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Announcements

International Literacy Assessments

U.S. to Carry out Supplementary PIAAC surveys

The U.S. PIAAC National Supplement and Prison Study (2013) – National Center for Educational Statistics. From *PIAAC Fact Sheets from American Institutes for Research, May 2013*, from <http://www.caalusa.org/PIAACFactSheets5-13.pdf>

The original PIAAC survey was administered in 2011. The PIAAC National Supplement administer the same survey in late 2013 to a new sample of 3,600 U.S. adults, increasing the sample size of key U.S. subgroups of interest including unemployed adults, young adults, and elderly adults. The PIAAC Prison Study will conduct PIAAC in U.S. prisons in early 2014, drawing from a sample of 1,200 inmates aged 16 to 74 in state, federal, or private prisons. Although the direct assessments in this survey will be the same as in the PIAAC Main Study, the background questionnaire of the Prison Study will be tailored to address the needs and experiences of this specific population. It will allow comparisons between the prison population and the general population of the United States.

Keywords: International Literacy Assessments, National literacy assessments, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Prisons, United States

PIAAC Reports and Data Tools to be released in late 2013 and early 2014

PIAAC 2012 Publications and Data Tools – National Center for Educational Statistics. From *PIAAC Fact Sheets from American Institutes for Research, May 2013*, from <http://www.caalusa.org/PIAACFactSheets5-13.pdf>

The National Center for Education Statistics has announced that they will release the PIAAC First Look and Web portal on October 8, 2013. On the same day, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will release an initial international report, which will be followed later by a “series of in-depth reports”. Also on the same day, the OECD will unveil the PIAAC Data Explorer, a “dynamic interactive online tool that will allow users to produce customized reports using PIAAC data”.

Keywords: International Literacy Assessments, National literacy assessments, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), United States

OECD and European Union Announce an “Online Version of PIAAC”

Education and Skills Online Assessment

http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/ENGLISH_Brochure%20Education%20and%20Skills%20Online.pdf

The Education and Skills Online Assessment, a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union, is an online assessment tool designed to provide individual assessments that are linked to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). It will be possible to benchmark the results of these assessments against the national and international results available for the countries participating in PIAAC. This tool will generate reports based on the personal assessments that will characterize strengths and weaknesses in each cognitive area assessed. This tool is available online in English (Canada, Ireland, UK, US), French (Canada, France), Spanish (Spain, US), Czech, Italian and Japanese. The brochure provides contact information.

Keywords: European Union, International Literacy Assessments, Literacy proficiency, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

Publications

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Evaluation of Embedded WLES Programs in New Zealand

Ryan, R, McDonald H, Sutton A, & Doyle, S. (2013). Formative evaluation of ITO embedded literacy and numeracy projects. *Findings of a formative evaluation of the embedded literacy and numeracy projects undertaken by ITOs in 2009-2011*. New Zealand Department of Labour.

<http://dol.govt.nz/publications/research/formative-evaluation-ito-literacy/Formative-Evaluation-ITO-Embedded-Literacy-and-Numeracy-Projects.pdf>

Under New Zealand's New Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2008–2012, the Tertiary Education Commission funded 23 embedded literacy and numeracy projects run by industry training organisations (ITOs). In 2009 the Department of Labour commissioned Heathrose Research Limited to carry out a formative evaluation of these projects. The researchers conducted interviews with ITO staff and created in-depth case studies of some ITO's. The report looks at the strategies the ITO's developed to embed literacy and numeracy within industry training. Challenges included changes in government policy and resistance from employers. Lessons learned include the need for embedding strategies to be flexible and supported by ITO senior managers, the need to raise awareness of literacy issues among employers to secure employer engagement and the need to build the capacity of ITO staff to deal with literacy issues. The report concludes that although the ITOs have largely completed the projects for which they received funding, much work remains to embed literacy and numeracy skills more broadly into industry training arrangements.

Keywords: Embedding, New Zealand, Numeracy, Program evaluations, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Social Innovation and Finance

Community Sector and Social Enterprises Squeezed out of Public Service Delivery: UK Report

Williams, Zoe. (2013). *The Shadow State: A Report about outsourcing of public services. A report by Social Enterprise UK*.

http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/uploads/files/2012/12/the_shadow_state_3_dec1.pdf

This report looks at the outsourcing of public services in the UK. The researchers reviewed research on UK outsourcing, spoke to researchers in the field, interviewed people working in public services, and analyzed records of Parliamentary Questions to extract data on which contractors are earning how much from providing public services. They found that many markets for publicly funded services are increasingly dominated by small numbers of large companies while social enterprises and community organizations are being squeezed out. The researchers also polled two thousand adults for their views on outsourced public services and

found low levels of public awareness of the extent of outsourcing. The report supports the Public Services (Social Value) Act which comes into effect this year. The Act will require all public bodies in England and Wales to consider the wider social or economic benefits of contracts they award, as opposed to simply going with the cheapest bid. However, the report recommends that the Act be strengthened and that the Freedom of Information Act be reviewed to improve the transparency of outsourcing contracts.

Keywords: Community organizations, Policy, Public service delivery, Social economy, Social finance, Social innovation, United Kingdom

International Literacy Assessments

Controversy over Use of International Assessments to Benchmark School Performance

America Achieves. (2013). *Middle Class or Middle of the Pack: What can we learn when benchmarking U.S. schools against the world's best?* <http://www.americaachieves.org/docs/OECD/Middle-Class-Or-Middle-Of-Pack.pdf>

This report by [America Achieves](http://www.americaachieves.org), a think tank that promotes educational reform in the United States, challenges the assumption that problems with American schools are confined to those serving large numbers of low-income families by focusing on how “middle class” American high school students compare with their counterparts in other countries. An analysis of data from the 2009 Programme for International Student assessment (PISA) shows that “23 countries or regions had a significantly higher average score than the U.S. in math, 18 in science, and 9 in reading”. The report also draws on data from the pilot of the OECD Test for Schools (based on PISA) to highlight some high-performing American schools and practices that might account for these good results. The OECD Test for Schools was “conducted with a convenience sample of schools” and 105 schools participated. The report suggests that schools interested in improving their performance should sign up for the OECD Test for Schools in order to measure their performance against an international benchmark. Resources on the America Achieves website that complement this report include four case studies of schools achieving high results on the Test (<http://www.americaachieves.org/docs/OECD/OECD-Case-Study.pdf>)

Keywords: International Literacy Assessments, Programme for International Student assessment (PISA), United States

Carnoy, Martin (June 2013). *Review of Middle Class or Middle of the Pack*. National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-middle-class-or-middle-of-pack>

The [National Education Policy Center](http://www.nepc.colorado.edu) aims to inform policy by producing and disseminating rigorous research on education. This review is a strong critique of the *Middle Class or Middle of the Pack* report (see above). It criticizes the report for focusing exclusively on the 2009 PISA results, since other tests have shown better and improving performances by U.S. students in

math and science. In particular, while the report claims that U.S. students are falling behind while countries like Singapore, Finland, Korea and Germany raise their game, Carnoy finds little evidence of improved performance in those countries between 2000 and 2009, let alone any that can be attributed to policy changes. Carnoy also faults the report for promoting the OECD Test for Schools as a “driver” for improving school performance, especially since the test is not aligned with any American curriculum. Carnoy concludes that the report “offers nothing useful to policymakers”.

Keywords: International Literacy Assessments, Programme for International Student assessment (PISA), United States

Outcomes of Learning

The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning: Challenging Assumptions

Reder, Steve (2012). *The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning: Challenging Assumptions*. Retrieved June 06, 2013, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/cfl/longitudinal_study/longitudinal_study.pdf

This research brief published by The Centre for Literacy summarizes the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL), a study that tracked 1,000 high school dropouts in the Portland, Oregon, area of the United States, between 1998 and 2007. The study sought to determine the extent to which adults’ literacy abilities continue to develop after they leave school, the patterns of their participation in literacy training and education over time, life experiences associated with adult literacy development, and how formally organized basic skills programs, workplace training, and other activities contribute to adults’ learning trajectories. It also sought to identify the impact of adult literacy development on social and economic outcomes. LSAL involved a series of six “waves” of in-depth interviews and skills assessments in respondents’ homes. In each wave, researchers assessed respondents’ literacy proficiency, engagement in everyday literacy practices and self-perceived wave-to-wave changes in literacy skills and practices. The study found that adults’ literacy development continues after they leave school, and that this development varies depending on demographic and background characteristics and on specific life events and experiences. The study also found that participation in programs does not result in improvements in literacy proficiency in the short-term, although it is related to increases in literacy and numeracy practices, and that over time, engagement in these practices leads to increased proficiency.

Keywords: Adult literacy, Literacy proficiency, Longitudinal studies, Outcomes of Learning, United States,

Community Organizations

UK Report on Community Sector Involvement in Adult Education

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS). (2013). *Third Sector Engagement and Participation in the Learning and Skills Sector Report*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/third-sector-engagement-and-participation-in-the-learning-and-skills-sector-report>

In February 2012 the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) commissioned a partnership consisting of Skills-Third Sector, the Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to carry out research into “third sector” (voluntary sector) involvement in adult learning and skills provision. The research, completed in December 2012, included a literature review, a quantitative survey and focus groups of providers, a statistical analysis of learner and provider data and the development of “good practice case studies”. It aimed to establish a working definition of the “third sector”, look at the learning and skills provision being provided there, the types of organizations involved and their contracting and funding arrangements, and the third sector involvement and role in providing in learning and skills in the UK. The researchers found that the third sector played an important role in learning and skills provision, particularly for disadvantaged and excluded groups of learners, delivers high quality learning, is able to demonstrate successful outcomes and is experienced at accessing a diverse range of funding streams. However, recent changes in policy and funding have impacted the ability of the third sector to deliver provision, particularly as they are over-reliant on grant funding and contracted services from local government providers. Documents include an executive summary, quantitative research report, literature review and baseline report, provider case studies, and a strategic framework that sets out priorities for action to boost the capacity of the third sector in this area.

Keywords: Case studies, Community organizations, Literature reviews, United Kingdom

Learning Disabilities

U.S. Study of Learning Motivation and Impacts for Young Adult Learners with Learning Disabilities

Shaw, D, Disney, L. (2012). Expanding Access, Knowledge, and Participation for the Learning Disabled Adults with Low Literacy. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary and Basic Education* 1 (3): p148.

<http://www.coabe.org/html/pdf/Shaw%20and%20Disney-Expanding%20Access.pdf>.

This article reports on a study of 244 learning disabled young adults with low literacy skills enrolled in a residential program to prepare them for careers, higher education programs or military service. The program was located in a mid-western U.S. state and included a reading clinic as part of its program. The study's purpose was to provide a deeper understanding of the students' literacy profiles and their reasons for attending the program. The students who attended the reading clinic were given seven formal assessments before and after the intervention. They were also administered qualitative surveys to explore their attitudes and self-perceptions about their abilities as readers. A mixed-methods design was used to study the variables collected from the demographic information and quantitative and qualitative measures. The researchers found that the students had relatively strong listening comprehension and vocabulary skills but were weaker in decoding and text comprehension. Students' feelings about literacy and their self-reported abilities improved after intervention. The authors discuss possible reasons for the students' high persistence rate in the program (93%) and encourage future research into this.

Keywords: Learning disabilities, Outcomes of learning, Program evaluation, Young adults,

Reading

Reading in Canadian Society Report Confirms Benefits of Reading for Pleasure

Murphy, Sharon. (2013). *Towards Sustaining and Encouraging Reading in Canadian Society*. National Reading Campaign. <http://nationalreadingcampaign.ca/test/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/TowardsSustainingAndEncouragingReading.pdf>

This report is the result of a literature review on reading commissioned by the National Reading Campaign (NRC) in fall 2012. The review looked at the benefits of reading, reading for pleasure, reading and civic engagement, strategies for promoting reading, and research trends and areas in need of research. The researchers, using the online database ERIC, a selection of ProQuest databases, and online searches with Google and Google Scholar, looked at hundreds of commentaries and studies from close to 300,000 indexed on the subject of reading approach since 1966. Priority was given to recent publications. Adult literacy was excluded. The report acknowledges that the review was "not exhaustive" but should be taken as "indicative" of existing trends in the literature. The benefits of reading identified in the research include: opportunities for self-examination, enhancement of social relationships, improved health and

well-being, and academic and cognitive benefits. Greater civic participation is identified as a wider social benefit of reading. The report also looks at factors that encourage and sustain the practice of reading: ready access to books, the ability to choose what one reads, having time and a comfortable space for reading. The National Reading Council will use the report to identify areas for future research and is developing project proposals on the reading habits of boys and teen and adult males, reading in multicultural communities, and the way schools encourage or discourage reading for pleasure.

Keywords: Canada, Children, Literature reviews, Reading, Young adults