

Research Results

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NOTE: This research scan includes links to PDF documents

International Literacy Assessments

OECD. (2014). *Education at a Glance 2014*. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

This annual OECD publication brings together data from several of their ongoing international surveys. It includes the 2012 Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the 2012 data on the learning outcomes of 15-year-olds from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2012), published in 2013 and 2014, and 2013 data on lower secondary teachers from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2013). All data are accessible using [Education GPS](#), an online research tool. The report presents the data through a series of “indicators” that answer questions such as A1 (“to what level have adults studied?”). Each indicator is analyzed in depth. For example, analysis of the A1 indicator includes a discussion of the relationship between educational attainment and literacy and numeracy skills, as well as “adults’ skills and readiness to use information and communication technologies (ICT) for problem solving”. The introductory editorial by the Director General of the OECD sums up general findings: Access to education in OECD countries has been expanding, as has the level of skills, although increases in educational qualifications are not always fully aligned with increases in skill level. Despite increased educational attainment and skill levels across the population, social inequality has increased, and upward social mobility is decreasing. He

suggests this may be because the importance of skill levels in the economy has increased; nevertheless, increased access to education has not yet resulted in a more inclusive society.

Keywords: [International literacy assessments](#), [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#), international education data.

Digital Competencies

Holloway, Susan M. (2014). Visual literacies and multiliteracies: an ecology arts-based pedagogical model. *Fine Print* 37 (2): 13-16.

"Multiliteracies" is a concept coined by the New London Group to expand the definition of literacy beyond reading and writing a standard form of English to include variants on the English language as well as proficiency in the use of communication technologies besides print. Visual literacy, defined by Falihi and Wason-Ellan (2009) as "the ability to create, read, and respond to visual images", is the focus of the Canadian case study featured in this article. The study looked at the "kinds of visual literacies and multiliteracies" learners experience and use when they "read" the natural world using photography. This model was implemented in a secondary public school in a small city in Southwestern Ontario. The researcher used an "ecology arts-based model" incorporating digital photography lessons and field trips into curriculum-based learning in science and technology, visual arts, mathematics, and language arts. For example, student used mathematics to calculate depth of field, and learned to look for and document geometry in nature. They used language arts to journal about experiences and observations. "Professional community partners", such as photographers, farmers and entomologists, were involved. For the study, five participants, including teachers, community partners and the coordinator, were interviewed. The respondents discussed how this framework helped struggling writers find excitement creating stories, and enabled students to connect emotionally and intellectually to their local environment through art. Although the article focuses more on potential benefits to learners than on actual research findings, both the discussion and the description of the program suggest that further research on "ecology arts-based models" would be worthwhile.

Keywords: [Arts](#), [Digital competencies](#), Multiliteracies, Secondary education, Canada

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Folinsbee S, Hayes, B. (2014). *Getting to Yes: What Works in Workplace. Literacy and Essential Skills* [Draft report].

<http://www.advancingworkplacelearning.ca/files/documents/Draft%20AWL%20Research%20Report%20Sept%202014.pdf>

See also summary at:

<http://www.advancingworkplacelearning.ca/files/documents/AWL%20Final%20ResearchBrief-%C6%92.pdf>

See also webinar recording of a webinar based on this report: <http://abclifeliteracy.ca/getting-%E2%80%9Cyes%E2%80%9D>

This research, conducted as part of a two-year *Advancing Workplace Learning (AWL)* project, funded by the Government of Canada, was carried out by ABC Life Literacy Canada and the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN). The goal was to help employers increase learning and essential skills in their workplaces. The study looked at the "supply/demand infrastructure" in each province and territory and the features of successful WLES programs based on employer experiences. The researchers reviewed 12 documents, including reports on workplace training and lifelong learning, on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and training, and on workplace literacy and essential skill (WLES) programming. They also reviewed 40 case studies of employers that had committed to WLES initiatives at some point in the past twenty years. They interviewed 11 employers and 15 "key informants" who work with employers, and received 47 responses to an online survey from people "knowledgeable about WLES initiatives and programs". The researchers found that generally employer interest in WLES is very weak; they do not tend to see how it would further their business objectives and only provide it when required to or enticed by government funding. The authors conclude that "without financial support, employers were unlikely to undertake a WLES program". Although those employers who did engage in WLES programs tended to cite positive results, they also said that they were unlikely to continue their involvement without continued government support. This was particularly so for SME's. Nevertheless, the report identifies effective workplace literacy and essential skills (WLES) development models and workplace practices adopted by Canadian employers, particularly small and medium sized businesses (SME's). Linking WLES programming directly to specific business objectives and customizing curriculum to the requirements of particular workplaces are identified as effective approaches to marketing WLES programs to employers.

Keywords: [Canada](#), [Employers](#), [Literature reviews](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#) training

Hayes, Brigid. (2014). *The Canada Job Fund: An overview of the federal transfer to the provinces and territories*. Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

<https://brigidhayes.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/cupe-canada-job-fund-research-paper-e28093-final-version-26-08-14.pdf>

See also summary at <https://brigidhayes.wordpress.com/2014/10/02/summary-of-the-canada-job-fund/>

This report, commissioned by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) traces the development of the Canada Job Fund that came into effect in 2014. The document describes what was known about the new mechanism based on "information that was accurate as of August 18, 2014.". In 2014, Labour Market Agreements (LMA's) through which the federal government funded provincial workforce employment and training programs expired. The previous year, the federal government had announced that LMAs would be replaced by the Canada Job Grant. The provinces/territories' rejection of that proposal led to a series of negotiations that resulted in signed agreements starting in spring 2014. The Canada Job Fund, of which the Canada Job Grant is a major element, was set up. This paper draws on on-line documents on provincial and territorial websites and the federal Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). At of August 2014, five provinces had public websites encouraging employers to apply for the program. Ontario stated that applications would begin in September. Quebec opted out of the Canada Job Fund. Noting that employers will be required to pay \$5000 per student for training, with the federal government contributing \$10 000, the author questions how many employers are prepared to pay such an amount since this represents a substantial increase from the average \$688 per employee that employers currently invest in training. The author suggests there is no incentive for employers to fund training for those they do not already employ, and notes that the federal government "has spent the last few years closing down sector councils, the very organizations that could mobilize training of employed and unemployed people on a large scale." She finds "most troubling" the "lack of specificity" about who can be trained and what types of training will be supported. She expresses concern that program managers, to meet targets, may focus on more expensive training with larger employers, leaving out those who need training the most. Funding earmarked for including the unemployed and those with low literacy skills in training is set to decline by 70% by the last three years of the Canada Job Fund, so that these populations will likely once again be excluded as they were prior to the Labour Market Agreements.

Keywords: [Canada](#), [Policy](#), [Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills \(WLES\)](#), Canada Job Fund, Canada Job grant

Policy

Bunker N. (2015). *Is higher education the answer to reducing income inequality?* Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Available at <http://equitablegrowth.org/news/higher-education-answer-reducing-income-inequality/>

Would increasing the skill levels of workers reduce economic and social inequality? Many arguments for increased investment in adult basic education are based on the belief that economic demand for highly skilled or educated workers is increasing and that investments are necessary to prevent large numbers of people from being left behind or further marginalized. But what if economic demand for high skilled workers is not increasing? In January 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama announced a proposal to make two years of community college free to students who meet certain requirements. The role of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth is to look at the relationship between government policy, structural changes in the economy, economic growth, and economic inequality. In the context of the proposal to make community colleges free, this article looks at whether increasing access to higher education would reduce economic inequality in the United States. The author notes that several renowned research economists have found that demand for "skills and cognitive tasks" has been on the decline since 2000. If this is true, the "wage premium" for college educated workers would indeed decline, but that would be due to declining wages for college educated workers as the supply of such workers increased while the demand for them did not. Since the research cited, and this article itself, focus on the advantage of college education it is unclear what the direct implications are for adult basic education, apart from the fact that it casts doubt on the beliefs that demand for skills in the workforce is rising and that rising inequality is mainly the result of "low skilled" workers not being skilled enough. The author concludes that although education has many benefits, it may not be the panacea for inequality many have hoped for.

Keywords: [Access to education](#), [Policy](#), inequality, skills supply and demand, United States

Adult Literacy

Saal KS & Dowell M-MS. (2014). A literacy lesson from an adult "burgeoning" reader. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 58 (2): 135-146.

This phenomenological case study examines the lived experience of Charles, a beginning adult reader who became print literate in middle age. It asks: Can an adult ever be "illiterate"? From a "literacies" perspective, print literacy is one among many - a vital skill, but not to be focused on at the exclusion of all others. An adult can lack print literacy and yet be proficient in other literacy practices, and building on those skills can help in the acquisition of prose literacy. The researchers look for answers to the following research questions: 1) What factors or experiences were motivating or de-motivating factors in Charles' learning of print literacy; 2) How did his prior experiences and literacy skills impact his ability to learn print literacy? Phenomenological research seeks to understand the significance of participants' experience. Data was collected through interviews, reflexive dialog interviews, pre-post-tests, observation, and film. The authors conclude that, although Charles lacked print literacy skills, he had previously never been given the opportunity, when learning print literacy, to use his other "literacies" (visual, auditory, oratory) or have them recognized, and that his negative self-perception from those past educational experiences affected his ability to acquire print literacy. The authors recommend that literacy educators strive to foster a print literacy acquisition in which students are able to apply their life experiences and other literacy skills to print literacy.

Keywords: [Adult literacy](#), Beginning readers, [Case studies](#), Multiliteracies

Immigrant Youth Literacy

Stewart MA. (2014). Social Networking, Workplace, and Entertainment Literacies: The Out-of-School Literate Lives of Newcomer Latina/o Adolescents. *Reading Research Quarterly* 49(4): 365-369.

This collective case study investigated the range, form, and purpose of the Out-of-School literacies of four Latina/o adolescent English learners who were new arrivals to the U.S. . Previous studies indicate that Latino immigrant youths engage in a wide range of sophisticated literacy practices outside of school that are often transnational, crossing various linguistic, cultural, and social spaces. However, Latino immigrant youths drop out of U.S. schools at disproportionate rates, suggesting that their literacy practices are not recognized or valued by the educational system. Findings from this study showed that the most prevalent Out-of-School literacies that the participants practice are on the social networking site Facebook, in their workplaces, and through entertainment media

sources. A cross-case analysis suggests that the literacy practices in these spaces provide unique and purposeful roles for the four individuals that allow them to connect to their home countries and maintain their Latina/o identities. The participants also use their out-of-school literacy practices to acquire English, support themselves, and establish a place to succeed. The five spaces that their Facebook, workplace, and entertainment literacy practices fill are almost completely absent from their in-school literacies. The authors suggests that literacy pedagogy should not impose a narrow monolingual, monocultural, monoliterate, and monomodal view of Latina/o immigrant when their literacy practices demonstrate that they competently engage in multimodal means of communication.

Keywords: [Case studies](#), [Digital competencies](#), Immigrants, Multiliteracies, [United States](#), [Youth](#),

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Johnson T & Berry S. (2014). *Beyond the ESOL Classroom*. Available at http://pure.uhi.ac.uk/portal/files/1549744/Beyond_the_ESOL_Classroom.pdf

This report describes a small-scale research project on the benefits of an ESOL curriculum using a simplified Social Return on Investment (SROI) model. The research was conducted over six months in 2013 - 2014 in an area of the North Highlands (Scotland) by two qualified teachers supported by the Department of Rural Studies and Centre for Rural Health at the University of the Highlands (UHI). They used questionnaires and face to face interviews with previous and current students (mainly migrant workers) as well as representative stakeholders such as employers and people working in education, health and social and community services. Using their SROI model, the researchers calculated an SROI of £3.06 for each £1 invested in the ESOL course per student. Inputs were calculated by summing the cost of educating each student, while outputs were calculated by assigning proxy values to the outcomes, which were: improved English, more frequent use of English, increased social integration, and increased “comfortableness with community”. Recommendations for educators include investigating a wider range of ESOL provision including “at work” classes, and inviting speakers on “specialist topics” into the classroom. Further research could compare ESOL students and others who have not attended classes, using a wider sample from a range of colleges. The researchers also suggest more in-depth research into barriers to learning and research using widened SROI to “see how business/professional/trade groups not currently investing in ESOL could benefit.”

Keywords: [English as an additional language \(EAL\)](#), [Immigrants](#), [Integration](#), [Outcomes of Learning](#), [Return on Investment \(ROI\)](#), [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\)](#)