

Research Results

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NOTE: This research scan includes links to PDF documents

International Literacy Assessments

Reder, Stephen. (2014). *Low-Skilled Readers in Canada: Results for Level 1 and Below: Summary*. The Centre for Literacy. Available at www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/sites/default/files/Reder_Sumry.pdf

In this presentation prepared for The Centre for Literacy's Summer Institute 2014, researcher Stephen Reder briefly analyzed Canadian PIAAC data for those with low reading proficiency (Level 1 and below on PIAAC's Literacy Proficiency Assessment). Unlike its predecessors, PIAAC included an assessment of some component skills of reading in order to provide more detailed information about the skills of low proficiency adults' reading that could be useful to those designing adult reading instruction. About 15% of Canadian adults fall into this category. They tend to be older, and less likely to be Canadian born, than the general population. They also have lower employment rates and tend to have lower incomes. The rate of low proficiency is somewhat higher among Francophones than Anglophones (18% to 14%). Among those with low proficiency, Anglophone and Francophone average proficiency does not differ significantly, but the use of these skills does. Engagement in reading practices as measured by PIAAC was significantly lower for Francophones. Reder offers a caveat about generalizing from the results: Although the assessment was designed to provide details about the "reading processes of low-skilled adults", not all low-skill adults surveyed took it, and not all who took it were low-skilled. In fact, slightly under a third of low-skilled respondents took the test, while 12% of other respondents did. The results suggest that overall literacy proficiency levels, reading practices, and reading components such as accuracy and fluency are strongly interrelated; however, further research is needed to better understand the nature of these relationships. Reder recommends that interventions aimed at boosting the skills of adults with low reading

proficiency include measures to build their engagement in reading, and the use of assistive technologies to aid in their fluency in processing text. A longer analysis of the Canadian results will be published in Fall 2014.

Keywords: [Canada](#), [International literacy assessments](#), Low reading proficiency, [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#), [Reading](#)

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC). (2014). *UPSKILL: A Credible Test of Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Training: Summary report*. Available at <http://www.srdc.org/news/new-study-shows-net-benefits-of-essential-skills-training-in-the-workplace.aspx>

Until now, few studies have reliably measured the effects of Essential Skills training in workplaces or its return on investment. With funding from the Canadian government's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) designed Upskill, a program of Essential Skills training, and assessed its benefits using a randomized control study that compared outcomes for training participants to those in the control group who did not receive training. The researchers focused on the accommodations industry. 100 firms were randomly assigned to a program group or a control group. Among the 1500 employees in the study, those in program group firms received the UPSKILL training and those in control group firms did not. The researchers found that a well-designed program of Essential Skills training can lead to substantial gains for employees in literacy scores, job performance, job retention and earnings following a small investment of time – typically about twenty hours – while employers were estimated to earn an average return of 23 per cent on their investment in the first year after providing training even if they covered the entire cost of the training. With some government support, the returns would be larger. The program led to increased task efficiency, fewer errors, lower supervision costs, greater service quality, improved customer relations, and higher revenues. Notably, the greatest impacts of training on skills and job performance were found among those with lower scores on the pre-training skill tests. Positive impacts were not uniform across all firms, however. The extent to which benefits were attained depended on a number of factors, including a program design based on a strong understanding of worker and business needs, employers' commitment to learning and training, and trust and receptivity to learning within the workplace. The researchers also note that small businesses had difficulty implementing the programs, so alternatives such as training through mentorship or through "off-site cluster-based delivery models" should be explored.

Keywords: [Canada](#), [Outcomes of Learning](#), Randomized controlled studies, [Return on Investment \(ROI\)](#), [Small and medium enterprises \(SME's\)](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#)

Outcomes of Learning

Motschilnig, Ricarda. (2012). *Benefits of Lifelong Learning – BeLL: Final Report* (Public Part). Available at <http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Final-Report1.pdf>

[The Benefits of Lifelong Learning \(BeLL\)](#) study investigated the benefits to learners from participating in “organized non-formal, non-vocational, voluntary adult education in Europe”. The results of this study were reported in our April 2014 scan; however, the final report has since been released so we provide a link from this scan.

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

Myers K, Frenette M, et al. (2014). *State of knowledge review of the wider benefits of adult learning Adult Learning and Returns to Training Project*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. <http://www.srdc.org/media/199754/adult-learning-state-of-knowledge.pdf>

This is one in a series of papers published by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) that have informed the development of an analytical framework for the Adult Learning and Returns to Training Project, a three-year project dealing with the “conceptual, analytical and methodological issues concerning the scope and measurement of adult learning activities and their associated financial and non-financial returns to individuals, firms and society at large”. This report provides an analysis of “the best available empirical evidence on the outcomes associated with participation in adult learning.” While not exhaustive, the review aims to help consolidate knowledge and identify gaps and areas for further policy relevant research. It looks at the literature on a variety of financial and non-financial outcomes of adult learning people, businesses, and society-at-large, and covers three categories of adult learning: foundational learning, higher education, and workplace learning. The researchers generally included only studies that met the criteria outlined in the [Practical Guide for generating causal estimates of a program’s impact](#) except in areas where the literature was sparse and a case could be made that including an article would “enrich the knowledge base”. They found little systematic evidence on the relationship between inputs and outcomes in foundational learning, but note there is “emerging exploratory evidence” suggesting that program quality in design and delivery (instruction) matters. They found no studies that rigorously investigate links between outputs and outcomes. Evidence on intermediate human capital gains is mixed, although there is some evidence of psycho-social capital gains. Evidence on social capital, however, is weak. Evidence on financial outcomes for individuals was mixed. Literature on outcomes for employers consists mainly of case studies, some of which report large returns on investment but some have methodological limitations. Promising areas for future research on the impacts of foundational learning identified include: looking at what program inputs matter most, and how they relate to outcomes; how much learning time is spent outside of formal learning environments and how this affects learning outcomes; and how financial outcomes for adult learners vary by type of foundational learning, and why. When it comes to workplace learning, the researchers found no studies that systematically investigate the relationship between inputs and outcomes, and

outputs and outcomes, for individuals. Numerous studies do find positive wage-returns to training but estimates vary dramatically. While some studies have found a correlation between training and job satisfaction, the causality of this relationship is uncertain. There are few studies that measure the impact of training on productivity, and those that do use relatively small samples. They recommend future research to explore different methodological strategies for dealing with the “heterogeneous and episodic nature” of workplace training.

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

Assessment

Circelli M, et al. (2012). *Does 1=1? Mapping measures of adult literacy and numeracy*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
http://www.ncver.edu.au/wps/portal/vetdataportal/restricted/publicationContent!/ut/p/a1/lZDBbslwEE_S_pQeO0a4Tx3aOKah1EFUlaFXiC3LsJBgFE0iK-vk1qFdKu7eRZnfeDihYg_L67Fo9uoPX3UUrtillPJWS4vxVSoYFf3pbruR7goTBBYhQxo_9uIXSm3N92gxbfartBPvPqnPmemmYYJwKcvH2uq1tPbjWX5VxFsrEVoZkmkQk4WIEbcojQa2JmjhLCCJrRFwFIDKg4I3J8U-kwTJ9ziXli7BDRYzF7FHOePaCwfxj-CWiDAz8ZohMYfXPp-b3qMPXbnc8qjy0fPBj_TXC-m7N_X4vds2CLQUmadc-fAOFsS30/dl5/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/

This report looks at the extent to which the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey (the OECD predecessor of PIAAC) and the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), which both feature scales of five performance levels, actually matched up. Although the OECD surveys are used by the Australian Government as a benchmark of national progress, they provide a “relatively course measure of skill levels” and are not designed to be an assessment tool. The ACSF, however, can be applied as an assessment tool at the individual level. The report finds that “while it is broadly possible to translate the five ACSF performance levels to the ALLS scales, there is not an exact match between the two, especially at the higher levels.” The researchers also found a “definite hierarchical structure within the levels of the Australian Core Skills Framework” meaning that it is possible to show learner progress within a level rather than merely between levels.

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

Escalier McLean Consulting. (2013). *Skills Tasmania: Exploration project on reporting Language, Literacy and Numeracy outcomes using finer gradations of the Australian Core Skills Framework, ACSF*. Available at <http://www.acal.edu.au/14conf/docs/Skills-Tasmania-26TEN-Escalier-McLean-Using-ACSF-in-Finer-Grained-Way-2013.pdf>

This reports on a project that examined current use of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) in literacy and numeracy programs in the Australian state of Tasmania, particularly the Employer Pledge Program. In this program, an employer pledges to support their employees' LLN (Literacy, Language and Numeracy) skills development and teachers deliver instruction designed to address a specific mismatch between the employee's LLN skills and the skills required to do their job effectively (link to info on current 26TEN Grants Program- Employer Stream). Since such interventions tend to be quite short-term, lasting no more than a few hours, and it would be unrealistic to expect interventions to result in learners "moving up a level", the researchers wanted to look at possible ways to report progress at "finer gradations" of the ACSF rather than assessing "by whole levels alone". The authors review the Australian and international literature on what constitutes progress in adult Literacy Language and Numeracy, and best ways of achieving this progress; they also provide an overview of provision in Tasmania. The researchers conducted stakeholder interviews including government staff and program managers to find out how progress is currently being assessed and recorded. Focus groups of teachers and program managers from major LLN providers discussed "particular delivery contexts" and "current methods to record progress". In their review of the literature, the authors note that the "diversity of needs, perspectives and provision" in LLN programs makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and to determine the factors contributing to program effectiveness. However, from the reviews, they identify factors "likely to contribute to learner gain". These include: "deliberate and sustained" teaching that is clearly focused on learners' diagnosed, over the course of more than 100 hours, with more contact hours for lower level students. However, lower intensity courses are recommended for pre-literate learners on the grounds that early language and literacy development demands intense concentration that cannot be sustained over long periods of time. Other important factors include teacher expertise and course content that is meaningful and relevant to learners.

Keywords: [Assessment](#), [Australia](#), [Literature reviews](#), [National literacy assessments](#),

Reading Instruction

Levine, Sarah. (2014). Making Interpretation Visible with an Affect-Based Strategy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(3) pp. 283-303.

In their interpretations of literary texts, novice readers tend to engage in literal interpretations while more experienced readers tend to engage in more figurative “sense making” when interpreting the same texts. This article reports on a quasi-experimental study that explored the hypothesis that novice readers “can be supported in constructing literary interpretations by drawing on and applying everyday interpretive practices to their readings.” This hypothesis is based on the idea that “affective evaluation”, that is to say, ascribing positive or negative values to things based on the words used to describe them, is an everyday interpretive practice. The author also draws on previous research to support the idea that such evaluation can be applied in both the real and literary worlds, and that to be independent interpreters of literature, readers must explicitly understand the processes by which they interpret literature. In a four-week, classroom-based instructional intervention, a 12th-grade class from a high-poverty, low-achieving, urban high school, a teacher who had been trained in the process of affective evaluation, made this process “visible” to students by showing them the ways in which they already practiced this process, then taught them to use it interpreting literature. A comparative class also engaged in a unit of literary interpretation but did not use this process. Comparisons of the “pre- and post study interpretive writing task and clinical think-aloud protocols from both groups “showed that students receiving the intervention made gains in interpretive responses, whereas the comparison group did not”. These results suggest that explicit instruction in “affect-driven” literary interpretation can support novice readers in constructing interpretive readings of literary texts.”

Keywords: [Reading](#), Secondary education, [United States](#)

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Byers D, Winstanley B & Cooke M. (2014). The Power of Discussion, from *Language issues in migration and integration: perspectives from teachers and learners*. URL (ed. by David Mallows). Available at <http://esol.britishcouncil.org/language-issues-migration-and-integration-perspectives-teachers-and-learners>

This chapter documents a six-week period of research in a Tower Hamlets, London, classroom of 16 students, in which classroom time was devoted to discussions using the Participatory ESOL approach, which focuses on getting students to engage in discussions on social and political issues based on their experiences outside the classroom. This was part of the Power of Discussion project, the Whose Integration? Project. The types of discussion focused on were debate, in which people argued for and against positions, and “decision making/negotiating outcomes”, in which they attempted to negotiate their way to decisions or resolve problems.

There was some explicit language skills and discussion skills work. The researchers recorded these discussions and, based on these recordings, observed that the discussions became more complex, coherent and collaborative over the course of the six weeks. They found that students' struggles to express complex ideas drove them to speak beyond their ascribed level. The explicit language work done with students not only provided a break from intense discussions but also helped students succeed in communicating their ideas.

Keywords: [English as an additional language \(EAL\)](#), [Immigrants](#), Integration, Teaching, [United Kingdom](#)

Paget A, Stevenson N. (2014). On speaking terms. Demos. Available at <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/onspeakingterms>

This report published by Demos, "Britain's leading cross-party think-tank" looks at the state of ESOL provision in England and compares with other countries, drawing on interviews, focus groups, requests for government information ("freedom of information" requests) and a review of international evidence. Problems identified with the system include: disincentives to find employment while studying, and the fact that funding from government has been reduced by 40 per cent in the past five years, despite the large waiting lists around the country. Among the report's recommendations are the provision of student-style loan, more support for ESOL from employers and local authorities, and the creation of a "coherent national strategy" for ESOL.

Keywords: [English as an additional language \(EAL\)](#), [Immigrants](#), [United Kingdom](#)