Current Research

Unpublished Reports

Publications

Current Research

Digital literacy

Connecting Youth: Digital Learning Research Project - Principal Investigator: Richard Arum at the Institute of Development and Social Change
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/ihdsc/connecting_youth

This research project spearheaded by the Institute for Human Development and Social Change at New York University is a longitudinal multi-method study of youth, educators and organizations across the United States that are participating in educational innovations based on digital media and a connected learning approach, including after-school and summer programs, YOUmedia drop-in sites, and "Learning Labs". The purpose of the study is to document activities and outcomes of these programs, use the findings to help organizations improve the programs, and publish reports that improve academic and public understanding of the potential role of digital media in supporting youth development and educational outcomes. The research looks at

the demographic characteristics of youth participating in the study programs and schools. It also looks at the ways in which participants interact with and access digital media and communication technologies in their everyday lives, changes in their attitudes, behaviour, and competencies in the area of digital technology and learning change and the extent to which these changes vary based on program characteristics. It looks at how programs are understood and implemented in schools and partnering cultural organizations, the resources educators have to draw on to accomplish their work and the barriers and obstacles they face, and the institutional changes involved in implementing these programs. The project team includes more than twenty researchers from New York University, the University of Chicago, George Brown University, George Washington University, and the University of California. The study is being funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Keywords : Digital competencies, E-learning, United States, Youth

Official Language Minorities

Quebec Community Group Networks Spearhead Research Project on Quebec Anglophone Seniors

English-Speaking Seniors Project – Quebec Community Groups Network
http://quescren.cmail1.com/t/r-l-pjtdijd-tidyldzf-x/

This research project aims to build an evidence-base about English-speaking seniors across Quebec, to support seniors in their efforts to mobilize themselves and be heard by policy-makers, and to increase their research capacity by involving them in the project design, implementation and dissemination of findings. It is being managed by the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) and the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN) and runs from 2012 -2015. The project is investigating the language barriers English-speaking seniors face in dealing with public institutions and agencies, the social support networks and living conditions in the communities in which English-speaking seniors live, and the best practices and models for creating an effective voice for Quebec's English-speaking seniors. The research methods include: a literature review, a review of statistical data from the 2011 Canadian Census and the 2010 provincial CHSSN/CROP Survey of Community Vitality, and a project survey carried out from August to December 2013 in eight regions of Quebec. The survey collected input from 835 English-speakers 55 years of age and over that provide a sample of urban, suburban and rural/remote areas of Quebec. Ten researchers – all English speaking seniors - from the selected regions were trained and worked with local organizations to recruit respondents, and to distribute and collect the surveys. Results are being tabulated. One limitation of the survey is that although the selected regions provide a sort of geographical "sample" of Quebec, many regions are not covered.

Keywords: Action research, Canada, Literature reviews, Official Language Minorities, Quebec, Quebec anglophones, Seniors

The Centre for Literacy
Le centre d'alphabétisation

Unpublished Reports

Health Literacy

Health Literacy Community Capacity Assessment Tool Project Final Report

Frankish J, Gray D, & Milligan CD. (2013). *Health Literacy Community Capacity Assessment Tool Project: Final Report* [unpublished]. Vancouver, BC: Centre for Health Promotion Research, University of British Columbia.

> This unpublished report presents the Health Literacy Community Capacity Assessment Tool and describes the process of developing and refining it. The project fulfills part of the research agenda of the "Health literacy Approach laid out in the 2012 Public Health Association of BC discussion paper *An Inter-Sectoral Approach for Improving Health Literacy for Canadians*. Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the project involved developing the Health Literacy Community Capacity Assessment Tool, designed to help communities and community-based groups assess their capacity to participate in health literacy work, and identify context factors, resources, activities and outcomes related to developing and implementing community based health literacy initiatives. The developers conducted a review of the literature on the measurement and assessment of community capacity, and identified key theoretical constructs and influencing factors related to the planning and implementation of health literacy initiatives. They drafted questions to address each characteristic of community capacity, under three domains: individual factors, organizational factors and community factors. They sent a draft questionnaire to health literacy experts and received feedback through email and phone interviews with seven of these experts (five Canadian) the process was repeated with a second draft of the questionnaire. The Assessment Tool was then pilot tested in interviews with four health literacy practitioners and revised.

Keywords: Assessment, Canada, Health

Published Reports

Digital Literacy

2013 Survey Results of Self-Reported Internet Use by Canadian Grade 4-11 Students

Steeves V. (2014). *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online*. Ottawa, ON: MediaSmarts.
http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/YCWWIII_Life_Online_FullReport.pdf

> This report is drawn from a national classroom-based survey of 5,436 students in Grades 4 through 11, carried out in every province and territory of Canada by MediaSmarts in 2013. The purpose was to examine the role of networked technologies in young people's lives. *Life Online* the first in a series of reports from the survey, focuses on "what youth are doing online, what sites they're going to, their attitudes towards online safety, household rules on Internet use, and unplugging from digital technologies". Among the notable findings: Almost every student surveyed has access to the Internet outside of school; half of all students report using a shared family computer to go online, but these numbers drop from 64 percent in Grade 4, to 37 percent in Grade 11. The survey shows that youth are now accustomed to online access through mobile devices; a major change since 2005. Even in Grade 5, more students access the Internet through a tablet or laptop than through a desktop computer (62% compared to 59%). The report notes that while students are enthusiastic users of networked technology, they may not always be using it to its full potential. Their online life has become "increasingly social". Online media are primarily used for entertainment and for communicating with family. They are also an important source of information on sports, news and health, but creative and participatory civic uses of digital media are described as "low": one quarter to one third of students have used networked tools to post their own stories or artwork, videos, audio clips or mashups. Just over half have posted links to news stories and current events to people, just over a third have supported activist groups online and less than a third have posted comments on news sites. Students' preference for socializing and entertainment online can also be seen in their choices of websites: among the most popular sites, 75% of students reported using YouTube, followed by Facebook at 57% and Google at 31%. One limitation of the survey is that it is based on self-reports of respondents rather than direct observations of behavior. Also, due to rapid changes in technology some findings may not be directly comparable to findings from previous surveys.

 Keywords: Canada, Digital competencies, Technology, Youth

The Centre for Literacy
Le centre d'alphabétisation

236-2100 Marlowe
Montreal, QC   H4A 3L5
www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca

Adult Education

Adult Education Learning Environment a "Double-Edged Sword" for Unemployed School Dropouts

Murray S, & Mitchelle J. (2013). The 'double-edged sword' of the adult learning environment. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 53* (1): 111-128.

> In Australia recent statistics indicate that 8% of people aged 15-19 and 12% of those aged 20-24 were neither employed nor in formal study. Research is divided on the extent to which *Technical and Further Education* (TAFE) institutions, which provide a wide range of predominantly vocational tertiary education courses, support student re-engagement in formal education. This study looks at how students and teachers in five foundation TAFE courses on two campuses in regional towns in New South Wales view the adult learning environment, and how they respond to it. The courses had been designed for those who had not completed their tenth year of compulsory education or had low levels of literacy and numeracy. Students attended classes on three days each week over an eighteen week term, and ten to fifteen students were enrolled in each course. 30 students aged 16-25 (19 male, 11 female) participated in the interview, participation rate of 70%. All ten staff in the courses participated in the interviews. Seven had teaching-only roles while the others also had leadership, counseling, and assessment roles. The interview findings were grouped into three sections: positive aspects of the learning environment, problematic aspects, and the ways in which teachers deal with issues arising from an adult learning environment. Students expressed appreciation at being treated like adults and some said that they found the learning environment motivating. Both teachers and students noted the importance of establishing respectful relationships. However, teachers and students spoke of a conflict between providing adult students with appropriate autonomy and making sure that students were punctual, stayed in class, and took responsibility for their work. Some students expressed a wish to be regulated and pushed to do their work. Teachers attempted to be understanding and flexible when coping with issues such as lateness and disruptive behaviour and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own work. The researchers found, overall, that the autonomy provided by adult education is a "double-edged sword": it can both enhance and limit student engagement. However, in this particular case teachers reported being able to deal with the issues that could limit student engagement with understanding and flexibility.

Keywords: Adult education, Australia, Learner participation, Vocational education, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Children's Literacy

Is Kindergarten Too Easy?

Claessens A , Engel M, & Curran C. (2013). Academic Content, Student Learning, and the Persistence of Preschool Effects. *American Educational Research Journal.* Online article [behind paywall, abstract at http://aer.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/11/25/0002831213513634.abstract?rss=1].

> This study looked at how exposure to basic and advanced reading and math content in kindergarten affect children's achievement gains in those areas. "Basic content" includes alphabet recognition and counting out loud, while "advanced content" includes adding numbers and matching letters to sounds. The researchers hypothesized that children who had been to preschool would benefit little from basic content, since they would be relearning material they had already been exposed to, and would benefit more from advanced content, while children who had not been to preschool would be more likely to benefit from basic content. The researchers analyzed data from a large, nationally representative sample (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K)) of more than 15,000 students who started kindergarten in 1998-99. The children were given direct assessments in reading and mathematics in the fall and spring of the school year to track progress. Teachers were surveyed on classroom activities and content in the spring. The researchers were surprised to find that all children benefitted from exposure to advanced content rather than basic content. However, they also found that teachers generally spent more time covering basic content. They caution that the data covers a time period pre-dating educational reforms such as No Child Life Behind, so it may be dated, although research suggests that these reforms have not increased the coverage of more challenging content in schools. Another limitation of the study is that teacher survey reports are a less accurate measure of content coverage than a measure based on classroom observations. Also, while controls were used to minimize the threat of selection and omitted variable bias, such bias cannot be ruled out entirely. Nevertheless, the researchers recommend replacing basic content with more advanced content in kindergarten as a low-cost way of improving academic performance in kindergarten.

Keywords: Children's Literacy, Elementary Education

E-Learning

Barriers to Workplace E-Learning: An Australian Study

Becker K, Newton C, Sawang S. (2013). A learner perspective on barriers to e-learning. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 53* (2): 211-233.

> While the use of e-learning is becoming more widespread in workplaces there is no consensus on its benefits or on whether it is more effective than traditional forms of training and development. This study seeks to identify and categorize barriers to the effective adoption of e-learning. A background literature review found that e-learning has the potential to offer advantages over traditional learning methods such as the ability to personalize the learning experience. However, experts have expressed concerns about its potential impersonality, the possible isolation of the learner, and the consequences of a lack of guidance provided by an instructor. The study was conducted in an Australian railway company that started using e-learning in 2008 for employees on topics such as use of financial systems, security transit procedures and workplace safety policies and procedures. A pilot study in the organization had identified potential barriers to e-learning. To study the perceptions of users over the previous two years, the researchers invited all users from that time period to respond to a questionnaire delivered to the researchers online or by mail; 683 employees responded to the survey. Potential barriers to e-learning that had been identified in the pilot study were listed and respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they were actual barriers on a scale of one to five. Three barriers to e-learning were identified: concerns among learners about the suitability and effectiveness of e-learning, difficulties and worries people had about using the technology, and concerns about lack of time and potential interruptions when trying to complete e-learning. The researchers recommend that organizations planning to implement e-learning reassure users of the validity and usefulness of e-learning and provide organizational support and allocate time for employees to engage in e-learning.

Keywords: Australia, E-learning, Technology, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Learning Disabilities

Teaching Adults with Developmental Disabilities: A Case Study

Lynch, J. (2013). A case study of a volunteer-based literacy class with adults with developmental disabilities. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 53* (2): 303-323.

> There is a need for more research on how volunteer-based adult education classes can best support adult learning and little is known about how such classes can support the learning of adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities from the perspective of participants. This case study examined a volunteer-based class for adults with a developmental or intellectual disability in a not-for-profit adult education centre in a large Canadian city to find out what aspects of the class participants found best supported students' learning and possible ways of

improving learning. The researcher conducted a literature review on common structures of adult literacy instruction and the particular learning challenges faced by adults with developmental disabilities. The class studied consisted of four adult-learners, four tutors (including the researcher) and two coordinators, and lasted for ten months. Since learners with developmental disabilities tend to have difficulties in learning and performing certainly daily life skills and often have difficulties with oral expression and social interaction, the goal of the class was to help the learners gain life-long learning skills, get them to express themselves orally, and develop better daily living skills. Two tutors, three adult learners, and both coordinators participated, along with two tutors from another class at the same centre and who sometimes replaced the regular tutors. The class itself provided a mix of full-class and one-on-one instruction. Data collection involved interviews and classroom observations. The learners' goals – to improve their reading and writing ability – diverged from those of the tutors and coordinators, and the literature would suggest that this would affect learner persistence. However, in this case learners showed interest in most class activities, while the class structure promoted social skills and learner accountability. Classroom activities were intended to reflect learners' day-to-day activities, however it did not always do so. For example, some learners did not have stoves and so were unable to apply what they learned about cooking to their daily lives. The researcher recommends that the link between class content and reading and writing be made more explicit to learners, by asking learners about their daily activities before designing class activities and connecting course content more to learners' social lives.

Keywords: Canada, Disabilities, Learning disabilities, Literature reviews

Reading

Explaining the Gender Gap in Reading

Chuy M, & Nitulescu R. (2013). *Explaining the Gender Gap in Reading through Reading Engagement and Approaches to Learning.* Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)
http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/302/PISA2009_Research_CMEC_HRSDC_EN.pdf

Surveys have shown a persistent gender gap in reading achievement, with girls outperforming boys in Canada and in most OECD countries. This paper uses the PISA 2009 data to investigate the factors contributing to the gender gap in Canada. It begins with a short review of literature about gender differences in literacy and factors that could account for them, including socio-cognitive differences such as differences in reading habits and learning strategies. It discusses the Canadian results in reading and links them to measures of reading engagement such as enjoyment of reading, diversity in reading, and on-line reading. Although the literature review found much discussion of biological, developmental and brain-based differences as a possible explanation of the reading gap, the researchers note the difficulties in determining the actual importance of these factors. This report focuses instead on the possible impacts of socialization, differences in reading engagement and differences in learning strategies. The researchers applied Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to several multiple regression models relating student

background factors to reading performance. They find that over 70% of the gender gap is due to girls scoring higher on measures of "reading enjoyment". However, it is difficult to tell whether reading enjoyment causes reading proficiency, or vice versa. Two reading strategies were found to make significant contributions to gender differences in reading: control and summarizing. One limitation of the research is that the data on reading strategies and student background factors is based on student self-reports, and the researchers acknowledge that the contribution of these factors to the gender gap could look different if measured more directly. The researchers recommend that policy-makers look into how to stimulate girls' and boys' awareness of their reading strategies.

Keywords: Boys, Canada, Girls, International literacy assessments, Literature reviews, Reading, Youth