Research in Progress

Literacy Surveys

Circelli, M., Curtis, MD, & Perkins, K. (2011). *Mapping adult literacy performance*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2463.html

Australia's National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) did a study to determine whether performance levels on the literacy and numeracy scales of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLSS) can be reliably mapped to the performance levels of the Australian Core Skills Framework. An expert panel concluded that such a mapping is feasible, based on similarities between the factors that contribute to task complexity in both surveys The next step will involve a larger-scale study to bring together the two frameworks. No timeline is provided for this in the paper.

Keywords: Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL); Australia; Australian Core Skills Framework; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

Reports

General – Australia

Australian National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Releases Summaries of 2011 Research

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2011). *Research messages 2011.* Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2453.html

Research messages 2011 is a collection of 58 research report summaries published by NCVER in 2011, with an overview essay. Topics include school-work-life balance, labour mobility, e-learning, adult language, literacy and numeracy, embedded learning, learning in low-paid occupations, and skill requirements across countries. Several of these reports are summarized in this scan[See Barker, C.. (2011); Circelli, M., Curtis, MD, & Perkins, K. (2011); Pocock, B. et al (2011); Ryan, C., & Sinning, M. (2011); Semo, R. & Karmel, T. (2011).]

Keywords: Australia; Australian Core Skills Framework; Conferences; Consultations; Educational participation; E-learning; Embedding; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Learning transfer; Literature reviews; Longitudinal studies; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); Numeracy; Research reports; Social capital; Workforce literacy; Workplace literacy and essential skills; Vocational Education; Youth

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Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

Australian Industry Group. (2012*). When Words Fail: National Workforce Literacy Project.* Available at http://www.aigroup.com.au/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDelivery Servlet/LIVE_CONTENT/Publications/Reports/2012/10870_national_workforce_literacy_project_final_r eport_web.pdf

This paper reports on the results of a study of Australian employers' perspectives on workforce literacy. The study involved a national employer survey and series of roundtable discussions in three states. It also involved trial training programs at business sites ("enterprise trials").   More than 75% of respondents reported that their business was affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy. Employers indicated that the problem was not confined to "low-skill" segments of the workforce: even those with more skills can often struggle to meet the demands of their jobs.   Only 8% said they had adequate capacity to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of their workforce. They tend to see workforce literacy as a shared responsibility between government, people in the workforce, education authorities and employers. The enterprise trials showed the importance of context in understanding and resolving workplace literacy problems, as a variety of training approaches were necessary to cater to different business needs and contexts.

Keywords: Australia; Australian Industry Group (AIG); Employers; Numeracy; Surveys; Workforce literacy

Barker, C. (2011). *Embedding learning from formal training into sustained behavioural change in the workplace.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2405.html.

This National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) study focusing on the health care sector conducted a literature review and interviews with industry and trainers to identify potential strategies that could help learners transfer their learning to the workplace. It used a pilot training program to test the effectiveness of these strategies. Feedback was sought immediately after the conclusion of training and again two months later. The study found that the delivery model using the strategies enhanced students' capacity to transfer their learning into the workplace; that it was helpful to focus attention on student self-directed learning and to assist trainers and supervisors to support sustained behavioural change; and that it was important for students to understand the purpose of the training program.

Keywords: Embedding; Health care sector; Learning transfer; Literature reviews; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); Workforce literacy; Vocational education

Labour Education Centre. (2011). *Union-Led Work-Related Learning: Profiles of Effective Practices.* Centre for Workplace Skills. Available at http://www.workplaceskills.ca/en/workers/union-led-work-related-learning-profiles-of-effective-practices.html

This report examines how union-led workplace education programs are implemented, based on 20 profiles of "effective" union-led learning practices. Four are drawn from Quebec, 13 from English Canada, two from the United Kingdom and one from New Zealand. The report defines "effective practices" as those that result in job development and increased productivity as well as citizenship development and participation, integrating functional skills and critical thinking. Effective union-led programs are defined as those centered on the needs of workers and featuring content that includes workplace skills but is also sensitive to workers' prior learning and aspirations. The focus of programs varied from literacy and second-language training to apprenticeship and health and safety.

Keywords: Canada; Case studies; Labour education; New Zealand; Quebec; Unions; United Kingdom

Pocock, B. et al (2011a). *Work, life and VET participation amongst lower-paid workers.* Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2378.html

This report comes out of a research project undertaken by the Centre for Work and Life at the University of South Australia into the factors that influence the participation of low-skilled and low-paid workers in vocational education and training (VET) between 2008 and 2010. The project included a literature review, an analysis of several surveys, industry consultations, a survey of 2748 Australian workers about education and training and work-life balance, and a qualitative study (described in the *Juggling Home, Work and Learning* report summarized below).

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The study found that VET is not a panacea for people in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. These people are more likely to be in small firms with flat employment structures offering little opportunity for advancement and few resources for cushioning work-life pressures. The study found that training can do more harm than good if it makes time and money demands on workers without genuinely generating new skills or opportunities for them. It concludes that it is important that training have realistic objectives, be of high quality and relevant to the job.

Keywords: Australia; Low-paid workers; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); Qualitative research; Vocational Education; Workforce literacy

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Pocock, Barbara, et al (2011b). *Juggling work, home and learning in low-paid occupations: a qualitative study.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2369.html

This report comes out of a research project undertaken by the Centre for Work and Life at the University of South Australia into the factors that influence the participation of low-skilled and low-paid workers in vocational education and training (VET). It is the culmination of the qualitative component of the larger study. Interviews and focus groups were held in three industries in four Australian states; these included students in formal VET courses as well as employees in workplaces, many of whom were also participating in some form of training. Employees were drawn from a small number of companies in each industry, and most interviewees were in larger workplaces or chains of workplaces. The researchers found that low-paid work tends to be physically, mentally or emotionally taxing, involving significant transportation costs and variable working hours which would create difficulties in balancing work with other life responsibilities. In some cases job flexibility made the balance easier. Barriers to training include time and financial constraints, low literacy and lack of family and community support.

Keywords: Australia; Low-paid workers; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); Qualitative research; Vocational Education; Workforce literacy;

Ryan, C., & Sinning, M. (2011). *Differing skill requirements across countries and over time.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2428.html

This report looks at data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), conducted in the early 1990's, and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS), conducted a decade later, to investigate the extent to which the match between worker skills and job requirements has differed over time and among four countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. The study found that the broad match of workers to jobs that use their skills was similar across the four countries, that those workers with relatively high literacy skills use their skills more often at work than do those with lower skill levels. This relationship also holds true for numeracy skills, but to a lesser extent: only managers

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and administrators were found to make more use of their numeracy skills than those with lower numeracy skill levels. The use of literacy skills increased in all countries between the surveys, most in Australia, although it started from a lower level. However, the use of numeracy skills declined except in Australia, where they increased.

Keywords: Adult literacy; Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS); Australia; Canada; International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS); International surveys; National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); New Zealand; Numeracy; United States; Workforce literacy;

Wihak, Christine, & Hall, Gail (2011). *Work-related Informal Learning: Research and Practice in the Canadian Context*. Retrieved February 23, 2012, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/informal_learning/informal_learning.pdf

This document is the result of a project that used a literature review and a consultation process involving a survey of 100 stakeholders including businesses, labour organizations, educators, researchers and community trainers followed by discussions with selected participants. The literature review was confined to 2000-2008. The researchers found no clear, broadly accepted definition of "informal learning" and so have suggested adopting a "continuum approach" in which "informality" is an attribute that is present to various degrees in different learning situations, based on a framework developed by Colley et al (2003). They drew on survey results and theoretical concepts in the literature to develop a "Typology of Informal Learning and Learners".

The report also looks at the current state of informal learning in Canada, drawing from surveys and case studies. Different Canadian surveys have found highly variable rates of participation in informal learning *ranging from 33% to 93%). Case studies show that management expectations about learning influence employees' participation in informal learning, that informal learning can be undertaken for positive reasons or in response to problems, that in some situations employees resist sharing their informal learning for fear of a negative response from co-workers or management, and that informal learning can be focused on technical job-related skills or on skills such as managing relationships with superiors and co-workers.

Keywords: Canada; Case studies; Informal learning; Literature reviews; Surveys; Typology

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Digital Skills

Chinien, Chris, & Boutin, France (2011). *Defining Essential Digital Skills in the Canadian Workplace: Final Report*. Retrieved March 05, 2012, from
http://www.nald.ca/library/research/digi_es_can_workplace/digi_es_can_workplace.pdf

This is the final report of a 2010-11 project that developed a proposed Canadian digital skills framework based on an international literature review and key informant interviews with employers in small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada focusing on issues related to digital skill needs. Based on their review of the literature, the researchers developed a framework that included four clusters: (1) foundational skills; (2) transversal skills; (3) technical digital skills; and (4) digital information processing skills. They then interviewed informants from different economic sectors to validate the framework, and found that a large majority rated the framework as useful and comprehensive.

They also found that Canadian employers see an urgent need to address digital skills and that there is a clear link between "foundational skills" (i.e. reading, writing and numeracy) and the development of essential digital skills. The authors recommended that the proposed framework be subjected to further validation through a series of focus group meetings, that it be used as a foundation for updating HRSDC's Essential Skills occupational profiles, replacing "computer use" with "digital skills", and that further research be conducted into appropriate assessment tools and to support periodic updates of the framework.

Keywords: Canada; E-Learning; Employers; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC); Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES); Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

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Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Eaton, Sarah Elaine (2011). *The Need for Increased Integration of Technology and Digital Skills in the Literacy Field in Canada*. Retrieved February 28, 2012, from
http://www.nald.ca/library/research/eaton/need_tech_literacy_field/need_tech_literacy_field.pdf

This report notes that technology has become an integral part of both the learning experience and everyday life in Canada. The notion of literacy has expanded to include "digital skills". However, the literacy sector has been slow to integrate learning technologies. The report makes recommendations for people and organizations working in adult literacy on how to incorporate technology into professional practice.

Keywords: Adult literacy; Canada; Digital skills; E-learning;Professional practice

Walsh, L, Lemon, B, Black, R, Mangan, C. and Collin, P. (2011) *The role of technology in engaging disengaged youth: Final Report*. Australian Flexible Learning Framework, Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra. Available at
http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/files/Final%20Report_%20Diseng%20Youth_vFINAL.pdf

This paper reports on a research project that investigated how young people experience the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for learning and what they and other key players in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector believe should be done to maximize the benefits of ICT use. The research confirms that youth disengagement from learning is common, and that the use of ICT can help to engage young learners and improve their learning outcomes. The project conducted a literature review, identified case studies of innovative use of ICT in the teaching of youth, and consulted key stakeholders in the VET sector. The consultation included an online youth forum, a national series of face-to-face forums with policymakers and practitioners, interviews with current and recent young VET learners and with at-risk youth. The researchers found that youth disengagement from VET learning continues to be an issue and that that the use of ICT by VET instructors is highly uneven. They call for a "more flexible and responsive policy environment" and learner-centered pedagogy allowing practitioners to tailor the use of technology to the needs of learners, and for substantial investment in professional development to enable instructors to use ICT with confidence.

Keywords: Australia; Consultations; Educational participation; E-learning; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Literature reviews; Vocational education; Youth

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Social Capital

Semo, R. & Karmel, T. (2011). *Social capital and young people: do young people's networks improve their participation in education and training?* National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2408.html

Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth, this report finds that social capital, measured at age 15, influences educational participation at age 17, even after controlling for background effects such as parental education.

Four social capital factors were positively associated with later educational participation: student connectedness with school, student-teacher relations, participation in school-based activities, and participation in sport. The report suggests that these findings and the prior literature show that social capital can help students overcome socioeconomic and other disadvantages.

Keywords: Australia; Educational participation; Longitudinal studies; Youth

Keywords

Adult literacy

Case studies

Consultations

Digital skills

Educational participation

E-learning

Embedding

Employers

Health care sector

Informal learning

Information and communication technology (ICT)

International surveys

Labour education

Learning transfer

Literacy surveys

Literature reviews

Longitudinal studies

Low-paid workers

Numeracy

Professional practice

Qualitative research

Research reports

Social capital

Typology

Vocational education

Unions

Workforce literacy

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Youth

Name keywords:

Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL)

Australia

Australian Core Skills Framework

Australian Industry Group (AIG)

Canada

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)