

IALS Bibliography

1- Desjardins, R. (2001). The effects of learning on economic and social well-being: A comparative analysis. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 76, 222-246.

This paper opens with a description of a structural model of learning and its relationship to economic and social wellbeing. The author uses this model, linking it to IALS statistics, to examine causal relationships in a matrix of formal/informal learning, job related and personal interest learning. Key findings of interest are that initial formal education is very important in adults' willingness to take part in learning activity throughout their life span, in increasing their likelihood of engaging in learning at work and in improving economic well being. However it also increases the likelihood of them engaging in personal-interest-related education and this, according to the model and statistical analysis, has been shown to have a moderate to very strong negative effect on economic well-being.

Using statistical analysis, the paper identifies causal relationships that offer rich perspectives into the statistical data of IALS and, as such, specific areas for further potential research are revealed.

2- Hamilton, M., & Barton, D. (2000). The International Adult Literacy Survey: What does it really measure? *International Review of Education*, 46(5), 377-389.

In this detailed, carefully constructed paper, Hamilton and Barton examine the validity of the claims of the IALS from a social constructivist perspective and conclude that the survey is 'enactive' i.e. that it is a tool to support existing policy decisions. The main deficiencies that the authors identify are in the limited vision of literacy, the view of literacy as a set of skills and in the assumption that the test items can successfully transfer across cultures. In discussing how some items in IALS have produced different figures to their own research carried out repeatedly over a number of years, the authors identify the broad sweep approach of IALS that necessitates a limited number of items covering each particular aspect of literacy as providing an inadequate understanding of the meaning of literacy in the lives of survey participants. The authors conclude that IALS has failed to produce a meaningful comparison of literacy between countries, has been limited in its goal of understanding the relationship between literacy and economic indicators but has, by the power of the institutions that have supported this survey and by the research budget it has commanded, significantly influenced policy beyond a level that is justifiable by its research validity.

This paper is an important paper because of the influence IALS has had on the field of adult literacy and its central role in the debate that perceives literacy as set of skills and literacy as a socially constituted activity. The thorough argument that Hamilton and Barton present is well supported and serves to construct this paper as a strong piece of academic writing in the field of adult literacy.

3- Druine, N., & Wildemeersch, D. (2000). The vocational turn in adult literacy education and the impact of the International Adult Literacy Survey. *International Review of Education*, 46, 391-405

An examination of the arguments supporting and opposing IALS is presented in this paper. The authors argue that the debate around IALS reflects views from the opposing perspectives to literacy: one as a fundamental skill applicable in all areas of functioning and the other as a socio-cultural, context specific practice. Specific points of discussion centre on the lack of reference to literacy research in IALS, its base in the empirical cognitive tradition of science, the questioned relevance of a correlation between literacy and economic success and the incompatibility of the survey construction and design with a contextual perspective on literacy.

This paper offers concise and rich discussion on the key aspects of critical debate around IALS, a debate that reflects the major elements of research and critical analysis of the whole field of adult literacy.