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Current Research

International Literacy Assessments

Competencies in Later Life Survey Complements PIAAC in Germany

Schmidt-Hertha B, Gebrande J, & Friebe J. (2014). Competencies in later life. *Lifelong Learning in Europe*. Issue 1/2014. <http://www.lline.fi/en/article/research/312014/competencies-in-later-life>

The PIAAC survey excluded adults over 65 years of age, so researchers at the German Institute for Adult Education and the Pedagogical Institute at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (LMU) initiated a supplementary study called “Competencies in Later Life” ([CiLL](#)) to apply identical survey tools to a representative number of persons between the ages of 66 and 80. However, PIAAC was designed with a strong focus on labor markets and on skills related to employability. Also, just under 30% [CiLL](#) respondents used a computer, which limited the number of people who could be tested on “problem solving in a technology rich environment”. In response to these challenges, CiLL focuses more on everyday skills and less on job-related skills. Furthermore, CiLL data is being supplemented by qualitative research on how the interviewees perceive their competencies and on their living environment. As of January 2014, about 50 qualitative interviews had been completed. For the assessment itself, 1,340 household interviews were conducted (response rate 40%). The researchers caution that differences between this study and PIAAC means that findings may not be completely transferable. Since other countries did not carry out a CiLL survey there can be no international comparisons. While

noting methodological limitations of PIAAC, the researchers see it as – like PISA - “above all an excellent starting point for further research.” Although evaluation of the CiLL data has not been completed, the researchers indicate that preliminary analysis already suggests that it is necessary to increase educational participation of the elderly.

Keywords: [Ageing](#), [Germany](#), [International literacy assessments](#), [National literacy assessments](#), [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#), [Seniors](#)

Reading

The Center for the Study of Adult Literacy Research Project

<http://csal.gsu.edu/content/project-overview>

The Center for the Study of Adult Literacy, supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, was set up in 2012 to carry out a research study with the following goals: “to research the underlying processes that help or hinder the reading development of adults who struggle with reading”; and “to develop and evaluate a reading curriculum to address adult learners’ needs.” The study involves adults who read between the 3rd and 8th grade equivalency levels, and will include three phases over five years, each with specific research questions. The first phase focused on tests to assess learners’ cognitive skills, the second phase focuses on designing and testing a curriculum for adult learners; and the third phase focuses on conducting pilot intervention studies. As of May 31, 2013, seventy-eight adult literacy students had either completed or were in the process of completing testing.

Keywords: [Curriculum](#), [Pilot projects](#), [Reading](#), [United States](#)

Research Results

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Myers K, Sweetman A. (2014). *The Adult Learning and Returns to Training project: Final Report*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. Available at <http://www.srdc.org/projects/Adult-Learning-and>Returns-to-Training-details.aspx>

There are links to PDF documents in this summary.

Although governments, employers, and individuals invest significant amounts of time and money in adult learning activities, the lack of a coherent organizing framework to guide these investments in adult learning has impeded decision-making at all levels of the adult learning system. Employment and Social Development Canada engaged Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and the Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network to propose an adult learning framework and to conduct studies to illustrate its use. The project was carried out from 2010 to 2013. Its aim was to develop and test a framework for understanding and measuring the wider outcomes of adult learning, and to identify data needs to inform future research. Although the framework is meant to cover adult learning activities in general, there is a strong workplace focus. The researchers developed a [typology](#) of adult learning, and a [conceptual framework](#) for specifying outcomes associated with various types of adult learning that considers “a wide range” of “outcomes for individuals, firms, and society”. They also produced a practical guide for measuring these outcomes, including an approach for estimating cost-benefit “returns on investment”. The researchers also conducted a [literature review](#) focusing on the outcomes of each type of learning identified in the Framework. They provide a [glossary of terms](#) used in all documents created in this project. Additionally, six papers were produced as part of a [research program](#): one of these papers (Gray D, Morin L-P. , 2013) is summarized later in this scan.

Keywords: [Canada](#), [Employability](#), [Literature reviews](#), [Outcomes of Learning Program evaluation](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#)

Gray D, Morin L-P. (2013). An Analysis of a Foundational Learning Program in BC: the Foundations Workplace Skills Program (FWSP) at Douglas College. *Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network Working Paper No. 123*. Available at <http://www.clsrn.econ.ubc.ca/workingpapers/CLSRN%20Working%20Paper%20no.%20123%20-%20Gray%20and%20Morin.pdf>

This paper was produced as part of the Adult Learning and Returns to Training Project sponsored by the Canadian Labour Market and Skills Research Network and The Social Research and Development Corporation. The authors analyze information from the administrative data set compiled over five years from a small-scale foundational learning program targeted at unemployed workers thought to lack essential skills. The program, provided in Surrey, BC, by Douglas College at no charge to the participants, focused on diagnosing and filling gaps in essential skills related to learners’ career aspirations, using customized individualized learning plans to address these gaps. The program had three phases: the first included an initial

assessment and taking the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES); the final phase included a retake of the TOWES to assess learner progress. The authors investigated three outcomes for the participants: a return to work, a return to school, and an improved TOWES score. Of the 1,625 participants who started the program between June 2006 and September 2011, only 314 remained in the program long enough to complete phase 3. For these participants, test scores were significantly higher at the end of the program than at the beginning. However, it is impossible to know whether this improvement was due to the program or to increased familiarity with the test. Furthermore, neither the initial score level nor the degree of improvement between the two tests seem to correlate with the probability of finding a job after the program. An analysis of attrition during the program suggests that those with higher cognitive skills tended to leave the program early: if all initial participants had taken the test a second time, it is possible that the average improvement in scores would have been lower. The writers recommend that in future research a “control” group be used and that more data on employment status, income and further participation in adult education training be made available to researchers.

Keywords: [British Columbia](#), [Employability](#), [Learner attrition](#), [Program evaluation](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#)

Aboriginal Peoples

Bougie E, Kelly-Scott K, & Arriagada P. (2013). *The Education and Employment Experiences of First Nations People Living Off Reserve, Inuit, and Métis: Selected Findings from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey*. Statistics Canada, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2013001-eng.pdf>

This report presents the results of an analysis of data from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), a national survey of Aboriginal peoples aged 6 and older in Canada – First Nations people living off-reserve, Métis, and Inuit. The APS sample was drawn from respondents to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Questions emphasized education and employment, with supplemental questions on health. This report focuses on those aged 18-44 who were not attending high school at the time of data collection. It includes 5,418 off-reserve First Nations people, 2,457 Inuit, and 4,787 Métis. The data reveals that 72% of First Nations people living off reserve, 42% of Inuit and 77% of Métis aged 18 to 44 had a high school diploma or equivalent in 2012. Of these, 14% of off-reserve First Nations people, 15% of Inuit, and 9% of Métis had left school at least once before later returning to obtain a high school diploma. The report includes analyses of personal, family and school-related experiences during the last year of school, postsecondary education profiles and selected characteristics of workers, the unemployed and those not in the labour force, and addresses the subject of barriers to further education or training. The authors conclude that since the path to high school completion is not always straightforward, one must take multiple contexts in students’ lives into account in order to understand why they do or do not complete high school. The authors state there is much potential for further research based on the 2012 APS data. Possible areas of research include: the relationships between many of the factors associated with completing or leaving high

school, the educational experiences of those outside the 18-44 age group, family history of residential school attendance and language, health, housing, and mobility.

Keywords: [Aboriginal peoples](#), [Employability](#), [High school dropouts](#), [Postsecondary education](#)

Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2013). *Opportunity Found: Improving the Participation of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada's Workforce*. Retrieved January 31, 2014, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/ccs/opportunity_found/opportunity_found.pdf

This report draws on data from the 2011 National Household Survey, the 2006 Census, and the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (see Bougie E. above) to note that while the educational attainment rates of Canada's Aboriginal peoples are improving, the gap between them and those of non-Aboriginal Canadians remains wide. Meanwhile, Canada's Aboriginal population is younger and growing faster than its non-Aboriginal population. In a context where an ageing workforce and potential skills gaps are causing concern, the report authors say that it is essential to overcome this educational success gap. This report highlights some successful initiatives in engaging Aboriginal peoples in education and employment, and discusses what can be learned. It makes recommendation including that the federal government work with businesses to "identify more opportunities to match private sector financial support for Aboriginal skills and training programs", ensure Aboriginal communities have access to business and financial literacy training, and direct a portion of natural resource royalties received in the territories directly to skills and training.

Keywords: [Aboriginal peoples](#), [Employability](#), [Policy](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#)

Ageing

Thompson JJ, Blair MR, Henrey AJ. (2014). *Over the Hill at 24: Persistent Age-Related Cognitive-Motor Decline in Reaction Times in an Ecologically Valid Video Game Task Begins in Early Adulthood*. <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0094215#s4>

The IALSS and PIAAC survey results have led to speculation about cognitive decline setting in at around age 30, but this study conducted by researchers affiliated with the Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia, suggests that such decline sets in as early as age 24. This study investigated age-related changes in cognitive motor performance from the ages 16 to 44 in a complex "real world" simulation, the real-time strategy video game StarCraft 2. They sought to find out whether there is age-related slowing of within-game, self-initiated response times, when this decline begins, and whether expertise can directly ameliorate this decline. Analyzing the influence of age on performance using a dataset of 3,305 players, the researchers found that age-related slowing response times begins at 24 years of age. They found no evidence that expertise attenuates "domain-specific cognitive decline". However, they note that in their study, older players appear to hold their own despite

their declines, “perhaps by decreasing their cognitive load through the use of simplified strategies or improved use of the game interface”, suggesting that greater experience may indirectly compensate for cognitive decline.

Keywords: [Ageing](#)

Outcomes of Learning

Benefits of Lifelong Learning (BeLL) study

Herre P. (2014, April). Benefits of Lifelong Learning (BeLL) study complete. European Infonet Adult Education. <http://www.infonet-ae.eu/articles-science-55/2150-benefits-of-lifelong-learning-bell-study-complete>

The EU-financed “Benefits of Lifelong Learning” (BeLL) study from November 2011 to January 2014 held a final conference to present and discuss key results showing that adult education helps people cope better with social challenges. The project gathered data on the perceptions of participants about the benefits they had derived from their engagement in educational events in general, cultural and political continuing education. Ten European countries were involved in the study. The project builds on previous research in this area conducted in Britain by the Center for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) and the Institute of Education, University of London (IOE), and in Finland by the University of Eastern Finland. The researchers used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A 39-item questionnaire looked at psychological outcomes such as locus of control and self-efficacy as well as social benefits such as tolerance, trust, social network, sense of purpose in life, civic and social engagement, civic competence, mental well-being, work-related benefits, physical health, health behaviour, family, and changes in educational experience. In addition, eighty semi-structured interviews were held with eight course participants from each of the ten countries to find out how participants describe the benefits of education and what effect national or cultural contexts have on learners’ perception of benefits. The researchers analyzed 8,646 questionnaires and 80 interviews, identifying ten benefit factors. 86% respondents reported being more motivated to learn, 87% saw adult education as more important than they did previously, and 78% would encourage others to take a course. Over 70% of participants saw benefits in terms of social interaction and wellbeing, general satisfaction with their lives and determining their own course in life, while over 50% saw benefits in health and the family. Fewer respondents (31-42%) mentioned work and civic engagement. People with a low level of education benefitted particularly from adult education, and men placed greater emphasis on work-related benefits and changes in self-efficacy, while women tended to focus more on social engagement and the family.

Keywords: [Adult education](#), [European Union](#), [Outcomes of Learning](#)