

# **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition:** Emergence of a Canadian Community of Scholars



## **Trends in Public Support for Prior Learning Recognition:** National Survey Findings, 1998-2010

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# Abstract

This presentation will summarize basic findings from three national surveys conducted in 1998, 2004 and 2010 on paid and unpaid work, formal and informal learning and attitudes toward the principle of prior learning recognition. Trends in interest in using PLAR are summarized for the adult Canadian population, the employed labour force and specific social groups, including recent participants in further adult education, non-participants who wanted to participate, and those who did not participate and did not want to do so.

Particular attention will be paid to non-participants in further adult education who wanted to participate and are interested in using PLAR, a core group of those with unmet need for PLAR. In addition, the association of prior formal educational attainment, occupational class, age, sex, ethnicity, immigration status and underemployment with interest in PLAR will be assessed. Finally, the relationship between engagement in intentional informal learning activities and interest in PLAR will be analyzed. Implications of these patterns for PLAR policy and program development will be suggested.

# The PLAR Continuum

- 1. QR – qualifications recognition –  
exchange and transferability of credentials**
- 2. Competency-based PLAR systems –  
essential skills, performance indicators, etc**
- 3. Developmental PLAR approaches –  
Portfolio Learning**

[ Source: Livingstone and Myers 2006. ]

**Table 1:**  
**Typology for Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL)**

<b>RPL</b>		
<b>Formal Learning</b>		<b>Informal Learning</b>
<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Credit Transfer</b>	<b>PLAR</b>
<b>Recognition</b>		(portfolio) (challenge for credit)

[ **Source:** Adapted from Conrad, D. (2008). Revisiting the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): A Reflective Inquiry into RPL Practice in Canada. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 34(2), 89–110. ]

## Table 2: PLAR for different types of learning, different motives

Many discussions of PLAR conflate or confound PLAR for different types of learning (formal or informal) as well as different motives (education or work-related) for PLAR:

Motives	Formal education	Informal learning
Education-related	recognition of prior formal learning at another educational institution in granting <i>advanced credit toward completion</i> of a formal program at a given educational institution	recognition of prior informal learning in granting <i>advanced credit toward completion</i> of a formal program at a given educational institution
Work-related	recognition of prior formal learning in <i>granting certification to practice</i> a profession or trade	recognition of prior informal learning in <i>determining responsibility and reward</i> in workplaces

# PLAR Questions in NALL 1998, WALL 2004 and WALL 2010



PLAR questions in NALL 1998, WALL 2004 and WALL 2010 surveys focus on **education-related motives**-- advanced credit toward completion of formal education programs-- without distinguishing between **formal and informal prior learning** experiences.

## NALL1998:

Would you be more likely to enroll in an educational program if you could get formal acknowledgment for your past learning experiences so that it would require fewer courses to finish the program?

1 Yes / 5 No

## WALL2004:

Would you be more likely to enroll in an educational program if you could get formal acknowledgement for your past informal learning experiences so that it would require fewer courses to finish the program?

1 Yes / 5 No

## WALL2010:

In general, would you be more likely to enroll in an educational program if you were given academic credit for knowledge gained through your past informal learning?

1 Yes / 5 No

# Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning

<http://wall.oise.utoronto.ca>



- **Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning Research Network ([www.wallnetwork.ca](http://www.wallnetwork.ca))**
- Research funded by SSHRC under a series of Strategic Research Grants and the Canada Research Chairs Program
- Includes 1998, 2004 and 2010 representative national surveys of randomly selected respondents over 18 on many issues of working conditions and adult learning
- Also includes over 50 related case studies of different industry sectors, at-risk workers, unpaid work and informal learning

# Figure 1: Forms of Activity and Learning

## Forms of Activity

- Paid Employment
- Unpaid Housework
- Community Volunteer Work
- Leisure  
(sleep, self-care, hobbies)



## Forms of Learning

- Formal Schooling
- Further Education
- Informal Education
- Self-directed Learning

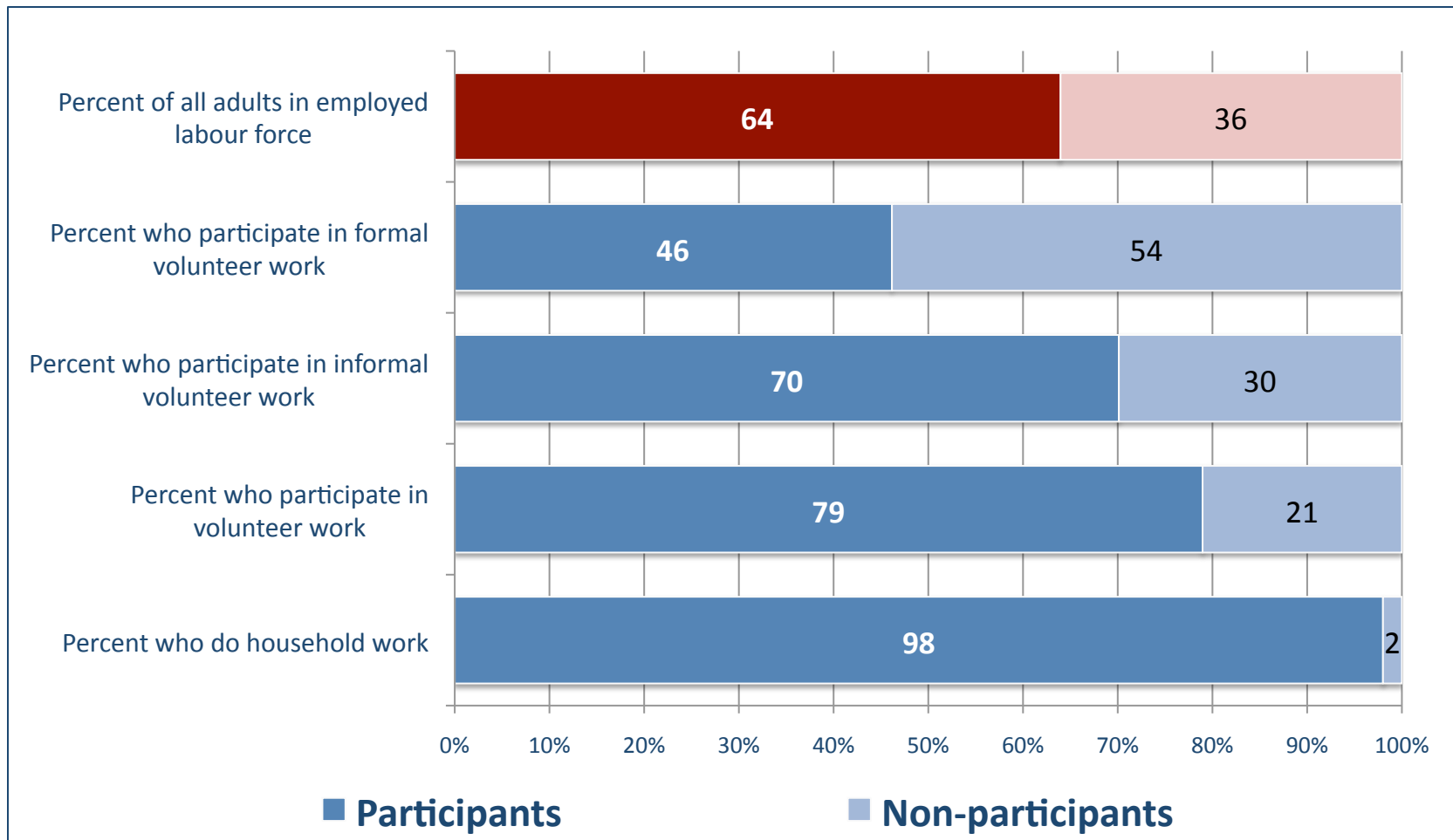
[ Source: Livingstone, 2010. ]



# General Context Findings

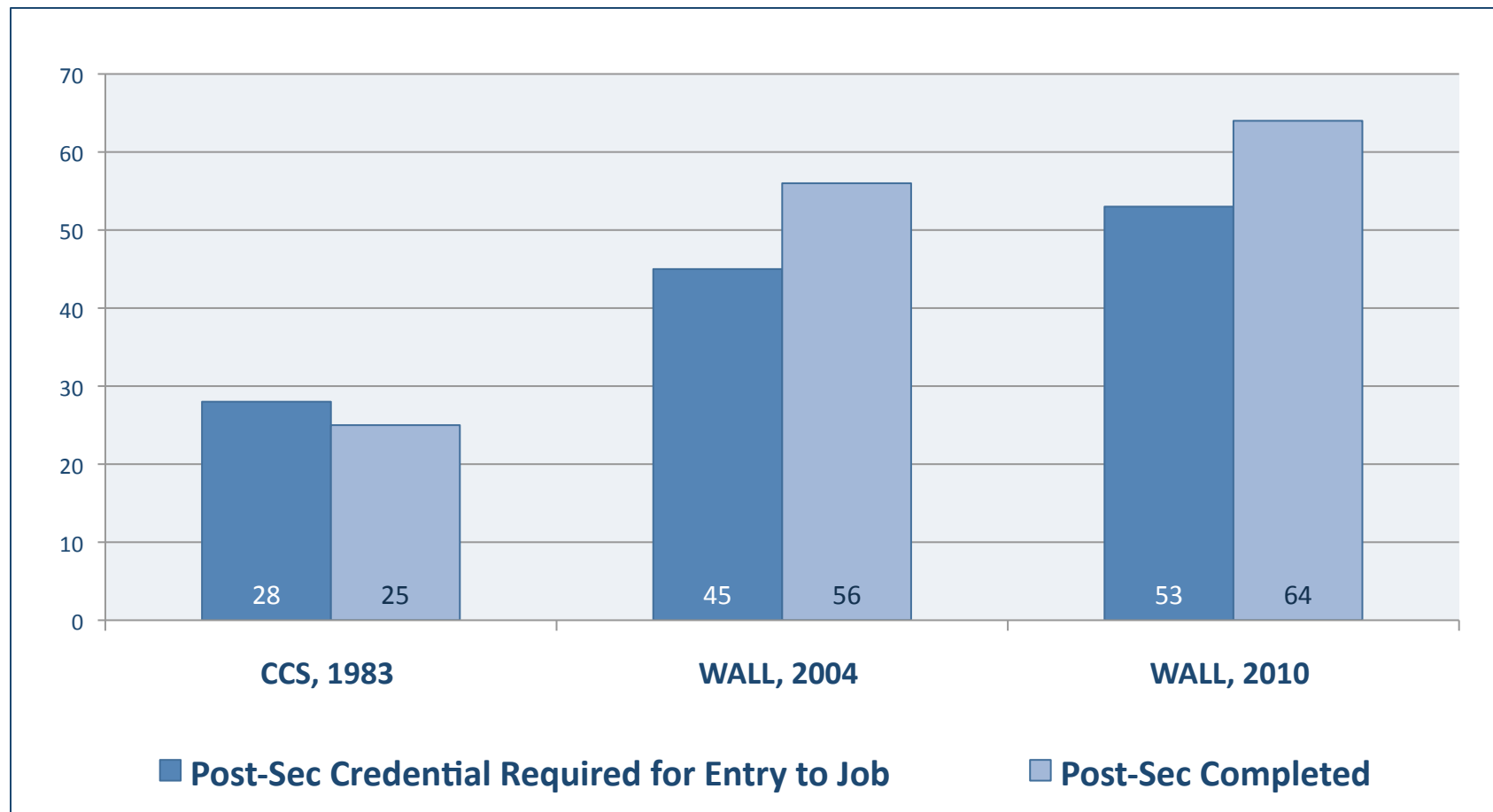
# Graph 1: Participation in Paid and Unpaid Work

All Adults, Canada, 2010 (%)



[ Sources: WALL, 2010. ]

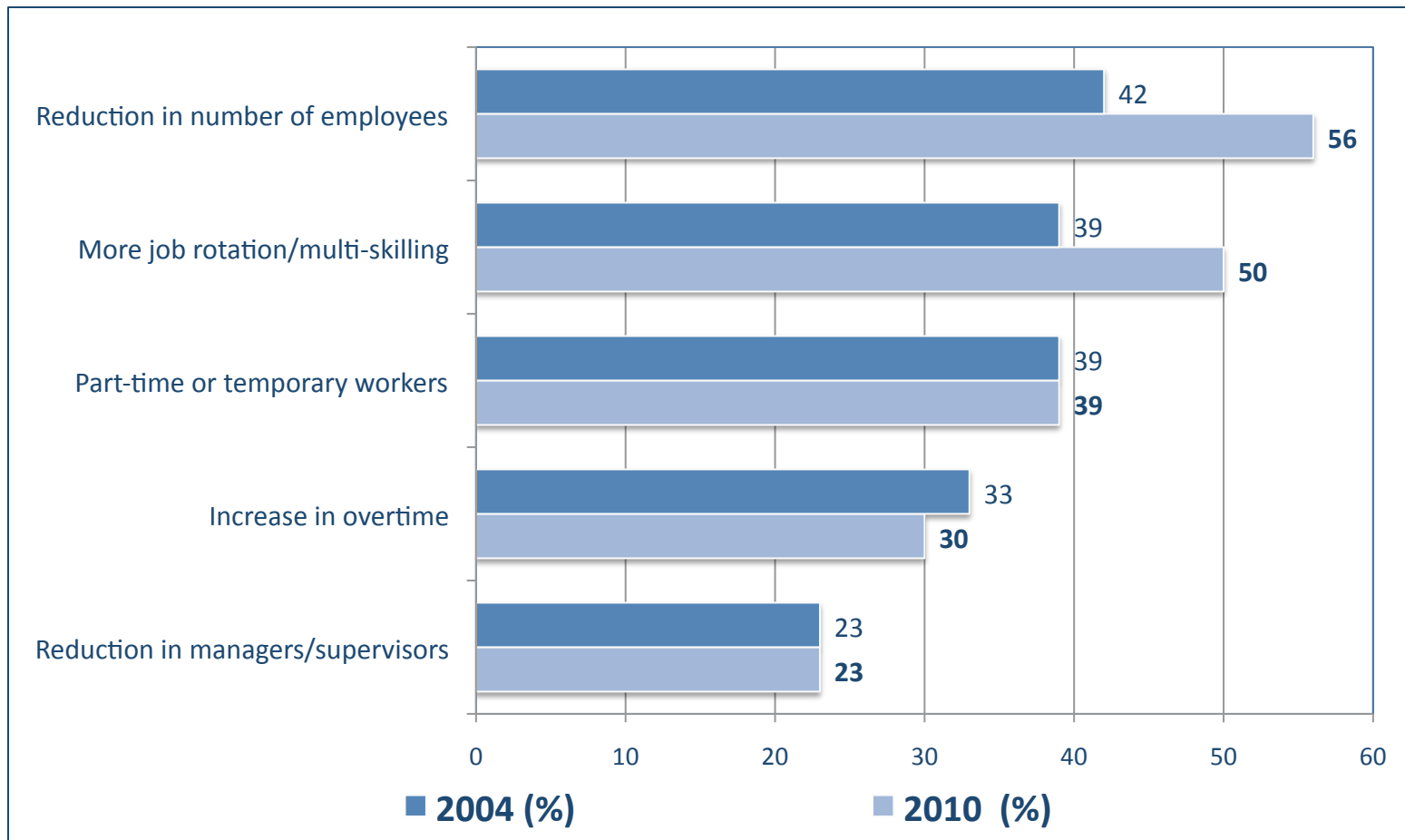
## Graph 2: Educational Job Requirements and Formal Educational Attainments of Canadian Wage and Salary Earners, 1983-2010 (% Post-secondary Credential)



[ Sources: Canadian Class Structure Survey, 1983 (N=1462); WALL 2004 Survey(N=3887); WALL 2010 Survey (N= 933).]

# Graph 3: Organizational changes in past 5 years

Canada, 2004 and 2010



[ Sources: WALL 2004 survey (N=5581); WALL 2010 survey (N=1256). ]

## Table 3: Job Demands “Great Deal” of Thought and Attention by Occupational Class

Canadian Wage and Salary Earners, 1983-2010 (% great deal)

Occupational Class	1983	2004	2010
Managers	77	78	69
Supervisors	55	72	81
Professional employees	74	76	71
Service workers	25	60	50
Industrial workers	30	63	61
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>63</b>
<i>N</i>	1,482	4,249	967

[Sources: Canadian Class Structure Survey, 1983 (N=1,482); WALL 2004 Survey(N=4,249); WALL 2010 Survey (N=967)]

**Table 4:**  
**Credential Underemployment by Occupational Class of Employee**  
 1983-2010 (% underemployed)

OCCUPATIONAL CLASS	1983	2004	2010
Managers	15	25	29
Supervisors	21	43	24
Professional employees	17	20	20
Service Workers	25	36	39
Industrial Workers	33	33	36
Total [%]	25	31	31
<i>N</i>	<i>1461</i>	<i>3844</i>	<i>934</i>

[ Sources: Canadian Class Structure Survey, 1983; WALL 2004 Survey; WALL 2010 Survey.]

# PLAR Findings

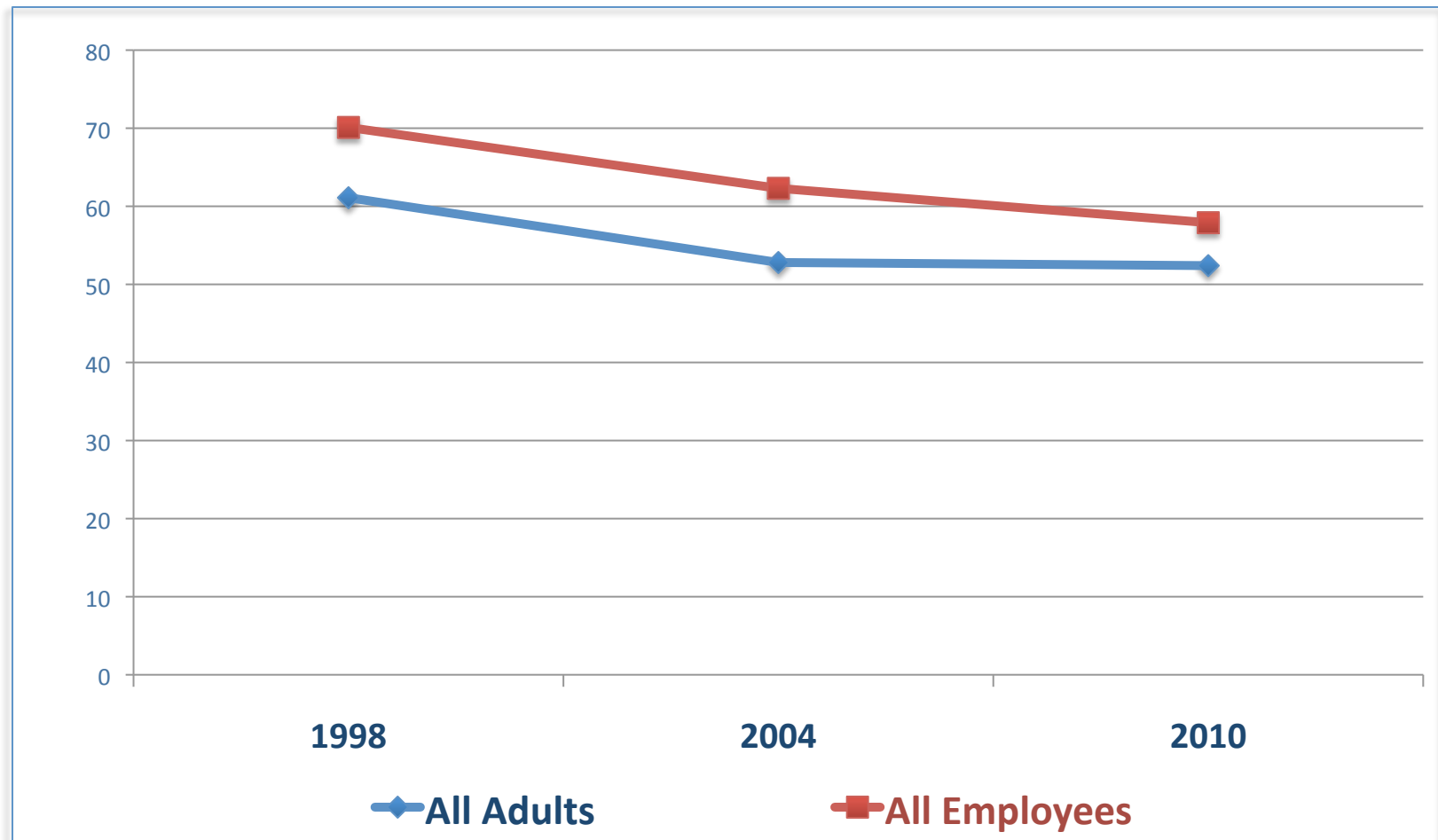
## Graph 4:

# Interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in Canada

All Adults and Employed Labour Force 1998-2010 (% Interested)

OISEUT

WALL



[ Sources: NALL, 1998; WALL 2004 and WALL 2010. ]



**Table 5:**  
**Current Participation Status in Further Adult Education and PLAR**  
 All Adults, Canada, 2004-2010

Participation Status	% of Total Population			% Interested in PLAR	
	2004	2010		2004	2010
Enrolled past year	45	45		64	60
Not enrolled, wanted course	17	19		66	66
Not enrolled, did not want	37	36		34	35
TOTAL	100	100		52	53

[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

**Table 6:****Current Participation Status in Further Adult Education and PLAR**

Employed Labour Force, Canada, 2004-2010

Participation Status	% of Employed Population			% Interested in PLAR	
	2004	2010		2004	2010
Enrolled past year	54	55		66	60
Not enrolled, wanted course	18	19		70	68
Not enrolled, did not want	28	26		49	45
TOTAL	100	100		62	58

[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

## Graph 5:

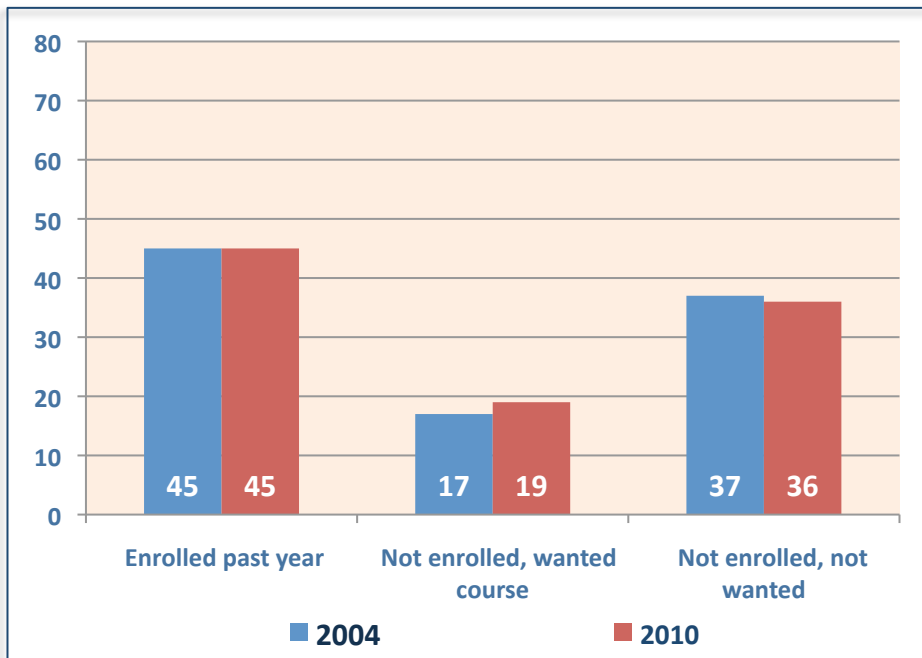
# Current Participation Status in Further Adult Education

All Adults and Employed Labour Force, Canada, 2004-2010 (% of total population)

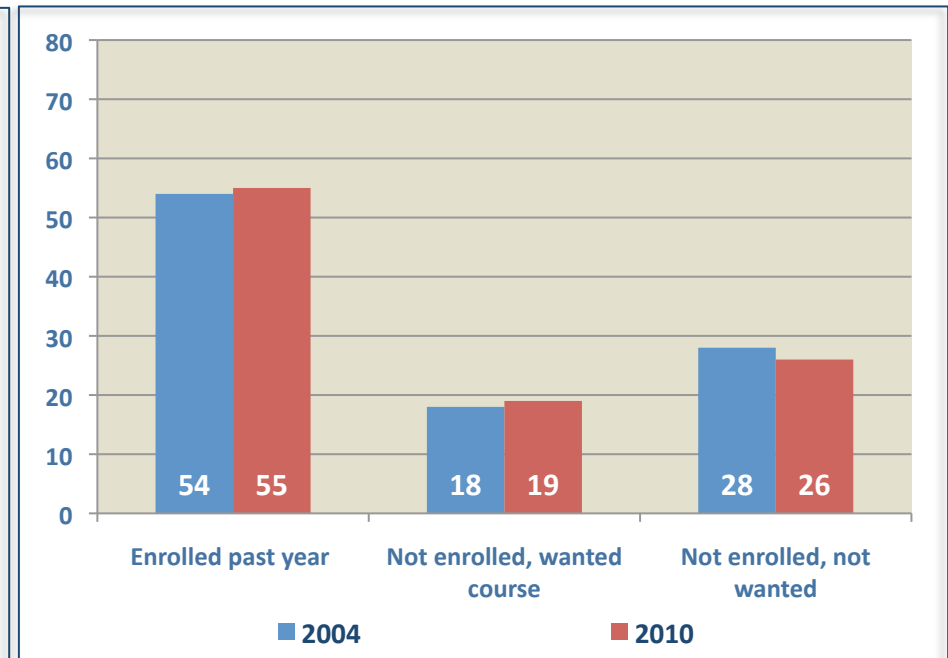
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Graph 5A: All Adults



Graph 5B: Employed Labour Force



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

## Graph 6:

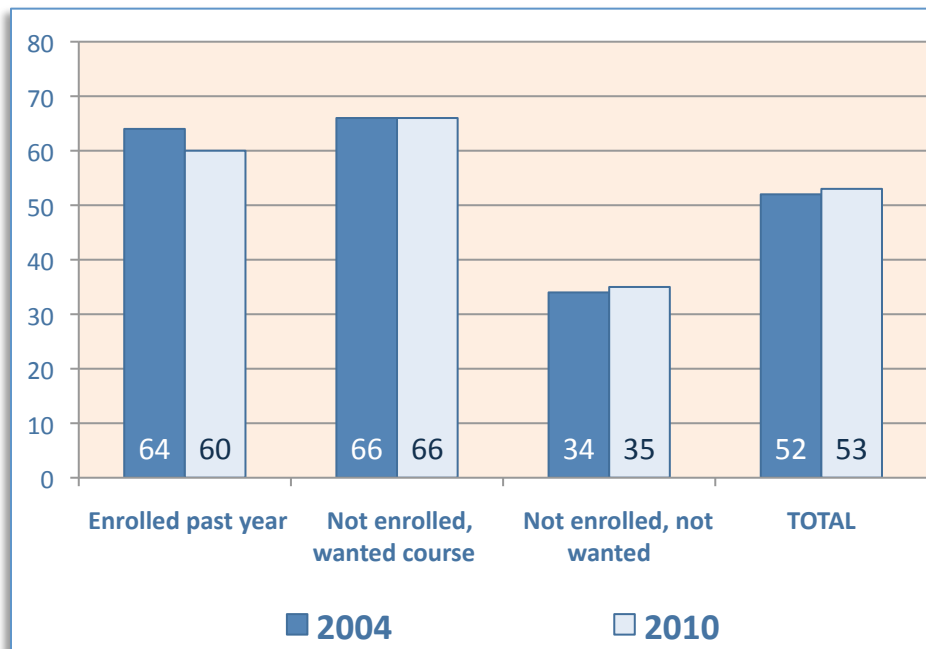
# Participation Status in Further Adult Education and PLAR

All Adults and Employed Labour Force, Canada, 2004-2010 (% interested)

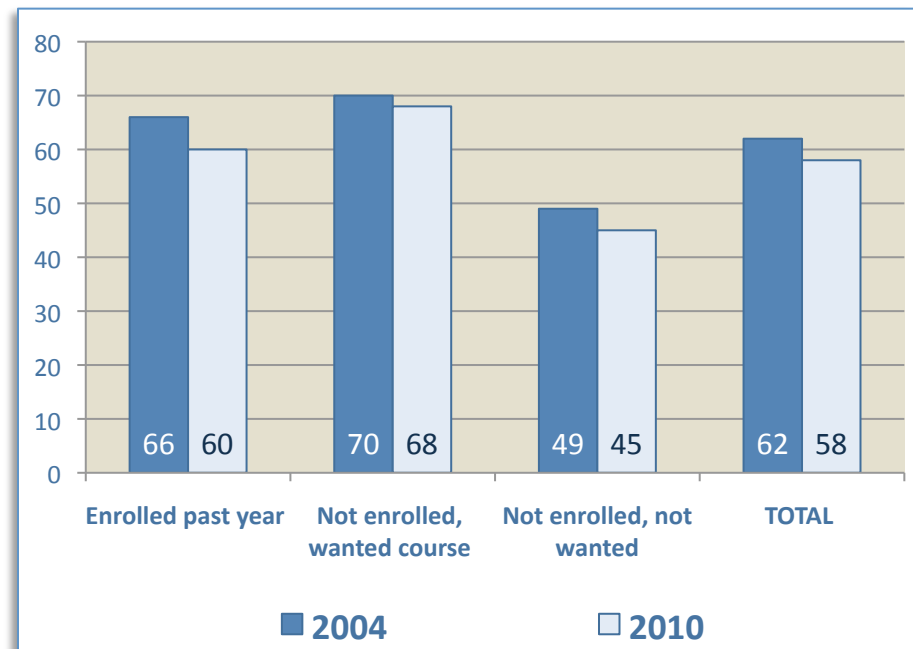
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Graph 6A: All Adults



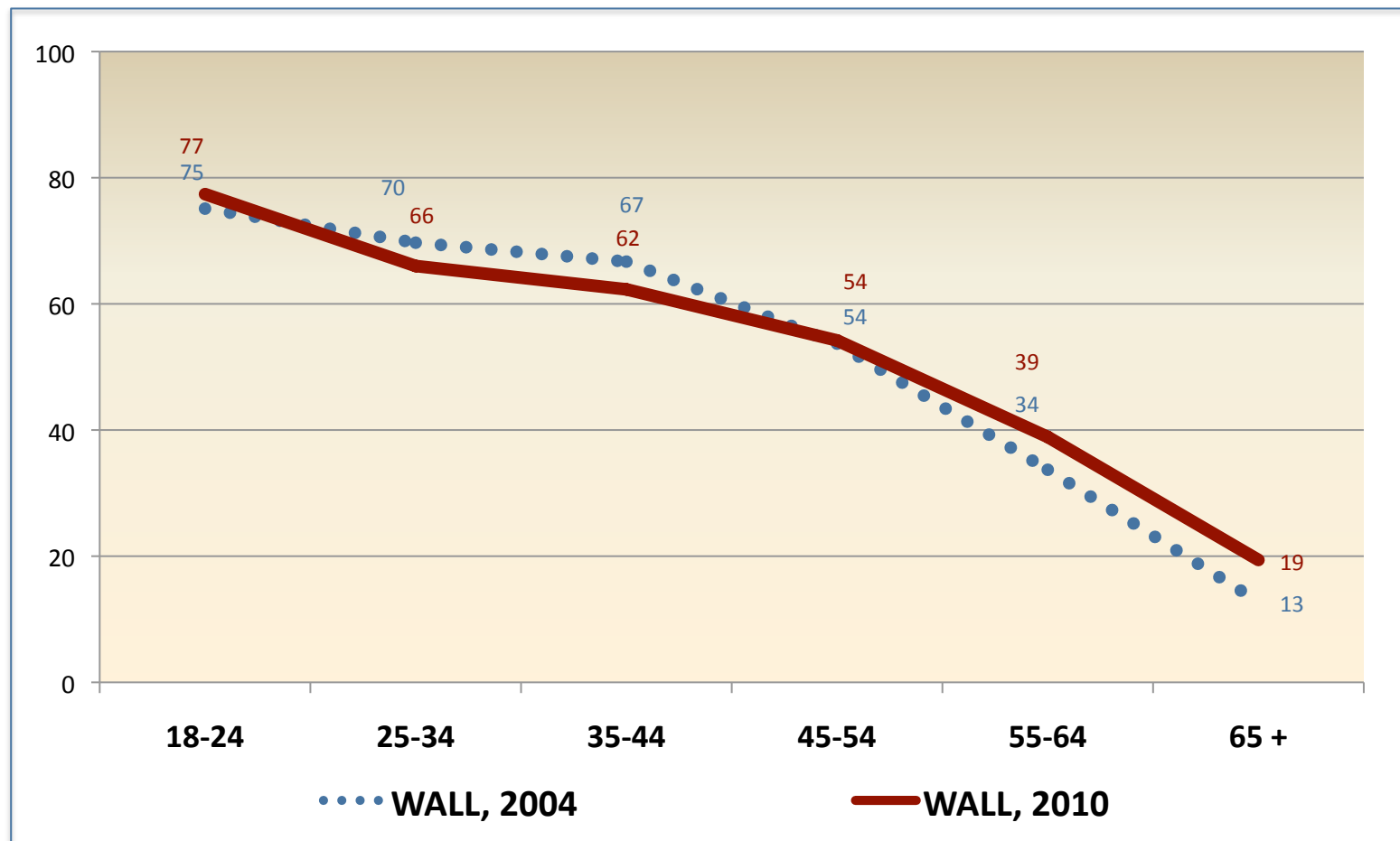
Graph 6B: Employed Labour Force



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 7: Age and PLAR

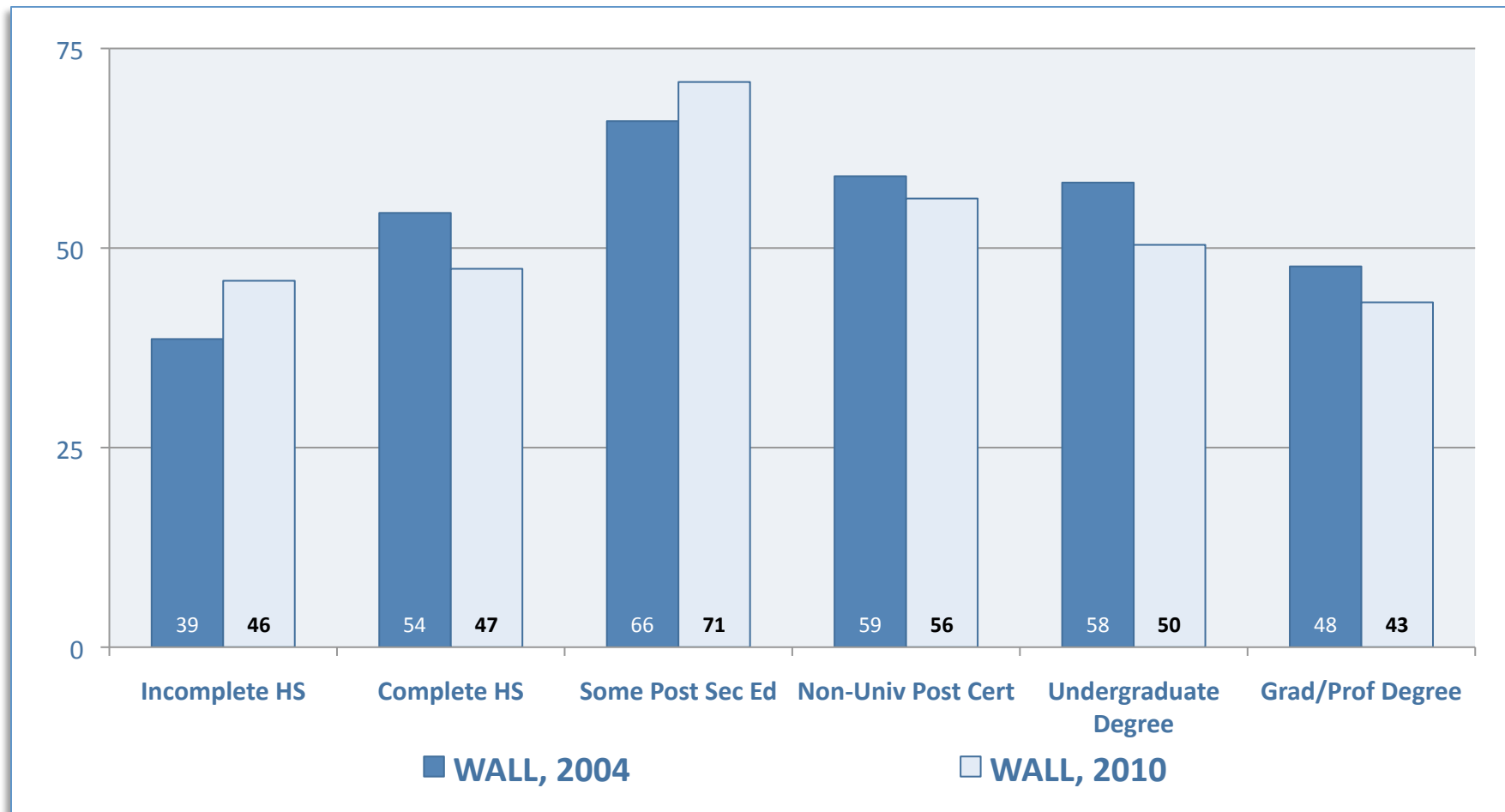
All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 8: Formal Educational Attainment and PLAR

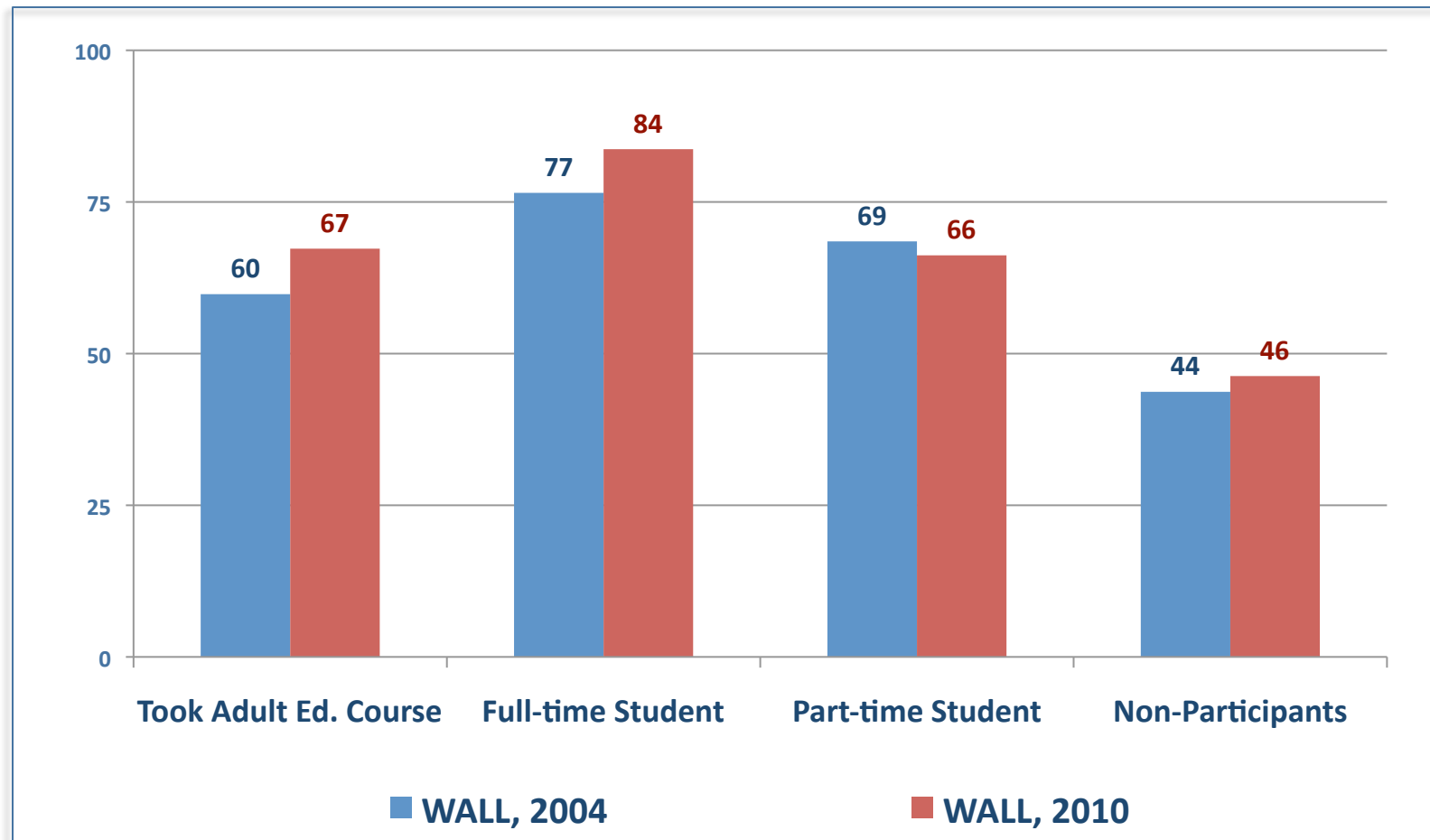
All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 9: Current Participation in Formal Education and PLAR

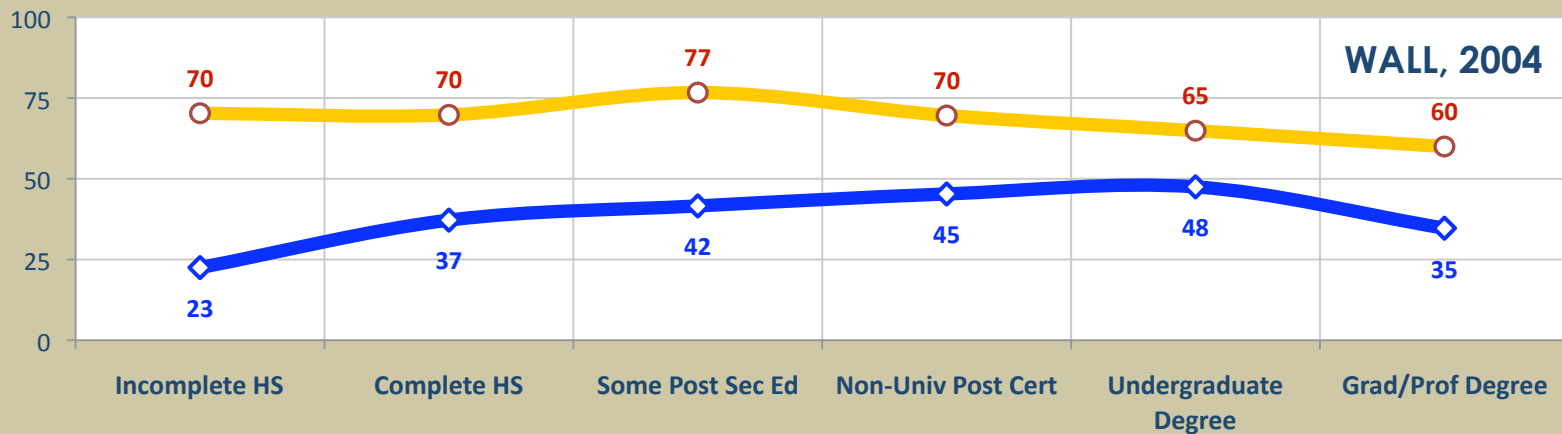
All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 10: Age and Educational Attainment by PLAR

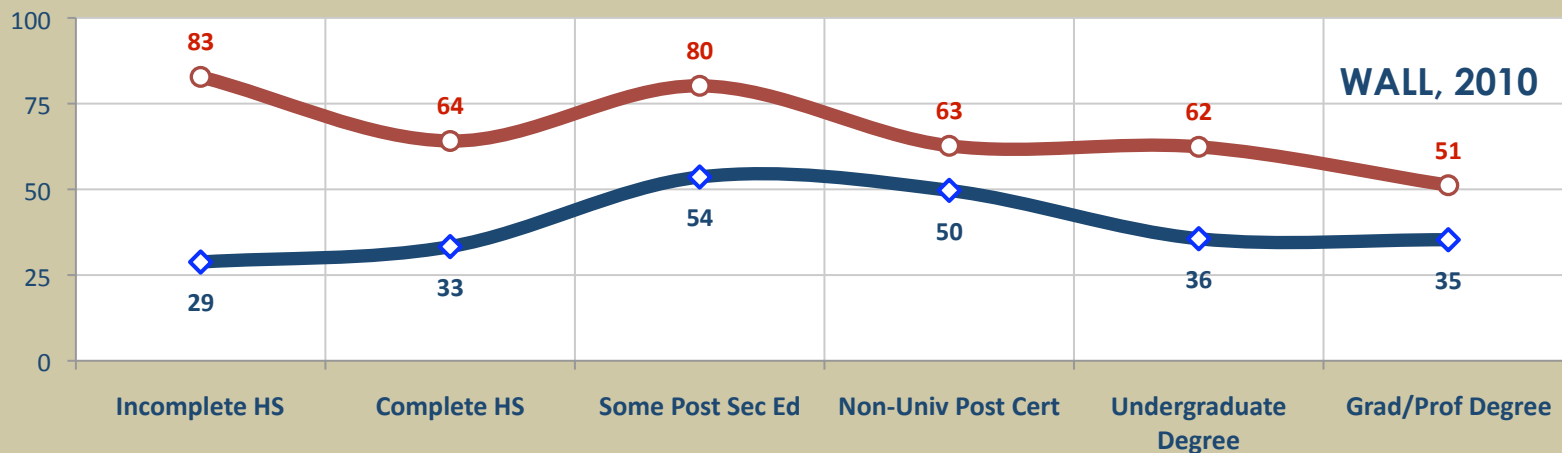
All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)



**Graph 10A:**

○ Up to 45 years old

◇ Over 45 years



**Graph 10B:**

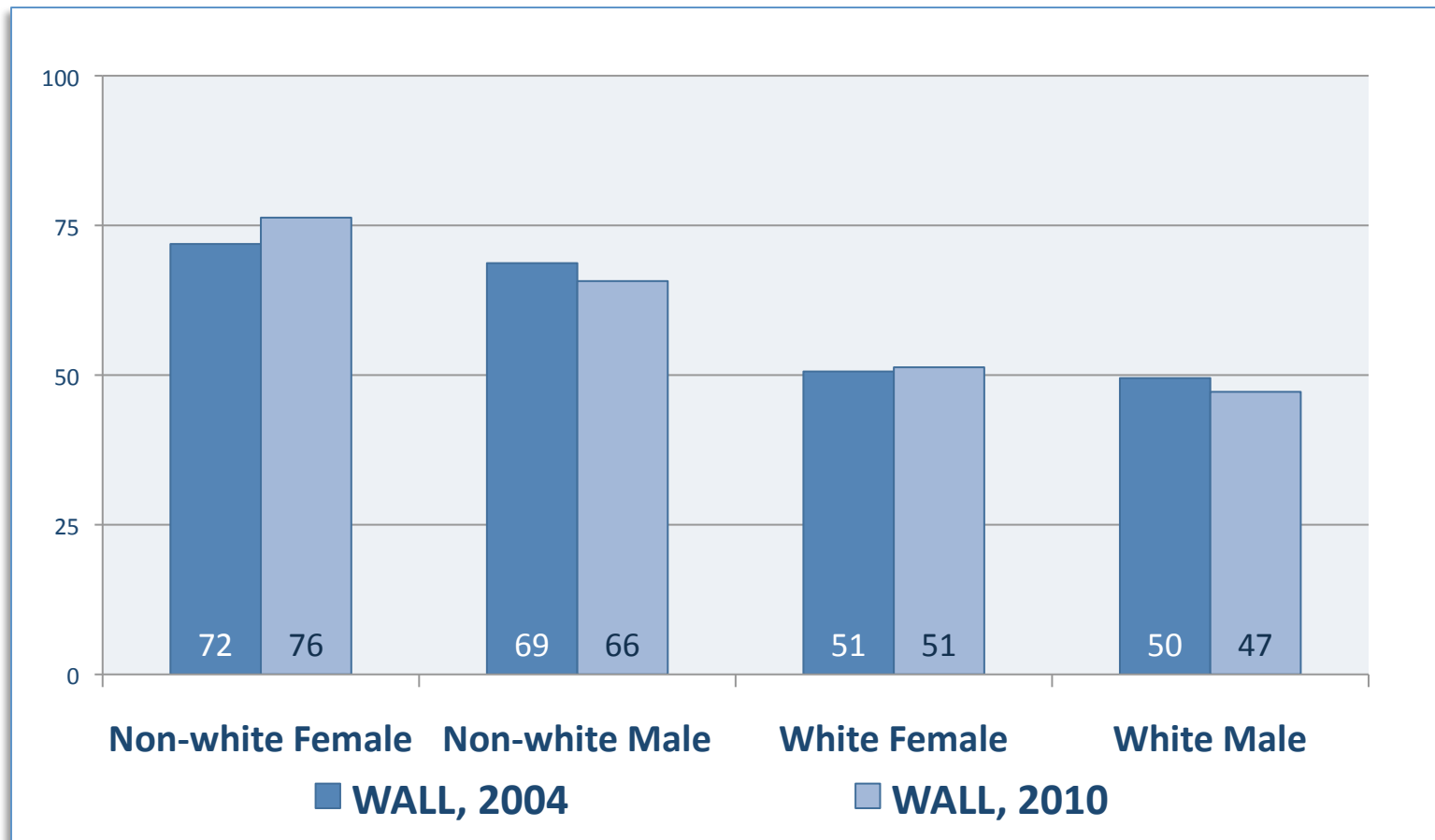
○ Up to 45 years old

◇ Over 45 years



# Graph 11: Race, Gender and PLAR

All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)



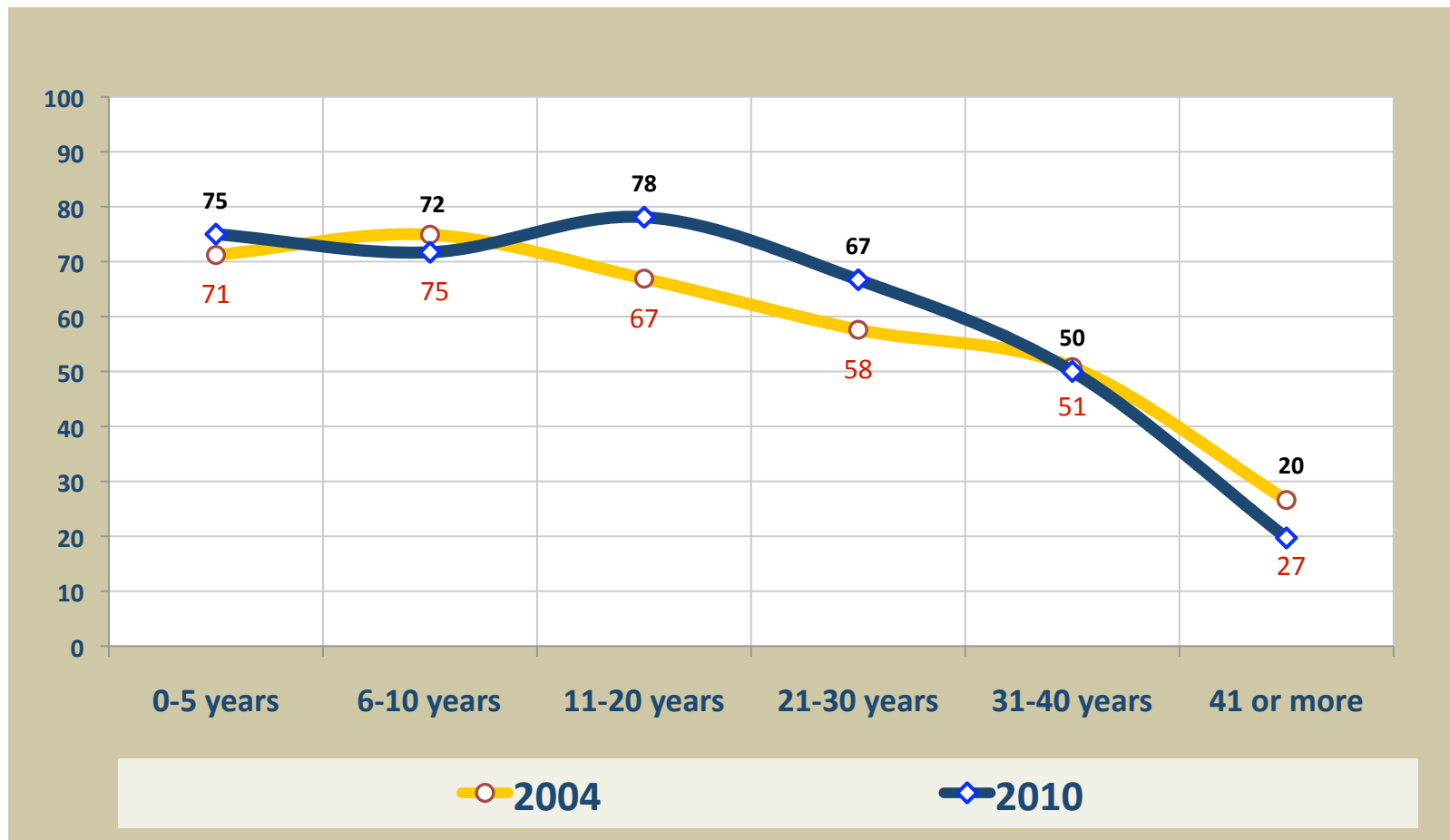
[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 12: Period of Immigration to Canada & PLAR

All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)

OISEUT

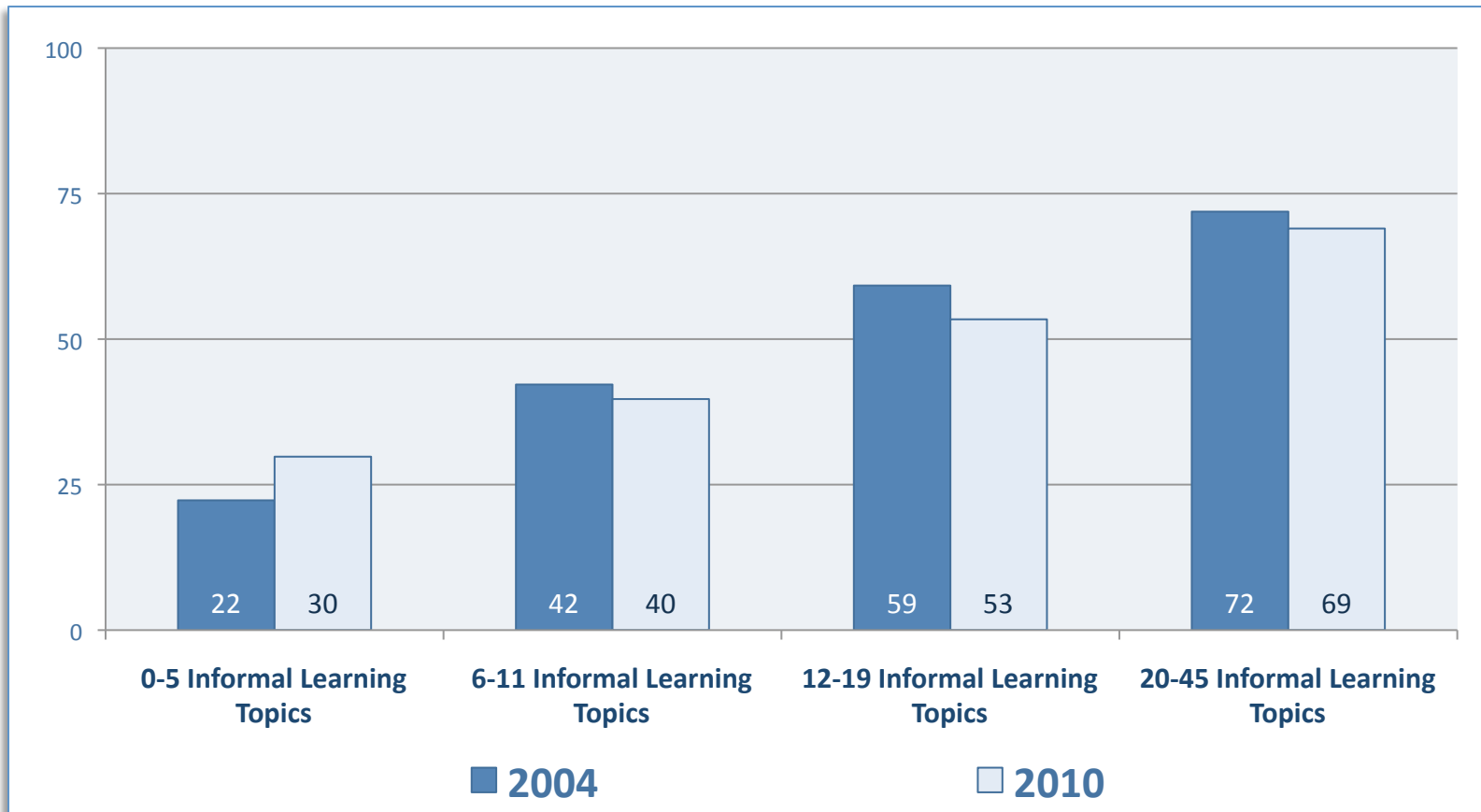
WALL



[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 13: General Involvement in Informal Learning & PLAR

All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)

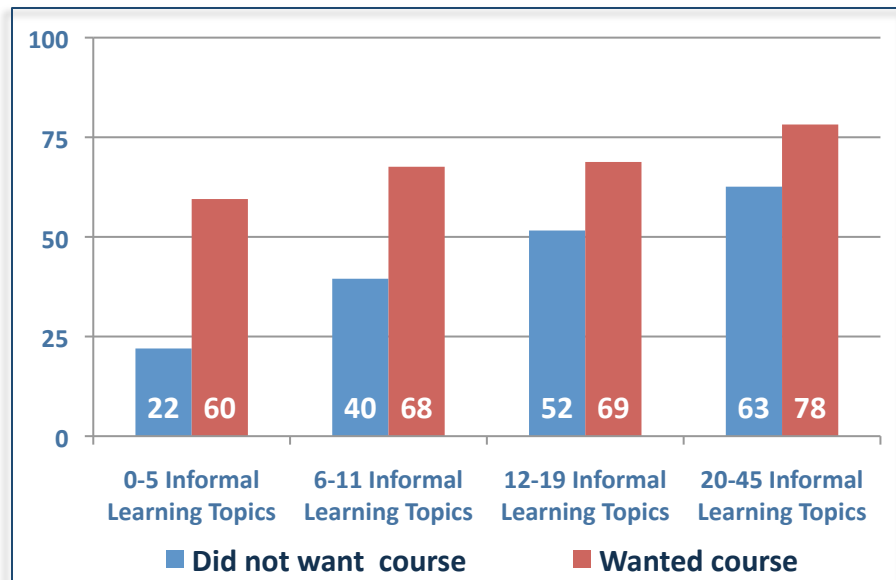


[ Source: WALL, 2004 and WALL, 2010. ]

# Graph 14: Overall Involvement in Informal Learning, Unmet Demand for Further Adult Education Courses and PLAR (%)

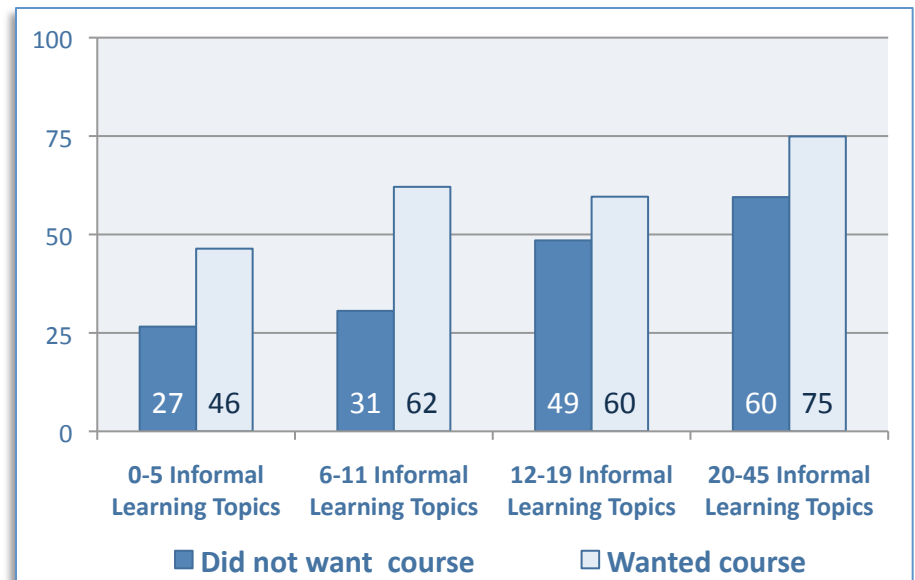
All Adults, 2004-2010 (% interested)

Graph 14A: 2004



[ Source: WALL, 2004.]

Graph 14B: 2010



[ Source: WALL, 2010.]

## Table 7: Selected Occupational Classes by Credential Underemployment and Interest in PLAR

Employed Labour Force, 2010

Occupational Class	Underemployed (% with higher credential than job entry requires)	PLAR (% interested)
Professional employees	20	49
Service workers	39	67
Industrial workers	31	61
Total labour force	31	52

[ Source: WALL, 2010.]

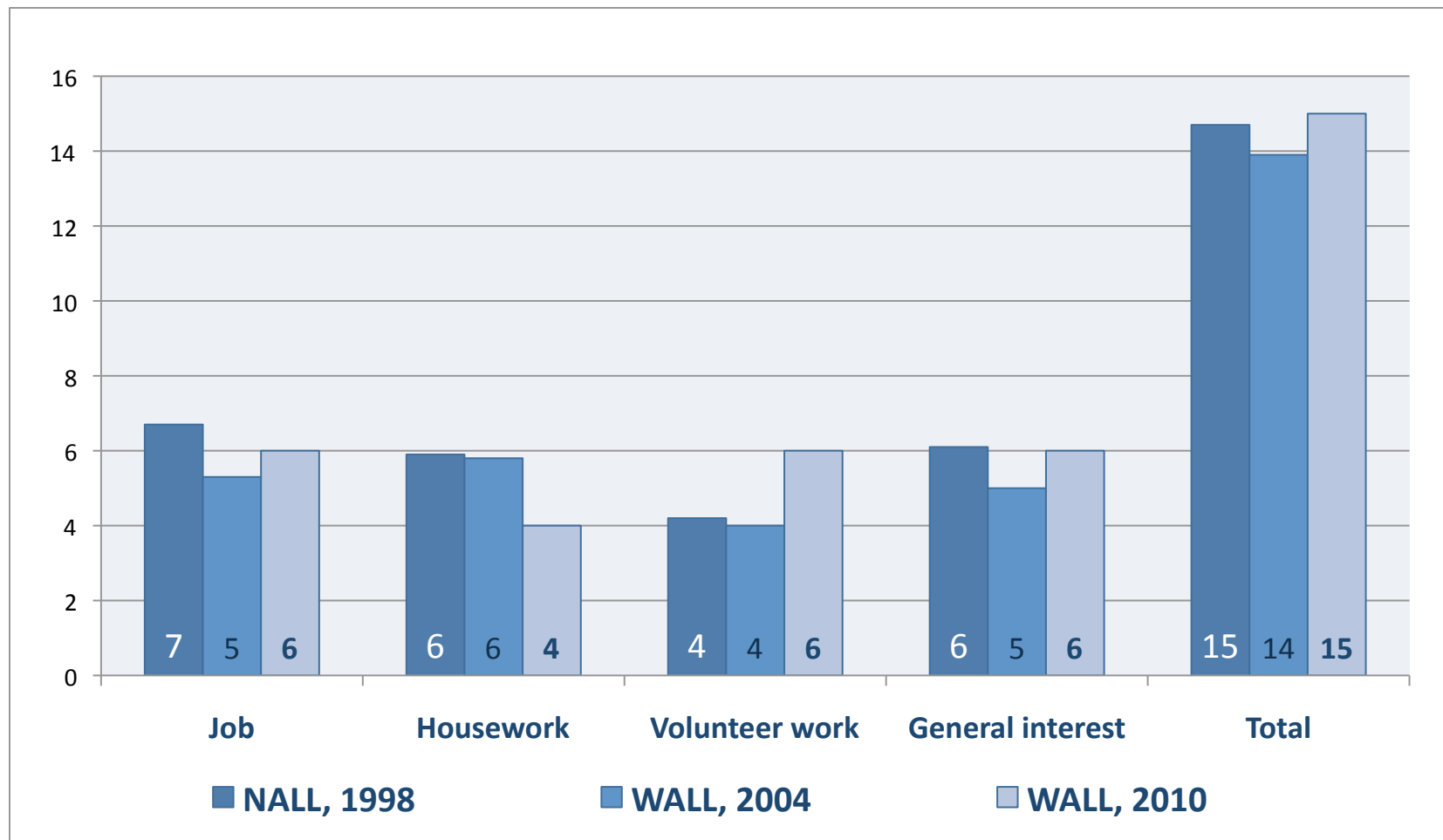
# Recognizing the Icebergs of Informal Learning

# Table 8: Participation rates in informal learning related to paid and unpaid activities, 1998–2010 (%)

	Area of informal learning											
	Paid work			Household work			Volunteer work			General interest		
Year	1998	2004	2010	1998	2004	2010	1998	2004	2010	1998	2004	2010
Total%	86	87	90	79	82	82	81	76	90	83	82	88
N	962	5734	1256	1436	8607	928	795	3745	1914	1565	9024	1965

[ Sources: NALL 1998 Survey; WALL 2004 Survey; WALL 2010 Survey. ]

# Graph 15: Time of Participation in Different Forms of Informal Learning, 1998-2010 (hours per week)

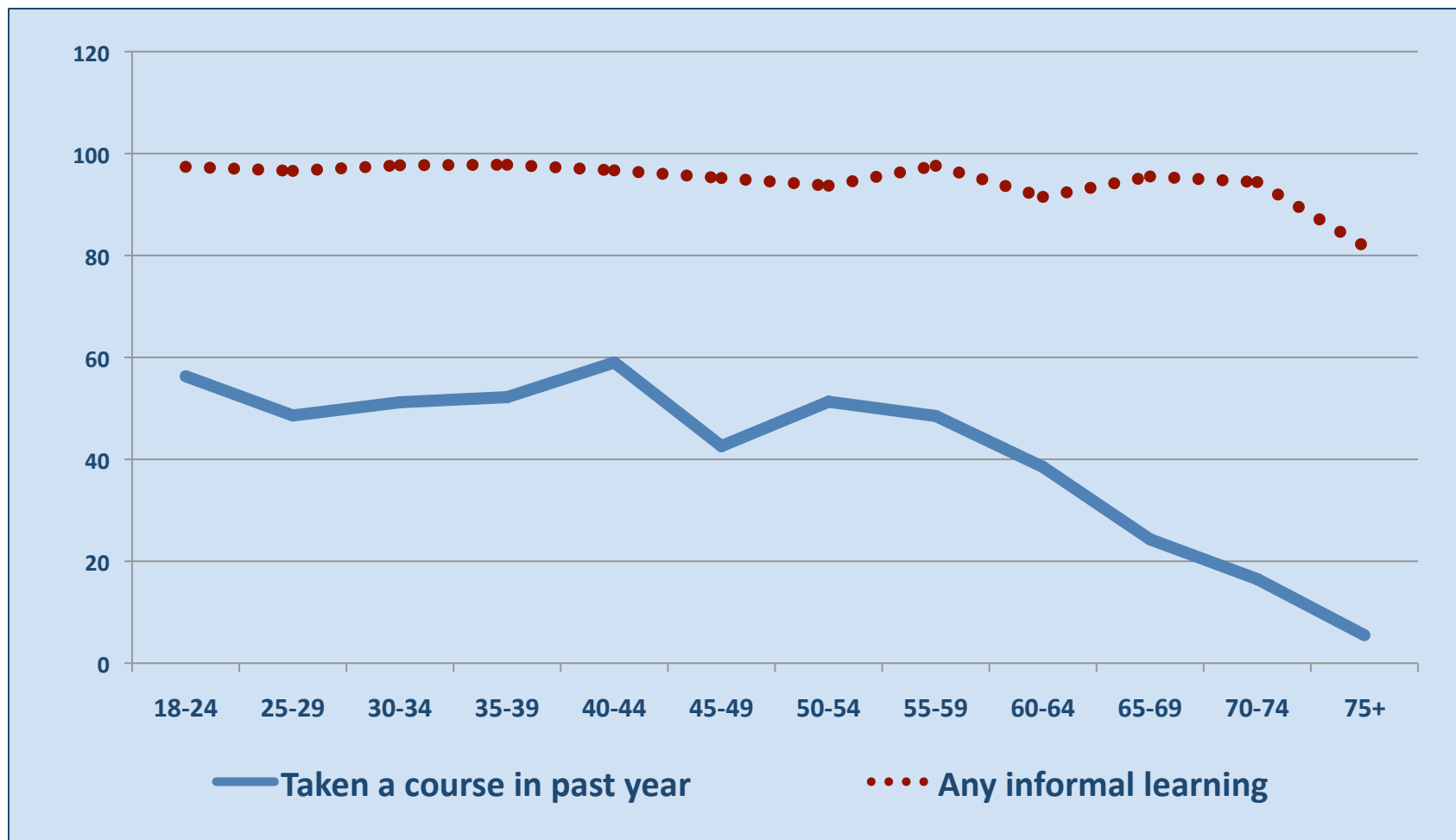


[ Sources: NALL 1998 Survey; WALL 2004 Survey; WALL 2010 Survey. ]



## Graph 16: Age and participation in past year in adult further education courses and informal learning activities (%)

All Adults, 2010



[ Source: WALL 2010 Survey (N=1965).]

# The Gap between Working Knowledge and Formal Job Requirements

**“Just involve the people ... This guy might run this machine every day for years. He will come up with ideas that will make his job easier for him and easier for management ... Give people some sort of a sense of importance ... rather than being treated like cattle.”**

[Ethan, a tool setter on an auto assembly line]

[Source: *Education and Jobs* 2009]

# Conclusions

# Concluding Remarks

- About half of all Canadian adults and greater numbers of the employed would be more likely to enroll in further formal education if their previous learning experiences were recognized for credit.
- More than two-thirds of racial minorities, recent immigrants and younger school dropouts express a high interest in enrolment in further formal education and training if their prior learning experiences were recognized for credit.

# Concluding Remarks

## PLAR for educational motives

- The survey results indicate substantial unmet demand for participation in further formal education. About one fifth of all adults wanted to enroll in further formal education in the past year but did not. Two-thirds of these people indicate interest in enrolling if their prior learning experiences were recognized for credit.
- This amounts to well over 10 percent of all Canadian adults, or over 3 million people. These people tend to be younger with less formal education. Fuller recognition of less credentialed Canadian adults' prior informal learning could contribute to substantially greater participation in further formal education and training among those most at risk of being excluded from an increasingly credential-oriented society.

# Concluding Remarks

## PLAR for employment motives

- Fuller recognition in paid workplaces of current educational credentials and informally acquired job skills and knowledge among the large numbers of underemployed workers, especially service workers and industrial workers, as well as fuller recognition of formal credentials from abroad and informally acquired job skills and knowledge of recent immigrants in employment settings could contribute to more effective use of workers' talents in fulfilling, decent jobs. Greater educational equity, a more productive labour force and a more sustainable just society could result.
- PLAR could address the chronic shortage of certified skilled trades workers in Canada.

# Concluding Remarks

- Can we develop the systems needed to support the current diverse demands for PLAR?
- Can we do so in a manner that is sensitive both to participants' learning capacities and work experiences, and also to their right to privacy in what they are prepared to reveal?
- More in-depth studies by communities of scholars on prior learning assessment and recognition, studies that distinguish between prior formal and informal learning and also between motives of educational certification and job benefits, are sorely needed.

# Concluding Remarks

## Lifelong and Lifewide Learning

- Broader than *lifelong schooling* mindset, as per WALL formal and informal learning in paid and unpaid work conceptual model.
- PLAR is not a 'one-trick pony' – i.e.: superb bridge into formal education and training but much more.
- PLAR applies to a broad range of transition challenges between learning and work throughout the life course– starts with strengths – builds confidence, motivation – opens range of options (labour market/career change/community engagement/legacy document/etc).



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