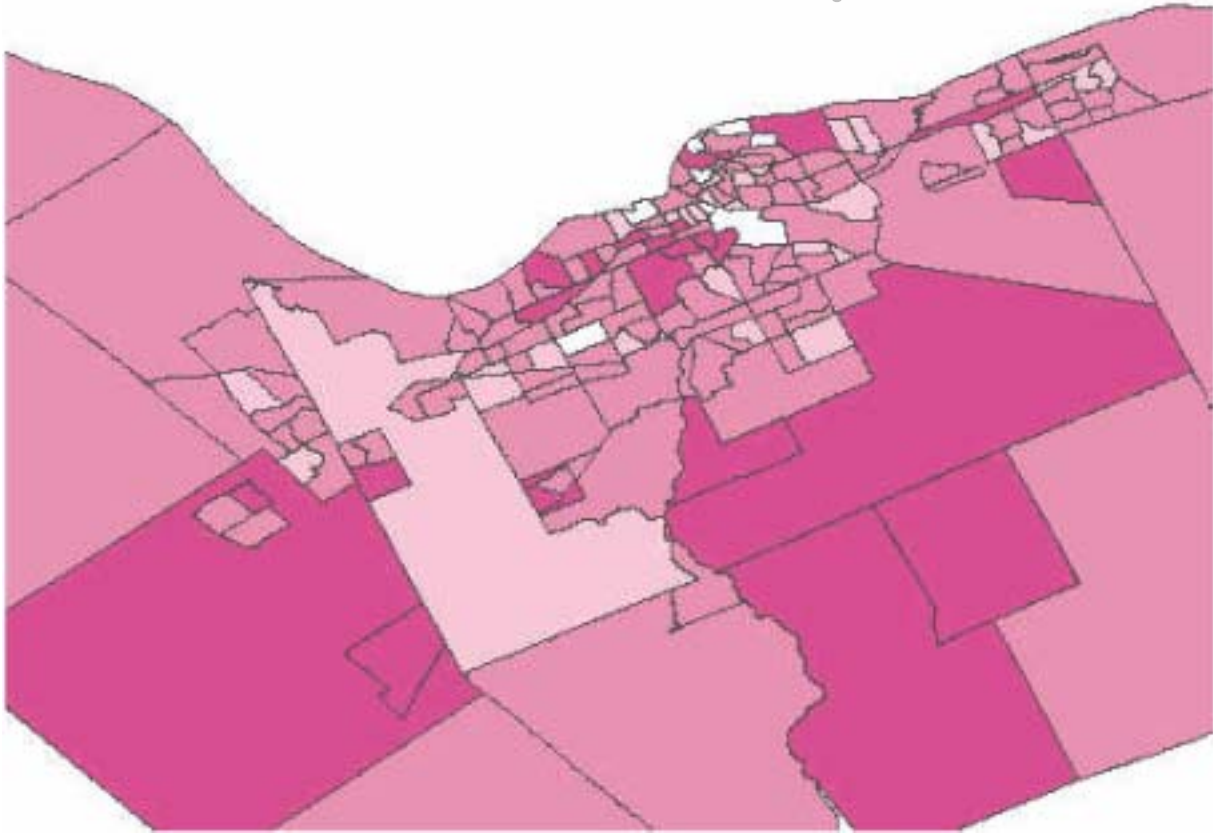


# Putting Literacy in Ottawa on the Map



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## Literature Review

This research began with a library search to see if any other communities had done a similar study in hopes that their methodology could serve as a model to follow. The on-line resources of *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education, National Adult Literacy Database* (NALD), and *AlphaCat* (on-line catalogue for AlphaPlus Centre) were queried, and a general Internet search was conducted.

While no identical project was found, two items were discovered which had some degree of overlap with this research: *The Manitoba Literacy Atlas* (Literacy Partners of Manitoba 1999) and *GIS as a Planning Tool for Literacy Organizations* (LLEO 2000). Both of these resources used selected demographic and socio-economic data related to literacy from the *1996 Canada Census of Population* to generate choropleth maps of their catchment areas (Manitoba and Eastern Ontario). These maps revealed the spatial relationship of neighbourhoods/districts with low income, low educational attainment and high unemployment and high government transfer payments. This research project will include a similar analysis using more recent census data.

The *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) of 1995 clearly demonstrated the link between socio-economic factors such as these and literacy level. IALS validated the common belief that poor literacy skills increase the likelihood of unemployment and lower family incomes. The two mapping projects from Manitoba and Eastern Ontario allow readers to identify neighbourhoods/regions where socioeconomic factors consistent with low literacy can be found, thus identifying areas of greatest literacy need—information useful for ongoing literacy service planning. This research project's goal is similar to those other initiatives, but it also considers the additional characteristic of the spatial distribution of LBS learners attending programs in 2002 as part of the analysis.

In order to fully appreciate the value of this research it is important to be able to see how it fits into our current understanding of issues related to learner participation, namely factors/barriers affecting access to service. For this we turn to the literature of theorists and researchers working in the field of adult education.

Research on adult learners usually falls into one of two main categories: it is, either very narrow in focus and application (i.e. action research, or participatory research for a particular program or delivery model), or is very broadly centered on mainstream adult education, namely post-secondary education. As a result, much of the literature is not ideal for the purposes of examining issues around participation for adult basic education learners; and few large scale studies dealing with adult literacy learners have been carried out in Canada.

Two recent Canadian studies by ABC CANADA (Long 2002, Long and Middleton 2001) sought to learn more about the recruitment and retention of adult learners in literacy and upgrading programs and reasons for nonparticipation. Their studies developed a

snapshot of the complex conditions that promote or deter successful participation in adult literacy and upgrading education in Canada. Their findings revealed serious problems with access to literacy and upgrading education. They found that fewer than half of those attempting to access service were able to enroll. Long categorized barriers to participation into three broad categories: program/policy-related (PPR) factors, socioeconomic-circumstantial (SEC) factors, and cognitive-emotive (CE) factors.

According to Long and Middleton (2001) the main barriers to participation for most potential learners fall into the program/policy-related (PPR) category. Potential learners reported the following reasons for not entering programs: they had never been called back after contacting a program; encountered long waiting lists to be admitted to a program; inconvenient class locations and times; wrong content or teaching structure; or having to pay for the program/tutor. For those who did manage to enrol in a program, socio-economic and circumstantial (SEC) barriers such as job-related conflicts, money problems, child/elder-care needs, and health reasons led more than a third to drop out within six to eight months. Similarly, Long (2002) also found that work and family reasons kept potential learners from following through on their intentions to seek upgrading.

Other research on barriers to participation has been carried out by researchers in the United States (Cross 1981) and the United Kingdom (Bailey and Coleman 1998, McGivney 1990). These studies similarly classified barriers to participation which can be grouped under four broad headings:

- informational barriers – difficulties accessing or understanding information about literacy programs available (i.e. not enough information available)
- situational barriers – any aspect of a person’s life situation that makes it difficult to attend a literacy program (i.e. lack of time to attend, conflict with employment, or transportation problems)
- institutional barriers – inflexible or unresponsive nature of programs or the system that deters learners from enrolling or continuing to participate in literacy programs (i.e. being wary of school buildings, a classroom setting, formal enrolment procedures/filling in forms, insensitive teachers, inappropriate teaching methods)
- dispositional barriers – anything in a person’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes or perceptions that has a negative impact on their motivation to return to education. (i.e. poor self-esteem, embarrassment, stigma, fear/feeling too old, memories of negative past school experiences)

It is important to remember that, for the most part, these theories developed around barriers to participation for all “adult learning opportunities,” mainly post-secondary learning. Adult basic education was not specifically studied in most of the research done to develop these theories, so it’s important to consider this when determining their validity and applicability to the context of literacy learners in this project. However, generally speaking, these types of barriers should be kept in mind when analyzing the patterns of participation for learners revealed in this research.

Understanding barriers faced by potential learners is one critical piece in building knowledge, but so too is knowing a little more about those potential learners as individuals. Besides describing the reasons why some people did not enrol in a program, Long and Middleton (2001) also examined who the potential learners were, how they heard about literacy programs, and what motivated them to contact a literacy program. They reported their potential learners spanned all age groups, were from communities of varying sizes and had a wide range of formal education and employment statuses. More than one third of callers had a high-school diploma or some post-secondary education, and those with higher education were more likely to have received it in another country. More than 80 percent of callers identified English as their language of greatest fluency; nearly half of potential learners were employed, and nearly a quarter received social assistance. Additionally, close to half the potential learners came from households with total family incomes of less than \$20,000 per year. A similar demographic profile of adult learners was also found by other researchers (Bailey and Coleman 1998, McGivney 1990, Wikenlund *et. al* 1992), thus it was used as a basis for the characteristics selected for this research as well.

Understanding the wide range of barriers faced by potential learners and knowing the socio-economic characteristics of this group are important tools when planning literacy service delivery. Combining this information with program delivery models best suited to participants, offered at ideally located program sites forms a recipe for success in efforts to effectively serve the needs of potential learners.

## **Methodology**

There were a number of processes and stages involved in carrying out this research. A full description of each step taken is included as part the relevant section of this report, (i.e. literature review and data analysis sections). Generally, though, this research was carried out between the period of December 2002 and October 2003. Ottawa census tract data from the *2001 Canada Census of Population* and LBS learner data from 2002 were used as the primary data sources for this research, supplemented by survey responses collected in October 2003 from selected social service agencies located in targeted Ottawa neighbourhoods.