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Research Updates

Assessment

Alberta Survey Asks How Learner Progress is Being Measured

http://www.nald.ca/sites/default/files/lpm_project.pdf

The Government of Alberta, seeking to develop future directions in LES programming and policy, has commissioned the Centre for Excellence in Foundational Learning at Bow Valley College to lead the Literacy and Essentials Skills: Learner Progression Measures research project. The primary aim of the project is to learn how learner progress in LES programs is being measured by those involved: learners, employees, community organizations, community leaders and elders, and workplaces. The researchers are conducting interviews, in person or by phone, with “adults who work in or support community literacy and essential skills organizations, employees and employers involved in providing program funding, policy development, institution administration, and workplace training.” This survey will be done from April 8 to June 15, 2013.

Keywords: Assessment, Learners, Surveys

Publications

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

PIAAC Conceptual Framework for Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments

PIAAC Expert Group on Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments. (2009). PIAAC Problem-Solving in Technology-Rich Environments: A Conceptual Framework. *OECD Education Working Paper No. 36*.

<http://search.oecd.org/officialdocuments/displaydocumentpdf/?doclanguage=en&cote=edu/wkp%282009%2915>

PIAAC introduces the domain and constructs of “problem solving in technology-rich environments” (PS-TRE) in international adult literacy and essential skills assessments. The paper describes the growing importance of information technologies in society. It defines PS-TRE as involving the use of “digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others and perform practical tasks.” The authors note that the PIAAC survey will focus on a person’s ability to solve problems for “personal, work, and civil purposes” by setting goals, making plans and then accessing and using information through computers and related networks. The authors describe the three core dimensions of PS-TRE as: 1) The task or problem; 2) The technologies through which the problem-solving takes place; and 3) The cognitive processes by which someone problem-solves when using the technology. The paper also reviews some practical challenges of assessing PS-TRE.

Keywords: International adult literacy assessments, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Technology, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

How Technology Changes Demand for Human Skills and the Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments Competency

Levy, Frank. (2010). How Technology Changes Demand for Human Skills. *OECD Education Working Paper No. 45*. <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5kmhds6czqzq.pdf?expires=1365173836&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=844F3CFD32DC2CE4361B0BB39E1A9667>

This paper argues that PIAAC's focus on the literacy, numeracy, reading, and "problem solving in technology-rich environments" (PS-TRE) competencies is all the more important because of changes in workplace demand for skills that are being driven by computer-based technology. Demand for workers to carry out cognitive processes that can be replicated by computers is on the decline, but the author identifies two "advanced" skills that computers do not have and which are in rising demand in the workplace. One is "complex communication", which involves the ability to elicit, share, and interpret information with an understanding of the context for sharing; the other is "expert thinking", which is any problem-solving process that cannot be reduced to a series of pre-arranged rules. Levy sees the "problem solving in technology-rich environments" (PS-TRE) competency as roughly equivalent to "expert thinking", and the other competencies assessed by PIAAC as prerequisites to the two advanced competencies he identifies. These competencies are made increasingly essential by the accelerating pace of technological change in the workplace, which requires workers to keep learning new skills.

Keywords: International adult literacy assessments, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Technology, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Social Innovation and Finance

Methodology of Peterborough Social Impact Bond Study Questioned

Fiennes, Caroline. (2013, April 3). What the First Social Impact Bond Won't Tell us: Two views on evaluating the pilot SIB in Peterborough, UK. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/what_the_first_social_impact_bond_wont_tell_us?utm_source=Enews&utm_medium=email&utm_content=3&utm_campaign=fiennes

The pilot Social Impact Bond (SIB) at Peterborough Prison in the UK is being closely watched and emulated. However, this article argues that even a significant reduction of the re-offending rate of the "treatment" group compared to the control group would not necessarily demonstrate the efficacy of the SIB model compared to other funding models. The author critiques the methodology of the study. The prisoners taking part in the intervention were not selected randomly, and it is possible that many kinds of interventions costing over \$2500 per prisoner could reduce recidivism rates.

Keywords: Pilot projects, Policy, Program evaluation, Social finance, Social Impact Bonds, Social innovation, United Kingdom

Social Impact Bonds Not Worth Extra Cost: Maryland Feasibility Study

McKay, Kyle A. (2013). *Evaluating Social Impact Bonds as a New Reentry Financing Mechanism: A Case Study on Reentry Programming in Maryland*. Department of Legislative Services Office of Policy Analysis, Maryland. Available at <http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=kylemckay>

Prisoner reentry programs, which prepare prisoners to reintegrate into the community, are often considered to be prime candidates for funding through Social Impact Bonds (SIB's). The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) in the state of Maryland conducted a review of the feasibility, potential benefits, and risks of using Social Impact Bonds (SIB's) to finance reentry programs. The researchers found, through a literature review, that highly successful programs can be expected to reduce the recidivism rate by some 20%. Based on a 1994-97 national three-year re-imprisonment rate of 27%, this would result in a 5.4% drop in the overall prison population. However, this would not be sufficient to cause large cost reductions, and so would not offset the costs of a Social Impact Bond program, which include the costs of contract design, compensating investors and conducting an independent evaluation. Furthermore, while the government supposedly only has to pay for the program if the program succeeds, it still has to allocate that money when budgeting. It is far from clear that SIB's can actually shift risk from the public sector to private investors as they are supposed to. The report recommends proceeding with reentry programs because they have benefits aside from their fiscal impact, but that they should be directly financed by the government rather than through a SIB mechanism.

Keywords: Feasibility studies, Policy, Program evaluation, Social finance, Social Impact Bonds, Social innovation, United States

RAND Europe Evaluating the Efficacy of HMP Peterborough Social Impact Bond

<http://www.rand.org/randeuropa/research/projects/social-impact-bonds.html>

In September 2010 the UK Ministry of Justice launched the first Social Impact Bond (SIB) for funding public services. British organization Social Finance raised approximately £5 million from private individuals and charities to finance interventions for offenders serving short prison sentences (less than 12 months) at HMP Peterborough, in eastern England. These investors will recoup their investment with a return if reconviction events fall by 10% or more (compared to a matched control group) for each cohort of 1,000 offenders released. RAND Europe was commissioned to evaluate this project. The evaluation may last for up to eight years, and will analyze the costs and benefits of the Peterborough SIB while attempting to determine whether and how this funding model leads to innovation and greater efficiency. A preliminary report from 2011, *Lessons learned from the planning and early implementation of the Social Impact Bond at HMP Peterborough*, [noted](#) in our [December 2012-January 2013 scan, was not identified as part of the longer-term evaluation study.](#)

Keywords: Pilot projects, Program evaluation, Social finance, Social Impact bonds, Social innovation, United Kingdom

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

New Zealand Study on Learner Recruitment and Retention in WLES Programs

Benseman, John. (2013). Recruiting and retaining learners in workplace literacy programs in New Zealand. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 53 (1): 6-23.

The data for this article came from a three-year evaluation study of eighteen workplace literacy and numeracy courses in fifteen companies around New Zealand. The courses varied in approach and length as they were tailored to the specific needs of employers. All participants were paid for their attendance time, and there was a mix of small group and one-on-one tutoring. About a third of the courses “embedded” literacy and numeracy content into other teaching content. 491 course participants were interviewed pre-course and 343 of them were also interviewed and assessed post-course. Companies used a range of strategies to recruit learners; the companies that used a mix of strategies, or proactive strategies such as speaking directly to potential participants, got the best results. Employers refrained from using explicit literacy and numeracy related technology so they would not deter potential learners. Instead, they described courses in broad generic terms. This was found to have caused confusion as to what the courses were about. Furthermore, once started, course participants soon understood that they were being taught literacy and numeracy skills, and after the courses most managers were no longer concerned about the issue. Two thirds of the participants achieved attendance rates of over 80%. Non-attendance was related to the demands of the workplace, not to the courses themselves. On some sites low learner motivation was an issue.

Keywords: Employers, Learner participation, New Zealand, Program evaluation, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

No Major Skill Imbalances Projected in Canadian Labour Market 2011-2020

Vincent, Nicolas, & Tremblay-Côté, Nicolas. (2011?). Imbalances between Labour Demand and Supply - 2011-2020: Canadian Occupational Projection System 2011 Projections.

<http://www23.hrsdc.gc.ca/l.3bd.2t.1ilshhtml@-eng.jsp?lid=16&fid=1&lang=en>

Researchers at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) used a variety of models by broad skill level and by occupation to produce national labour market projections for 2011-2020. Together these models are called the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS). The researchers found little evidence of imbalances between labour demand and supply between 1997 and 2010 based on unemployment rates and relative wages by skill level. They also projected no major imbalances by skill level over the decade of 2011-2020. However, they did project labour shortages in particular occupations and labour surpluses in others.

Keywords: Canada, Labour market, Occupations, Skills mismatch, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Technology

Blended Delivery: Moving Technology into the AU/LBS Classroom Project in Ontario

Clark, Bea (2012). *Moving the Technology into the AU/LBS Classroom*. Retrieved April 22, 2013, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/csc/moving_tech_classroom/moving_tech_classroom.pdf

There is growing interest in “blended delivery”, a mix of learning environments which includes learning mediated by communications and digital technologies, but faculty and managers in Ontario’s colleges find it hard to find the time and resources to explore this delivery mode. The [College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading](#) (CSC) therefore initiated the *Blended Delivery: Moving Technology into the AU/LBS Classroom* project to provide the Academic Upgrading managers and faculty of these colleges with resources and information on blended learning. The research involved a literature review, three surveys of teachers and students conducted in February and March 2011, and a pilot project. The literature review and survey report were [summarized](#) in our *September 2011 research scan*. The final report summarizes the literature review and survey report and also reports on pilot projects at six Ontario colleges. The majority of students in the pilot projects were satisfied with the blended delivery courses citing flexibility and convenience as reasons. However, a small minority of students were dissatisfied and expressed a preference for teacher-led, traditional classroom activities. Internet access and access to technical support were strong factors in the overall satisfaction of students and teachers.

Keywords: Blended learning, Literature reviews, Online courses, Ontario, Pilot projects, Postsecondary education, Surveys, Teaching, Technology

Professional Development

Evaluation of Professional Development Program in Minnesota

Johnson, KA , & Frank, MM. (2013). Minnesota STAR Project: Meeting the Needs of Struggling Adult Readers. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education* 1 (3), 130-147.

The Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) project is an initiative developed by the U.S. federal government that supports reforms in reading instruction to intermediate-level adult basic education students in participating states. It provides teachers and administrators with professional development, tools, and resources. This paper reports on findings from a two-year evaluation of the Minnesota STAR project. The researchers used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collected during the second and third program years, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Data sources included surveys of 52 teachers before and after

the STAR training, observation notes of 25 STAR teachers, 200 STAR student surveys, “stories of success” from 64 STAR teachers and administrators, and student reading test scores in seven STAR programs. The researchers found that STAR positively influenced teacher knowledge and confidence, student confidence in their reading skills, student persistence and student level completion.

Keywords: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Program evaluation, Reading, Surveys, Teaching, United States