these ways, for all intents and purposes they would have a literacy problem. For most of the immigrants we deal with, their skills and abilities exist, and the spoken and written forms of the English language remain to be dealt with.

Challenges and some suggestions for remedies to meet these challenges. First, currently three ministries — Advanced Education, Ministry of Economic Development and MCAWS — fund English language education. Each ministry has its own mandate and expertise, but often a lack of coordination creates a lack of cohesion and impedes overall planning for this group. A comprehensive provincial strategy for adult English language education would allow for more effective planning and help create a more accessible, rational system of English language education for ESL adults.

B.C.'s system of providing English language education through a mixed delivery approach of ELSA and then through varied college programming has created a good mix of educational approaches and has encouraged innovation and responsiveness. However, there is a need for better coordination with the funders.

The second one is funding challenges for students. The funding challenge for an ESL adult student is daunting. The government's adult basic education student assistance program allows for many ESL adults to attend English language education programs. However, many of our students are the working poor. They are ineligible for this funding because the threshold levels for eligibility are set too low.

Students will register for a term, then leave for a period of terms until they have worked and saved enough money for another term of study. Frequently this cycle of intermittent study is repeated several times. The outcome for this interrupted course of studies is a significant delay in students acquiring the literacy levels required for further study or employment.

One possible remedy would be to establish a system of educational planning for individual students based on their career plans and possibilities, with attached financial assistance that would sustain the individual's educational plans. An example of one province that does that is Manitoba. It has established a system of individual career and education counselling that's attached to financial assistance to make that a fact.

Developing literacy in new language requires not only financial support but time. A study from the University of Alberta shows that at the intermediate level of language learning, students need nine months of full-time language study to increase proficiency by one level. I'm using as a reference point here the Canadian language benchmarks, which is the national standard of language assessment.

To meet the language requirements for workplace entry, levels eight and nine are essential. Bridging programs that aim to connect internationally educated professionals, technicians and skilled tradespersons to the workplace require CLB levels of seven and eight. For many ESL adult students, that will require several years of financial support before they have the language and literacy skills to be fully productive in the workplace.

We would encourage the government to increase the overall amount of ABESAP funding and the amount available for individual students, and to recognize that acquiring literacy in a new language takes time.

Our third point refers to the challenges because of gaps in delivery. Access to all levels of English language education should be available throughout the province. Maintaining the presence of English language education in the public post-secondary system is an essential and effective way to hasten the entry of new arrivals into the social and economic life of the community. Gaps in the delivery of English language education waste productive years of internationally educated workers.

At present new immigrants to B.C. can access free English language education at the Canadian language benchmarks levels one to four, which provide beginning language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The next level of English language education, the intermediate level, five to eight, is a pivotal level in language learning. Without access to this level of language education, entry into further career training, bridging programs or academic study is stymied.

Recently the B.C. Skills Connect program initiated a new program to help skilled immigrants find jobs. This innovative program will help internationally educated professionals move into professional workplaces. This type of programming, however, will require language proficiencies in the seven-to-eight range.

A provincial plan to provide access to the intermediate levels of English language education needs to be adopted. Providing a comprehensive and seamless system for the funding and delivery of English language education from beginning through intermediate to advanced levels is essential to maintaining B.C.'s attractiveness to internationally educated immigrants and utilizing the talents and skills of those who have already selected B.C. as their new home.

The fourth challenge for the government is to provide a one-stop learning system. The publicly funded post-secondary education system has a responsibility to students in the developmental areas of ABE and ESL adults to provide them with access to ongoing, quality educational programming. Colleges are unique in that they can provide English language education from beginning through intermediate to advanced levels of English. Students can then transition to further applied training or content coursework, be it health sciences, technology or university transfer courses required for professional certification or upgrading.

Publicly funded colleges can and should provide educational counselling and advising and student support services such as libraries and learning centres, which are key to student success. Utilizing the expertise and resources of the local publicly funded community college should be a priority for funders. A provincial strategy to create a real and/or a virtual information clearinghouse that would provide information on access to English language education delivery throughout B.C., available professional bridging or transitional programming, support services and financial support information should be available and should be a priority for the government.

College program funding and tuition. At the institutional level there should be an increase in designated funding for the developmental programs so that demand can be met and delivery stabilized so that students can expect ongoing programming. While the government does require developmental FTEs of the colleges, and our

particular college is doing so to meet the current requirements, these quotas were set several years ago after there had been major cuts. There has been a loss from the levels of five years ago. Where five years ago there were 3,500 FTEs expected from the college, now something less than 2,500 are being provided.

This group of students also needs protection from rising tuition fees. As developmental students they do not yet have the core literacy or English language proficiencies demanded in the applied, technical and professional workplace. Often unemployed or underemployed, they, like the ABE student, need discounted, if not free, tuition in order to access education and language.

My last point is to do with immigrant youth in this one sector of the adult ESL profile that has not received adequate attention from the system. Often referred to as late arrivals, these young adult immigrants arrived in Canada as high school students. Some have not had the time to develop the reading and writing literacy skills necessary to compete for jobs or meet the prerequisite for college programs.

These youth are in danger of being marginalized. They fit neither the traditional ABE nor ESL student profile, and the system is struggling to find appropriate, effective and efficient literacy training for them. A provincial strategy is needed, and cooperation between the public secondary school system and the post-secondary school system is needed to plan and devise appropriate responses to this need.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the select committee for this opportunity to speak to them on the challenges our students face to acquire adequate language and literacy skills. We would encourage the government to consult with English language educators and with students. From our perspective we would recommend that there be more coordination at the funders' level, increased financial support and tuition relief for students, a recognition that language learning requires time as well as adequate institutional support, a plan of action to meet the literacy needs of the late-arrival group and a commitment to provide access to a comprehensive English language education for ESL adult students throughout B.C.

Thank you for your attention.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Lyn. Thank you, Nina, for taking the time to come and make your presentations.

Lorne, a very quick question.

L. Mayencourt: You mentioned the Manitoba program for individualized.... What kinds of dollars are attached to that program per student? Do you know?

L. Lennig: No, I don't have that exact information, but we understand that each student receives career and educational advising when they arrive in the program, through the ELSA initially, and that program and that planning follows them through to their completion of the educational plan. It could be up to two or three years.

L. Mayencourt: It'll be in the Advanced Education Ministry or....

L. Lennig: We can make sure you get that information in our written report.

L. Mayencourt: That would be terrific. If you could e-mail that to us, that would be great.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Last question. Richard.

R. Lee: You mentioned a reduction of numbers for the students of 3,000 or 4,000 to 2,500. Is that because of the job market? You know, sometimes they need to go to the program in order to catch up. Are there any statistics on the real situation?

N. Kozakiewicz: Was the question about why the numbers were reduced, or...?

R. Lee: Yes. Are those students taking jobs and then coming back to the school?

N. Kozakiewicz: No, they're not. Vancouver Community College is the largest provider of adult ESL programming in the colleges and in the lower mainland. Our students come from across the lower mainland, but because VCC was so highly based in teaching developmental education, it caused financial problems for the college. So the college has moved to becoming more of a comprehensive community college, offering first-year university courses and expanding in other areas. In order to do that, they had to cut developmental programs, so the cuts were made in the ESL area several years ago.

R. Lee: But I think some students are also moving to universities. I heard that some of the colleges aren't getting as many students because they're going to university.

N. Kozakiewicz: There was a time two or three years ago when tuition was raised and we were getting fewer students, but right now we are turning away students. At the level that Lyn was talking about, where there is a problem in serving them, they are post-ELSA, which is 100-percent funded, and pre-Canadian-language-benchmarks-7-to-10, where there are starting to be more programs for professional immigrants. I have, for example, about 580 students this term in my department alone — and that's only one of six departments — who are in that middle group of intermediate students. The large majority of them, probably 80 percent, have finished high school. Probably 60 percent of them have some post-secondary education — many, many of them graduate degrees.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Nina, for taking the time and coming before us.

Our next group is also from the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, on adult literacy. We have before us Stephanie Jewell, Laurie Gould and Ingrid Kolsteren. Please do proceed.

I. Kolsteren: Thank you for this opportunity. I'm Ingrid Kolsteren, and I'm representing the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association — that's the union that represents the instructors — and I'm also a literacy instructor. This is Laurie Gould, a literacy instructor and the department head of basic education, and Stephanie Jewell, the dean of arts and sciences and also previously an adult basic education instructor. It's a little bit unusual to have three from these different groups together doing a joint presentation, but we are here together because our union, our faculty and our administration have a deep commitment to adult literacy. We wanted to take this opportunity to bring that message to you in a joint kind of way.

By literacy we mean reading, writing and numeracy from the basic level of learning to read, to upgrading in general, to grade 12 completion. This is also referred to as adult basic education or ABE.

VCC teaches more literacy students than anyone else in B.C., possibly more than anyone else in Canada. We've been doing this for over 40 years. We offer the full range of literacy, from beginning reading and writing to grade 12 completion. Currently we have the equivalent of over 900 full-time students engaged in some form of literacy. That translates to over 2,500 students — students that are involved in our community, students with family, students with friends.

Going to school for these students is very, very hard. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for them to return to school. They often have had negative experiences in the past, and they face many, many barriers. We need strategies to dismantle those barriers, to increase their access to literacy education and to support them so they can be successful.

We have three main points that we want to touch upon. One is that they need an adult learning environment. Two, we want to make some comments about funding, and we want to make some comments about how government ministries need to work together.

We believe that adult literacy belongs in the post-secondary education system and that community colleges are the best place to offer that kind of education, especially in the lower mainland. We offer adult curriculum. We offer student services, support services, libraries, counsellors, etc. We offer the ability to move into other college programs and make a smooth transition. We are able to deliver programs in the community. Colleges offer stability, not just projects.

One of the key points in terms of talking about access for literacy is financial barriers. We need to remove all financial barriers for literacy, both on the individual level and at the institutional level. This means all literacy programs need to be free for everybody.

We need targeted funding so colleges can offer adequate adult basic education programs, and we need increased funding. We need funding that's sufficient and sustained to provide the flexibility needed to have realistic time lines for our students. It takes time to learn literacy skills. We need separate targeted funding for aboriginal students, and we need to increase the ABESAP funding, which is the funding for basic education and...

What's it stand for? I can't remember now.

S. Jewell: Adult basic education.

I. Kolsteren: Thank you.

...to provide the additional funding that's needed for books, supplies, transportation, child care.

In order for these kinds of strategies to be realized, the government ministries need to work together. Literacy needs to be seen as part of a process. Our students have education needs within the context of having social needs. They have multibarriers.

This means that the different government ministries, their policies and practices, need to work together to not just enable students to go to school but support them going to school. Literacy needs to be seen as a realistic and authentic part of an employment program. Income assistance recipients need to be encouraged and supported instead of sent to low-paying jobs. Parents need to be able to remain on social assistance and take literacy programs and not placed in job programs simply because their youngest child reaches the age of three. The Ministry of Education needs to acknowledge and support the work of post-secondary institutions in providing adult literacy.

These are some effective strategies that are needed to improve literacy. We believe that literacy is a basic right of people to learn. Our students need to have these skills in order to be fully engaged and participate in society, and our society needs these folks to be fully engaged.

I'm going to pass it over to Laurie to give more practical comments.

L. Gould: Thanks, Ingrid.

I'd like to talk about how the effective big-picture strategies that Ingrid has outlined apply to the literacy students that I've been teaching at Vancouver Community College for the last 32 years. Basic education is the department at VCC that provides classes to adults who are working on their reading, writing and math from beginning level skills up to about the grade-nine level. In order to come to our department, students must speak fluently.

In April we had our last registration. We registered over 200 students who wanted to work on reading, writing and math below the grade-eight level and about 125 math students. That is usually our lowest registration of the year. We have larger numbers that come in, in September.

Our students include young people, seniors, single moms and some single dads. They include aboriginal students, the unemployed, the working poor. They include people born in Canada and people that have come here many years ago and have learned to speak but need work on their reading and writing. They all have one desire in common, and that's to improve their education.

In the last years these students with the lowest levels of literacy have been finding it increasingly difficult to access upgrading programs, mainly due to changes in government policies. To help our students continue to access education and come to school, we've done a lot of tightrope walking and changing things around. We've offered more part-time, continuous intake classes. We've made them available in the morning, the afternoon, the evening and at a number of outreach sites.

Our department is large and flexible enough to be able to do these things, but it's not the ideal. It's my experience that most adult students are best served in small

scheduled classes where they have the time and opportunity to focus on their learning and get the help they require.

In a small full-time class, the group becomes a learning community and a support for one another. That's the ideal. But over the last few years I've watched the number of students that are to complete our fundamental-level program and move on to other programs decline, as more and more students are forced to move out of full-time classes and into part-time classes.

It's no surprise that adult literacy students make less progress when they try and fit school into stressful lives that often include short-term low-paying jobs, shift work, crummy living conditions, serious family problems and other challenges that you and I seldom have to face.

I'm sure other presenters — and I've heard some of them today — have told you about the relationship between low literacy skills and poverty, poor health, crime, addiction and disabilities. If we truly want to help people overcome these issues, which are either one of the causes or one of the results of their low literacy skills, we need to make sure that when they make the courageous decision to come back to school, they meet with success. Success for adult literacy students requires a number of systems to be put in place.

First of all, as you've heard, adult literacy students need the financial support to enable them to attend school on more than just a short-term, part-time basis. Without the time to concentrate on their studies, they'll never make enough progress to improve their lives.

Secondly, adults must have the opportunity to learn in a place where they feel comfortable, a place in their community that has ongoing stable funding. For many adults that place is a community college, but for others an alternative is needed. For example, in addition to the classes that we offer at our Broadway campus, King Edward campus, we offer classes in the downtown east side at First United Church, and we have been since the early '80s.

Also, about that time the Mount Pleasant disabilities connection people came to us and asked us to set up a program in their community centre, and we did. That program now is more accessed by single moms who require the day care there, and we're hoping to use it as an intermediate point for first nations students who are not quite ready to step into the big institution but might be more comfortable in a community centre.

Over the years we've offered classes in many of the libraries around the lower mainland. As they've become demographically more needed by ESL students, we've had our department — Lyn and the group — take those over, but we still run one in the downtown library.

J. Nuraney (Chair): I don't mean to interrupt, Laurie, but a minute to wrap up, please.

L. Gould: Okay. We've been able to initiate and run a number of innovative programs like these because we have a solid community college-based program and

trained, experienced instructors. And I want to underline what other people have said about the importance of having trained instructors.

When I came to VCC in 1974, I soon realized that I needed to learn how to more effectively teach adults to read. I taught English in the high school system in Australia and Alberta, but I wasn't trained to teach adults how to read. I went back to school, and I learned how.

I also learned the other things that are important about teaching adults, one of the things being adult-oriented materials. If you look at the materials that most adult literacy instructors in this province use, you'll find they were created by instructors — many of them instructors at the college. At our college we've published, produced and distributed a number of these.

In addition to financial support, stable programs, well-trained instructors and appropriate materials, to be successful adult literacy students need a range of support services. They need counsellors to help with issues like addiction, abuse, mental health, disabilities and educational career planning. They need learning centres and libraries with the relevant materials and professionals that know how to work with adult students, and they need access to other adult programs. Every day I walk a student down the hall to the GED program, upstairs to the ESL program or downstairs to the automotive technician.

I think my dean, Stephanie, is going to tell you a little bit more about the importance of having adult literacy in a college setting.

S. Jewell: Thank you, Laurie. Thank you, Ingrid. Thank you to the committee, and thank you very much to our faculty association for sharing this spot.

We've come here as a united group because it's absolutely critical to understand that the college is committed through our faculty association, through our instructors and through our administration to provide adult literacy. I am responsible for the area in the college that provides adult literacy, as Laurie said, from the beginning all the way to first-year university, including adult special education.

One of the key things about college is that when the public hears the word "college," many of them assume that you're sending 17-to-20-year-olds off to do the first and second year of university transfer. We do a little bit of that, but we provide 40 percent of our training in adult literacy and English as a second language.

It's absolutely crucial that the public and the province understand that these 22 colleges around the province provide unique and specific training for adults in an adult setting, as Laurie said, with materials developed for adults. You can't say enough about that.

In the current ABE outcomes study, fundamental learners were asked as a group, "Why did you come to school," or: "Why did you leave school?" Each time, they said: "Personal reasons." They didn't say: "I can't read and write." They didn't say: "I don't have the money to continue." They didn't say any of those things because in many cases a lack of literacy is something that people hide.

Jacques Lemaire, the hockey coach, is the perfect example of that. The psychic energy that it takes to exist in a society that is now information-based and not to have the skill set to be able to be successful or to pass that down to your children is a huge loss of human capital.

The government knows this. That's why literacy is one of its great goals. As Ted James from Douglas said, we have an absolutely incredible system in this province to deliver this service to our learners in an adult setting which provides for it.

I was an adult educator as well, and people used to ask me, when they heard of the college: "What do you teach there?" I'd say: "Well, people who don't have their high school diploma." What they have is an absolutely burning need to get ahead, and the only way they can get it is to achieve literacy or to call their instructor, which is me, at three in the morning and leave a message on my voice mail to say: "Could you delay the test for 30 minutes, because I'm closing 7-Eleven tonight?" That's what it means to teach adults and to be able to provide that service to them.

As Laurie and Ingrid have both said, there are many obstacles. The people we deal with are the most vulnerable, the most fragile and in many ways the most valuable people in our society, because they are the people we're going to need to put to work to be able to be successful in this province.

I'd like to thank the committee, and I'd like to thank my colleagues for letting me appear with them.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you.

D. Routley: Throughout the presentations to this committee in other locations, as well, we've heard reference to the fact that literacy is best absorbed and the skills are retained when there is a purpose, when people have hope, when they have a reason. You've referred to people having personal reasons, both as a target and as a description also — avoiding the shame that's associated with illiteracy.

We've also heard words like "maximizing return" and that there are great public benefits to investment in literacy programs. We've also heard, from Ingrid Kolsteren, the words "realistic and authentic piece of a job requirement." I think that's really important too. Those are important pedagogical goals perhaps.

For us as a political body, we've also heard constant reference to funding shortfalls not just in providing programs but in the support students need to be able to access them — transportation, housing, all of those issues. So in order not to make words just words — words like "great goals," words like "new relationship...." In order to make them more than just words, the funding that has been absent or the shortfalls inside and outside the college.... What do you see as the most significant barrier in accessing programs in terms of government funding?

L. Gould: I'll speak to my particular group, which is the students with literacy levels below grade eight. The single largest impact on their ability to come to school in the last five years has been changes in the Ministry of Human Resources funding and the ability for students who are on social assistance to access upgrading classes. It has affected them hugely. There are other things that have affected the ability to access

day care, but fundamentally it's that the students can no longer be funded to come to school.

D. Routley: I find it very impressive, Mr. Chair, that people refer to funding and not to themselves as the barrier and are encouraging us to consider funding beyond their own scope. I find that to be encouraging, and I congratulate them.

M. Polak: A quick question about the structure of funding.

Ingrid, you mentioned desiring forms of targeted funding in different areas. At the same time, one of the themes that recurs throughout presentations is the need to break down the ministry silos and have some better cross-ministry participation. Can you reconcile those two for me? In my past experience with school districts, targeting tended to militate against the cross-ministry kind of functioning.

I. Kolsteren: We have targeted funding now. We have targeted funding for about 2,500 FTE spots, and we're happy to have those. We used to have more, and when we had a higher level of targeted funding, we at VCC were able to provide more literacy training and more ESL training. We need to have some protected funding.

To have protected or targeted funding at the college doesn't necessarily mean bringing a silo. The thing is that literacy is part of a process. It doesn't exist on its own. Our students have literacy needs, and they have other needs. The institutions need to be funded, but so do other aspects of it. They need to be able to afford to go to school. They need to be able to have transportation. They need to be able to buy books and supplies. They need to have child care. It's all of them.

M. Polak: So it's the security of the funding as opposed to attaching it to...?

I. Kolsteren: Absolutely.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you very much for coming before the committee.