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## **Announcements**

### **Digital Competencies**

*Ontario “Digital Competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace” project*

The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) and the Canadian Information Processing Society (CIPS) are partnering on a “Digital Competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace” project in Ontario. The project involves a survey of employers and employees to identify digital competencies required in Ontario workplaces. Based on the results, the project team will develop and pilot skills training modules. People were invited to download and print out the survey, fill it out and mail it in by August 16, 2013. This project is paid for in part by the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities’ (MTCU’s) Sector Initiatives Fund (SIF).

**Keywords:** Canada, Digital Competencies, Technology, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

## **Publications**

### **International Literacy Assessments**

#### *Overviews of PS-TRE and the Survey of Skills Used at Work*

PIAAC: Problem-Solving in Technology-Rich Environments and the Survey of Skills Used at Work-  
*Essential Skills Bulletin* 2013, Issue 2, Essential Skills Ontario

<http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/sites/www.essentialskillsontario.ca/files/Essential%20Skills%20Bulletin%202013%20PIAAC.pdf>

Essential Skills Ontario has published an issue of the *Essential Skills Bulletin* providing an overview of two new elements of PIAAC – the "problem-solving in technology-rich environments" (PS-TRE) competency, and the Survey of Skills Used at Work. It explains how the Expert Group developed the PS-TRE framework using research conducted in the early 2000's by Levy, Murnane and Autore on work tasks in US workplaces from 1969 to 1999, which confirmed the growing importance of problem-solving and complex communication skills and a decline in routine tasks due to technological change. The Group also drew on other research that suggested using computers and other digital technology effectively requires a mix of technological aptitude with abstract problem-solving skills. The bulletin includes a diagram of the PS-TRE framework. The Survey of Skills Used at Work used the Job Requirements Approach (JRA), a methodology that has been used in the United States, UK and Italy. JRA asks workers to indicate the importance of types and levels of generic skills for their work. The Survey results is expected to enable policymakers to better understand the extent to which people's skills are being effectively used in workplaces, and the extent to which there is a "mismatch" between the skills people have and the skills that employers need.

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

## Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

### *Mini-Reports Released from UK Skills and Employment Survey (SES) 2012*

Felstead A, Gallie D, Green F, & Inanc H. (2013). *Skills at Work in Britain: First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012*. Available at <http://www.llakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/1.-Skills-at-Work-in-Britain-mini-report.pdf>

Green F, Felstead A, Duncan G, & Inanc H. (2013). *Training in Britain: First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012*. Available at <http://www.llakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2.-Training-in-Britain-mini-report.pdf>

Felstead, A, Gallie, D, Green, F and Inanc, H (2013) *Skills and Employment Survey 2012: Technical Briefing*, London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education. Available at [http://www.llakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Technical-Briefing\\_March2013\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.llakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Technical-Briefing_March2013_final_web.pdf)

Other mini-reports are available at: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/ses2012/>:

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) co-funded the Skills and Employment Survey (SES) with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). This survey, carried out in 2012, covered people aged 20-65 in paid employment in Britain and focused on the work that they do and how their working life has changed over time. The 2012 survey continues longitudinal ESRC-funded studies that began in 1986. The first three mini-reports for SES 2012 were published in April 2013 and three more were published in May. 3,200 people in paid employment for at least one hour a week participated by computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI): interviews were carried between January and November 2012. The response rate was 49% of screened eligible respondents.

*Skills at Work in Britain* reported that qualification requirements of jobs have risen since 1986 - a trend that became more pronounced after 2006. It also found that the prevalence of over-qualification fell from 2006 to 2012 after rising since 1986, and that there has been a decline in workplace time devoted to training and learning since 2006. *Training in Britain* also notes a recent decline in the volume of training in British workplaces while the demand for such training is rising from workers at all levels of education. Furthermore, both the quality and volume of training is higher for workers with more prior education.

**Keywords:** United Kingdom, Workplace education, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

*Australian Study Finds No Literacy “Crisis” in Workplaces*

See also:

- [\*Between crisis rhetoric and workplace realities: What role for literacy and numeracy partnerships?\*](#) - Stephen Black, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia
- [Stephen Black's video presentation](#) at the New Zealand literacy Forum in 2012 [video]
- [Q and A](#) with Stephen Black from Summer Institute 2012

Black S, Yasukawa K & Brown, T. (2013). *Investigating the ‘Crisis’: Production Workers’ Literacy and Numeracy Practices*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).  
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2628.html>

Recent talk of a “literacy crisis” in Australian workplaces has been largely fuelled by the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey which indicated that about half of Australia’s adult population had literacy and numeracy skills at Levels 1 and 2, which is widely seen as insufficient for fully participating in a modern economy. The researchers sought to investigate this crisis more closely by looking at literacy and numeracy as social practices within workplaces rather than as generic skills. They looked at three manufacturing companies that were introducing “lean manufacturing” processes. Each company was visited multiple times by the researchers, who observed workers performing their tasks and conducted semi-structured interviews with workers, managers and trainers. The interviews focused on how literacy and numeracy were embedded in workplace practices, how those practices were perceived by people in the workplace, and what approaches to training were being taken. The researchers found no evidence that workers’ literacy was inadequate, even though many of the workers may have lacked spoken English, literacy and numeracy skills in a normative sense. Literacy and numeracy were highly embedded in workplace practices; in two of the three workplaces, workers used advanced computer-aided technologies. The researchers do suggest that improved literacy could help workers better understand their rights and provide them with greater opportunities to take on leadership roles.

**Keywords:** Australia, Embedding, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

*Guide to Embedding LES in Workplaces Based on BC Research Study*

Defoe T & Twiss D. (2012). *Embedding Literacy & Essential Skills: Lessons from our research*. Decoda Literacy Solutions.

This report documents an action-research project that grew out of frustration on the part of the researchers at workplace LES projects that were not sustainable or did not even get started because of intermittent funding, the structure of the workplace, and work schedules. The researchers wanted to find a new strategy that would “fit seamlessly into the rhythms of the work environment”. They explored the idea of embedding LES in workplace learning. In the

three-year project (October 2009- September 2012), the research team selected three project partners in three sectors (health care, corrections, and services to aboriginal populations). They hired a “sector specialist” for each who explored embedding opportunities, gathered and analyzed data, and wrote research reports. This document is a guide to the lessons learned from doing the research. These lessons for people trying to start workplace training programs include: listen to and learn from people in the workplace, engage people in finding embedding opportunities, and use every possible opening to embed, for opportunities to embed LES exist in every workplace. Promoting the use of clear language and design in the workplace is used as an example of embedding.

**Keywords:** Action research, British Columbia, Canada, Embedding, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

## Community Education

*Place-Based Approaches May Be Best Way of Responding to PIAAC Data: Essential Skills Ontario*

Essential Skills Ontario (2013). Putting PIAAC and Data into Place, *The Essential Skills Bulletin*, Issue 3. [http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/sites/www.essentialskillsontario.ca/files/Essential%20Skills%20Bulletin%203\\_2013%20Place-Based.pdf](http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/sites/www.essentialskillsontario.ca/files/Essential%20Skills%20Bulletin%203_2013%20Place-Based.pdf)

This bulletin introduces the concept of “place-based approaches” to solving social problems such as low literacy, and suggests that such an approach would be the best way to address the challenges that PIAAC results may show. Place-based approaches focus on community building and involve multiple stakeholders from communities in decision-making, are designed or adapted to meet unique local conditions, and are flexible enough to evolve in response to changing conditions. The bulletin draws on relevant literature to describe how they work and why they may be the most appropriate response to problems that seem to have no clear solution due to their complexity. Although such an approach has seldom been applied to local workforce development, the bulletin does mention a US-based project called Jobs Plus. The authors suggests that efforts focused merely on raising LES levels may not achieve the results we want; it may be better to see LES as one of many interconnected elements that should be addressed at the community level.

**Keywords:** Canada, Community education, Community organizations, Ontario, Literature reviews, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Social innovation

## Educational Technology

### *Study Assesses Effectiveness of Computer-Assisted Reading Interventions in UK*

Kyle F, et al. (2013). Assessing the Effectiveness of Two Theoretically Motivated Computer-Assisted Reading Interventions in the United Kingdom: GG Rime and GG Phenome. *Reading Research Quarterly* 48 (1): 61-76.

In the context of increasing recognition of evidence-based technological tools to aid students' learning and provide individualized instruction, the researchers assessed the effectiveness of two computer-assisted reading interventions at an elementary school level based on a Finnish 'GraphoGame': GG Rime and GG Phenome. The researchers studied thirty-one 6-7 year old participants who were identified by teachers as poor readers. They were divided into three groups: one played GG Rime, one played GG Phenome, both as a supplement to regular classroom instruction. The third was a control group. Both game-playing groups had gains in reading, spelling and phonological skills compared to the control group. A follow-up found that these gains were retained after four months.

**Keywords:** Children's literacy, Educational Technology, Reading, Technology

## English as an Additional Language (EAL)

### *The Impact of Immigrants' Life Stories on their Learning*

Lee, YL. (2013). Telling the life stories of adult immigrants learning English as a Second Language in the Midwest: a chronotopic approach informed by Bakhtin's Forms of Time of the Chronotype in the Novel. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education* 2 (1): 22-34.

Little is known about how the life stories of ESL learners affect their English-language learning. This study investigates the life stories and English learning of three adult immigrants in a Midwest U.S. immigration center. The researcher spent six months at the center in 2009, videotaping the ESL classes and conducting interviews with the participants. The researcher developed a "chronotopic" approach to represent and map out the critical turning points in the participants' lives in order to find the effects of these "turning points" on immigrants' ESL learning in the U.S. The study found that details of the participants' life stories had considerable impact on the difficulties they were facing in learning English. The major limitation of the study was the small number of respondents. The researcher recommends that educators and researchers use the life stories and especially the "turning points" to better understand learners' goals and needs.

**Keywords:** English as an Additional Language (EAL), Learners, United States

## Professional Development

### *Kentucky Study Finds Need for More Professional Development for Adult Literacy Instructors*

Henry, LA. (2013). Literacy Content Knowledge Expertise among Adult Education Providers in Kentucky. *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education* 2 (1): 35-48.

State-level results from adult literacy surveys have suggested a need for quality adult literacy instruction in Kentucky. This study was conducted as part of a needs assessment to determine the training needs of adult literacy instructors in the state. It sought comprehensive information on adult education programs and instructors' backgrounds and professional experience. It also assessed instructors' adult literacy teaching skills using the Knowledge of Teaching Adult Reading Skills (KTARS) and The Professional Development Kit Needs Development Questionnaire. Invitations were sent to Kentucky adult education program providers by email and 315 of them filled out the online survey (response rate was 60.6%). The study found that individual one-on-one instruction was used most frequently, and student-centered activities were rarely used even though they are better supported by research. Computer-based programs were also rarely used. The majority of providers correctly answered 20 of 40 literacy content knowledge questions correctly. They tended to perform well on questions relating to fluency instruction and struggle with informal assessments of vocabulary development and less well on questions related to alphabetics instruction and emergent literacy skills. The study found that current professional development offerings did not seem to meet the needs of adult education providers in the state. The author noted several limitations of the survey, including the collection of self-report data, and that KTARS represents a "particular paradigm for reading instruction".

**Keywords:** Adult literacy, Needs assessments, Professional development, Teaching, United States

## Return on Investment (ROI)

### *Australian Study Investigates the Economic Returns on Literacy Skills*

Chesters J, Ryan C, & Sinning M. (2013) *The returns to literacy skills in Australia*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2623.html>

This study investigates the relationship between literacy skills and the incomes of workers in the Australian labour market using data from the Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL, 1996) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) Survey (2006), and estimates the extent to which the return from literacy skills changed from 1996 to 2006 and varies with level of education. The two surveys are based on different samples of the population but they have similar survey size,

design features and overlapping questions. The researchers compared people's assessed literacy levels with their education and income. The findings show that both educational qualifications and literacy skills are positively associated with income, although within broad education levels (university-level qualifications, vocational education and training [VET] level qualifications and those without post-school qualifications), income also increases with literacy skill level. No change in the rate of return from literacy skills was found between 1996 and 2006.

**Keywords:** International literacy assessments, National literacy assessments, Labour market outcomes, Literacy proficiency, Return on Investment (ROI)