



## Completed Primary Research

### **The Relationship of the Component Skills of Reading to IALS Performance: Tipping Points and Five Classes of Adult Literacy Learners**

**John Strucker, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Irwin Kirsch, November 2006**

Surveys such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) demonstrate the overall level of reading comprehension in a population, but provide little information on why certain adults do not read well. The research question that drove this study was: What is the relationship between the underlying components of reading (word recognition, reading fluency, and vocabulary) and reading comprehension level? This study was sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). It provides important findings for adult literacy teachers, administrators, and policy makers, because it looks at the reading profiles of Level 1 and Level 2 readers (the lowest-level readers), as compared to Level 3 readers, to understand where the specific level of proficiency (the “tipping point”) in component reading skills lies. Such profiles might be helpful to practitioners in making instructional decisions about how to improve adult’s literacy skills. The study found that when adults reach a .85 proficiency level in these component skills, they reach the tipping point of IALS Level 3 literacy, the level associated with improved quality of life. This information could help practitioners identify adults who are close to this tipping point and who might benefit from intensive instruction in specific print and meaning-making skills, beyond instruction solely in reading comprehension strategies.

For the research brief: [www.ncsall.net/?id=27#ials](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=27#ials)

### **The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy**

**Mark Kutner, Elizabeth Greenberg, Ying Jin, Christine Paulsen, and Sheida White, September 2006**

Previous research has demonstrated that better health is associated with adults’ ability to manage the literacy skills associated with treating chronic diseases, seek preventive screening tests, and navigate the health care system. This DOE-funded study comes out of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) survey, administered to 19,000 adults in the United States. The survey tested adults’ prose, document, and quantitative literacy skills; this study looks at the results of the health-related questions on that survey, to find out the proportion of adults who have below basic, basic, intermediate, or proficient health literacy skills. The research question was: What are U.S. English-speaking adults’ health literacy skills related to clinical care, preventive care, and



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navigation of the health system? The study found that over 50% of adults had intermediate level health literacy, 22% basic health literacy, and 14% below basic health literacy. Males, minorities, and older adults, high school noncompleters, and the poor demonstrated lower average health literacy. Adults who spoke other languages before starting school had lower average health literacy. Adults who received Medicare or Medicaid, or had no health insurance coverage, had lower average health literacy. This study is the most up-to-date assessment of how U.S. adults perform on health literacy tasks, skills that are crucial to improving the health of individuals and families. (See related Viewpoint essay in this issue.) For the full report: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006483>

*What are U.S. English speaking adults' health literacy skills related to clinical care, preventive care, and navigation of the health system?*

### **Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models** Cynthia Zafft, Silja Kallenbach, and Jessica Spohn, August 2006

The survey addressed this research question: Do ABE-to-college transition programs fall into discrete models and, if so, what are the key features of these models? The researchers surveyed 23 transition programs around the country, and conducted interviews with officials in four states—Connecticut, Maine, Kentucky, and Oregon—about their state-level initiatives to help adult basic education students enroll and succeed in college. Their analysis revealed five distinct models of transition programs: (1) the advising model, the goal of which is to build adult students' awareness of postsecondary options; (2) the GED-plus model, which aims to accelerate learning for adult education students interested in pursuing postsecondary education, usually through dual enrollment in adult education and postsecondary schooling; (3) the ESL model, which provides intensive language instruction with clear benchmarks for admission to postsecondary; (4) the career pathways model, which helps adult students prepare for “advanced training and college-level programs in high-wage, high-growth employment sectors;” and (5) the college preparatory model, which provides ABE students with direct academic instruction in a college-like environment to prepare them for postsecondary learning, along with counseling and the support of peers in a learning community. The analysis of state-level initiatives identified common features for supporting programs' efforts to help ABE students transition to postsecondary schooling, such as cross-agency collaborations, funding for development of models, and integrating support for transition program components into the state's regular RFP system for adult basic education. This study, published by NCSALL with funding from the Lumina Foundation and the Nellie Mae Foundation, contributes to the burgeoning knowledge base in our field about how to help adult students move beyond the GED for the education they need to find living wage jobs.

For the full report: [www.ncsall.net/?id=26#transition](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=26#transition)

### **The Role of Corporate Giving in Adult Literacy** Forrest Chisman and Gail Spangenberg, March 2006

This nine-month study was conducted by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy and funded by Verizon. The research question driving the study was: What is the nature and impact of corporate giving to adult literacy in the United States? The study used interviews with corporate donors, document review of corporations that give to adult literacy, and Web-based surveys of literacy program recipients. Researchers estimate that total giving by national corporations is about \$30 million per year, and most grants go to nonpublicly funded literacy providers such as community-based organizations, library and literacy coalitions, and national literacy leadership organizations. Impact is difficult to measure, and local organizations use funds mostly to support program improvement activities, expand infrastructure, or develop new types of services. This is the first study to investigate the extent of corporate funding for adult literacy programs, and it serves as a “baseline of information for understanding corporate philanthropy in this field” (p. i).

For the full report: [www.caalusa.org/corporategiving.pdf](http://www.caalusa.org/corporategiving.pdf)

### **Does Numeracy Matter More?** Samantha Parsons and John Bynner, January 2006

This study, funded by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, used data from two longitudinal surveys in Britain that followed 17,000 babies born in a particular week. The research question behind this study was: What role does literacy and numeracy play in people’s health, employment, and quality of life? By looking at the literacy and numeracy skills of the men and women in these surveys over time, along with information about many aspects of their lives, this study specifically investigated whether poor numeracy was a problem in its own right, beyond the effects of poor literacy and numeracy. The study found that “for men, there is no real difference between the effect of poor literacy and poor numeracy together, and poor numeracy alone,” but for women, “while the impact of low literacy and low numeracy skills is substantial, low numeracy has the greater negative effect, even when it is combined with competent literacy skills.” Women with poor numeracy were much more likely to be working part-time, in semiskilled or unskilled jobs, and to report low self-esteem, lack of control in their lives, and poor physical health in the previous year. This is the first study to show the separate effect of poor numeracy skills in people’s lives, and the study concludes that government policy should take a stronger approach to “tackling poor standards of numeracy among the most disadvantaged section of the female population.”

For the full report: [www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=16](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=16)

## Primary Research in Progress

### Adult ESL Explicit Literacy Impact Study

Larry Condelli, Mike Fishman, and Melanie Ali

This multiyear study is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, to be conducted by the American Institutes for Research, the Lewin Group, and other private consulting organizations. Research questions include: How effective is explicit literacy intervention in improving the English reading, writing, and speaking skills of low-literacy adult ESL learners? Does the explicit literacy intervention have different effects on subgroups of adult ESL learners? How well do instructors implement the intervention, and how does this affect learning? The goal is to test the effectiveness of a new 60-hour, 15-week curriculum for adult ESL students. The curriculum provides students with explicit instruction in language and literacy skills. Explicit instruction is defined as "the systematic, sustained, and deliberate teaching of language and literacy skills, and of strategies for making meaning." The study will include approximately 10 adult ESL programs, 40 teachers, and 1,800 low-literate adult ESL students. The research questions are aimed at discovering how well instructors implement the explicit literacy curriculum, and whether and which ESL students experiencing such a curriculum improve their skills, as compared to similar ESL students using the traditional program curriculum. Initial data collection is scheduled for one year (fall 2007–spring 2008), with follow-up data collection one year later, funding permitting. The findings will be published in 2009. The study will be the first to test a specific curriculum for low-literate ESL adult students, and it will produce not only information for teachers, program administrators, and policy makers about the effectiveness of explicit literacy instruction, but also a tested curriculum and longitudinal data about the retention and growth of language and literacy in adult students.

For more information: [www.air.org/news/documents/AERA2005%20ESL.pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/AERA2005%20ESL.pdf)

*How do adults participate in basic skills programs and literacy education? What impact does literacy development have on social and economic outcomes?*

### Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning

Stephen Reder

How do adults' literacy skills continue to develop after they are out of school, and what experiences in life are associated with literacy development? How do adults participate in basic skills programs and literacy education? What impact does literacy development have on social and economic outcomes? Researchers at Portland (Oregon) State University, supported by NCSALL with funds from the U.S. Institute of Education Sciences, have been looking at these questions by following a group of over 900 high school dropouts for

more than seven years. Researchers interviewed these adults every year or every other year, starting in 1998, collecting information about the adults' literacy skills and practices, about their participation in adult literacy programs, about their daily life and backgrounds, and about their work, health, and social activities. This research will provide the adult literacy field with its first comprehensive look at the long-term development and impact of literacy among a randomly selected group of adults. The study is expected to continue through at least 2007.

For more information: [www.lsal.pdx.edu/](http://www.lsal.pdx.edu/)

### **Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child: A Longitudinal Study of Family Literacy**

**Linda Phillips and Ruth Hayden**

This is a five-year longitudinal study of 84 parents/guardians and 90 children who participated together in a family literacy program in Canada in 2000 and 2001, compared with 50 parents and 50 children who do not attend the family literacy program. The research question asks: What are the effects of the program on children's and parent's literacy development and on parents' ability to assist their children in developing literacy skills? Those families who participated in the Learning Together program were followed for three years afterwards to determine the long-term effects. The study is taking place at the University of Alberta with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development in Ottawa, Canada. A completion date for this study is not yet available.

For more information: [www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/elementaryed/nav04.cfm?nav04=32799&nav03=32366&nav02=21042&nav01=14026](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/elementaryed/nav04.cfm?nav04=32799&nav03=32366&nav02=21042&nav01=14026)

## **Secondary Research, Meta-Analyses, and Reviews of Note**

### **Locked Up and Locked Out: An Educational Perspective on the U.S. Prison Population**

**Richard Coley and Paul Barton, February 2006**

This review, funded by the Educational Testing Service, asks the following questions: What is the size and nature of the prison population? What is the nature of prison education efforts? and What are the effects of education and training on recidivism? (See related article on page 27.) Using existing data and information about the educational prospects of inmates in U.S. prisons,

it includes a section that describes the growing size of the prison population (even as crime rates have gone down, due to mandatory sentences and longer terms); the educational level of prisoners, about 41% of whom have less than a high school education; the literacy levels of prisoners, two thirds of whom scored in the lowest two levels of the National Adult Literacy Survey; and the availability of—and declining investment in—correctional education programs. The review cites previous research about the strong effect of prison education on employment and reduction of recidivism after release, and shows a direct connection between the amount of hours spent in prison academic programs and a reduced likelihood of returning to prison. One section presents staggering statistics about the incarceration of young Black males, stating that for those without a high school diploma, “about as many are in prison as are employed,” and that “half of all Black males who do not have a high school diploma have a prison record.” The review presents a clear picture of the need for investment in correctional education.

For the full report: [www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-LOCKEDUP.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-LOCKEDUP.pdf)

### **An Evidence-Based Adult Education Program Model Appropriate for Research**

**John Comings, Lisa Soricone, and Maricel Santos, March 2006**

This exhaustive review of educational research asks: What is the research, theory, and professional wisdom about the criteria for quality adult education programs? The authors identify four program components—program quality support, entrance into a program, participation in a program, and re-engagement in learning—and a set of principles describing what programs look like when they have sufficient quality within which to conduct research. The report, sponsored by NCSALL with funding from DOE, also includes a site identification protocol that researchers can use when they visit programs to see how the program measures up against the evidence base for quality programs. This review of the literature and professional wisdom provides the field with a substantiated baseline for researchers (and programs themselves) to assess whether a particular program has minimum quality components.

For the full report: [www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/op\\_comings4.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/op_comings4.pdf)