



Primary Research in Progress

Compensated Adult Dyslexics: Deficits and Compensatory Mechanisms

Rauno Parrila, Lesly Wade-Woolley, Julie Corkett, S. Helene Deacon, and Nenagh Kemp

Although the difficulties that dyslexic children experience in learning to read is well documented, what is less well known is that between 20% and 25% of such children will become adults who have learned to compensate for such difficulties and read well enough to attend college. This research study, conducted by the University of Alberta Department of Educational Psychology, with funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada, addresses the question: *How is it that some dyslexic adults have achieved such success while others have not?* Begun in 2002, this study will compare the reading skills and strategies of adult dyslexics with nondyslexic adults of the same chronological and “reading” ages, to determine what strategies compensated dyslexics use. The goal is to provide research-based information about the strategies for the design of reading programs for children with dyslexia and for “noncompensated” adult dyslexics. *For a fuller description:* www.nald.ca

Adult’s Experiences Living with Low Literacy Skills and a Chronic Illness

Judith King

This qualitative study, based in Canada and funded by the University of Ottawa Faculty of Education, addresses the research question: *What do adults with low literacy skills and a chronic illness experience when they participate in patient education?* The researcher is conducting interviews with 14 adults in Ottawa who are participating in adult literacy programs and who have a chronic illness. The research will ask these adults to “reconstruct their patient education experiences.” Using three adult learning theories—transformational learning theory, situated cognition theory, and critical theory—the researcher will analyze the data to understand the role of literacy and the public health sector in patients’ educational experiences. The hope is that the results of this study will provide health and adult literacy practitioners with information to optimize the care of patients leading to a reduction in health care spending and an improved quality of life. Preliminary findings indicate that adults trying to improve their literacy skills feel more confident interacting with doctors and health care professionals, although since most of the patient education material they receive is in written form, patients themselves suggest that health care workers use more diagrams, pictures, and models. Adults with a chronic disease who had improved their literacy skills felt that their health status was improved through better understanding of patient-education information. The study began in 2003. *For a fuller description:* www.literacyjournal.ca



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Completed Primary Research

Education Pays (Second Update)

Sandy Baum, Kathleen Payea, and Patricia Steele, 2006

What difference does college make to individuals and to society? That is the research question driving this update, funded by the College Board, to the original 2004 report about the financial and nonmonetary benefits of higher education. Using census, earnings, and longitudinal study data from the U.S. and nine other countries, this report finds that the gap in median earnings between U.S. high school and college graduates has increased significantly in the past 30 years. For example, 46% of those aged 35–44 with a bachelor's degree earned \$60,000 or more, while only 12% of high school graduates earned that much. The college degree itself matters: those with a four-year degree now earn much more (37% for men, 41% for women) than do adults with only some college education. College graduates have lower unemployment rates, vote and volunteer more, have improved health outcomes, and a higher percentage save for their children's college. In comparing higher education in different countries, the report also shows that the U.S. spends more (as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product) on higher education than any of the other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, but that (including two-year vocational training programs) the U.S. has fewer adults who have completed a postsecondary education program than does Korea, Canada, Sweden, and Japan. Gender and racial gaps continue in college enrollment, which are "significantly lower for men than for women and lower for blacks and Hispanics than for whites and Asian Americans" (p. 8). The report concludes that investments in higher education "pay off in both dollars and in improvements to quality of life" for individuals and for society, "making it imperative that we renew efforts to narrow the educational opportunity gaps in American society" (p. 1).

For the full report: www.collegeboard.com

America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future

Irwin Kirsch, Henry Braun, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Andrew Sum, January 2007

This new report, funded by the Educational Testing Service, uses data from a variety of national educational surveys and studies to answer the question: *What forces (educational and economic) are affecting our country?* The authors conclude that we are in the midst of a "perfect storm" influenced by three factors:

1. **Disparity in literacy and numeracy skills**—a wide racial and ethnic gap in education means that large numbers of adults do not have the ability to "fully participate in an increasingly competitive work environment" (p. 2, executive summary).

What difference does college make to individuals and to society?

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2. **Changes in the economy**—fewer manufacturing jobs and more jobs requiring a college-level education mean that those with both more education and higher skills can expect consistently higher incomes over their lifetimes.
3. **Demographic changes**—our population is becoming more diverse and older. This means that most job growth will come from immigrants rather than nonimmigrant workers. Also, most new Hispanic immigrants—one of the largest growing immigrant groups—lack a high school diploma and report not speaking English well.

The report warns that, over the next 25 years, millions of students and adults will be unable to qualify for higher-paying jobs. The authors advocate for new policies supporting education and training, so that key segments of our population will not be competing for fewer jobs with newer immigrants as well as workers in other economies around the world.

For the executive summary and full report: www.ets.org

Lost in Translation

Tara Colton, November 2006

This publication, published by the Center for an Urban Future at the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, addresses the question, *How well is New York state meeting the potential demand and need for instruction in English as a second language (ESL), given the growth in numbers of non-English-speaking immigrants?* The answer is that “even though the state’s foreign-born population has grown by nearly 1.3 million since 1990, adult ESL programs administered through the state department of education added only 15,000 new seats over the same period” (p. 1). As in Massachusetts, New York’s population growth is fueled by immigrants: the immigrant population in the state grew by over 7% from 2000 to 2005, while the number of native-born New Yorkers actually declined. Currently, one in four New Yorkers is foreign-born, and many need help improving their English-language skills. “Foreign-born residents comprise the lion’s share—80% —of New Yorkers with limited English skills” (p. 4). Yet, the study estimates, only about 5% of those who need English-language instruction are enrolled in state-funded ESL programs in New York. The gap between the need for ESL instruction and actual services offered affects individual workers’ incomes since, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, workers with proficient English skills make up to 225% more in wages than do those with very limited English skills. The study also concludes that “as immigrants come to comprise a growing share of the state’s workforce, New York’s competitive position will increasingly depend upon getting them the skills that employers need” (p. 6).

For the full report: www.nycfuture.org

New Light on Literacy and Numeracy: Summary Report

John Bynner and Samantha Parsons, November 2006

This study, sponsored and funded by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Britain, collected further data (during 2004) from 9,665 people who were all born during the same week in April 1970. This type of longitudinal study is useful for following the lives of a random sample (cohort) of people. The data included information about cohort members' literacy and numeracy skills; their education, housing, work, home, and family lives; and (for 2,846 of the cohort members) their children's health, education, and cognitive skills. The research question was: *What are the outcomes for people—and their children—of lower literacy and numeracy skills?* The 2004 update found that people who did not perceive that they had difficulties with reading, writing, or math were unlikely to seek admission to basic skills courses, even if they had relatively low skills. Those with lower literacy and numeracy skills were less likely to be homeowners, to work full-time, to vote, and to participate in some sort of community or social activity; they were also more likely to smoke, to experience poor physical health and mental well-being and, among women, to have been a teenage mother. As for the cohort members' children, the study concludes that "parents' literacy and numeracy (are) key components of influence on children's educational achievements, particularly at the lowest parental and literacy levels," even when parents' highest qualification (educational degree) was taken into account. The report concludes that people with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy skills—and their children—are at a social, economic, educational, and health disadvantage.

For the summary report: www.nrdc.org.uk

What are the outcomes for people—and their children—of lower literacy and numeracy skills?

Secondary Research, Meta-Analyses, and Reviews of Note

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes: A Review of Controlled Trials

Carole Torgerson, Greg Brooks, Jill Porthouse, Maxine Burton, Alison Robinson, Kath Wright, and Ian Watt, March 2004

This secondary analysis, funded by British Department of Education and Skills and carried out by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, addressed the question: *What factors in teaching cause adult learners to make progress in adult literacy and numeracy?* Looking at both research evidence and professional wisdom of experts, the review found very few quantitative studies that could be used to answer the question. The meta-analysis, however, did find "just enough evidence" to show that people who participated in adult literacy and numeracy instruction progressed more than those who did not. Additionally, the review found positive effects on reading comprehension

What role does the U.S. government play in providing literacy services for the nation's adults?

of an instructional approach called *reciprocal teaching*, where teachers model comprehension strategies such as summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting, then ask learners to lead a dialogue about text using these same strategies. Other positive teaching factors included phonemic awareness and word analysis instruction for adult beginning readers.

For the full report: www.nrdc.org.uk

The Federal Role in Adult Literacy

Lennox McLendon, Garrett Murphy, and Jim Parker, November 2006

This compilation of four papers addresses the question, *What role does the U.S. government play in providing literacy services for the nation's adults?* Sponsored by the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy with funding from Dollar General, these four papers were written for the National Commission on Adult Literacy, a blue ribbon panel reviewing the current state of the adult literacy system and proposing recommendations for its future structure, legislation, and funding. The four papers include:

- ✦ *Adult Education and Literacy Legislation and Its Effects on the Field.* McLendon reports on how the government shifted its vision of how to govern, as described in the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, from a “regulatory” mode to a “continuous improvement” mode, and how this shift affected the field of adult literacy.
- ✦ *Adult Education and Literacy in the United States: Need for Services, What the Current Delivery System Looks Like.* Murphy reviews the continued need for improving literacy skills, based on the recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, and then describes the structure of the adult education and literacy system and the population it serves.
- ✦ *Introduction to Main Strands of Federal Adult Literacy Programming.* Parker provides a summary introduction to the key legislative initiatives and projects recently funded by federal government agencies that support the effort to improve the functional literacy skills of the nation's adults. These agencies include the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, and the National Institute for Literacy.
- ✦ *Federal Role in Adult Literacy, FY 05–06.* Murphy provides an overview of the main funding sources, by government department, for adult literacy and English-language services, basic skills services for specific populations, and research and demonstration project funding.

For the full report: www.caalusa.org