

Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research

Background

The Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education is committed to investing in rigorous research on adult learning to aid policymakers, practitioners, and providers. With increased attention to the educational implications of changing skill requirements and global economic pressures, improving adult literacy can be a key element in the nation's ongoing pursuit of sound educational policies and programs. Literacy is a foundation for further learning, educational attainment, and skill development; thus, sound adult literacy programs and policies can contribute to the enhancement of both individual economic opportunity and national competitiveness. Adults who want to improve their literacy skills face a full range of challenges. There are a broad range of programs and providers serving this population in diverse settings. A fundamental challenge for providers is how to deliver appropriate programs to such diverse populations. Available evidence-based knowledge—from the multidisciplinary perspective of education, cognitive and behavioral science, neuroscience and other disciplines on literacy—offers a strong foundation for understanding the main factors that affect adult literacy learning to inform curriculum and instruction for adult education practitioners and service providers.

Overview

The Committee on Learning Sciences of the National Academies of Science, through a contract awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) will assist OVAE in its efforts to inform adult literacy through an expert committee's study of adult and adolescent research. The report will synthesize research on literacy, draw implications for instruction in adult reading programs, and recommend a more systemic approach to research, practice, and policy in those areas. The report will include: factors that affect literacy development in adolescence and adulthood in general; an examination of their implications for strengthening literacy instruction for these populations, including technologies that can assist with multiple aspects of teaching, assessment, and accommodations for learning; other instructional practices; use of evidence-based practices and professional development; improving learner persistence through the use of technologies, social service support, and incentives; and, improved coordination of program improvement, evaluation, and research. The project period runs from September 2008 to September 2012.

Project Milestones:

- Pre-Publication Report: *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research—August 2011*
- Final Report: *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research—Spring 2012*
- Public Discussion: Late Spring 2012
- Dissemination Products: research-based pamphlets and briefs—*Fall 2012*

Outcomes and Products:

Final Report: *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*

Public Meeting

Two topical research-based pamphlets

Two research-based briefs focused on policy and research respectively.

Website: The pre-publication report is available now at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13242#description; the final will be published as a free PDF.

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