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ABSTRACT

A portrait of illiterates and literacy programs in the United States in the 1980s is derived from this summary of the most up-to-date, valid information that could be obtained from a literature review. The first section on adult illiterates identifies data sources, numbers of illiterates, and characteristics of the five main groups (the elderly, minorities, the poor, the unemployed, and Southern and rural residents). The next section includes these categories of adult literacy programs: state administered under the Adult Education Act, volunteer, community based, correctional, military, business and industry, Federal occupational training, and college and university. For each program area, available information is presented on program characteristics, numbers of participants, participant characteristics, and other factors such as persistence in program, reasons for quitting, and benefits derived. Finally, some recommendations are made regarding the future collection and analysis of descriptive data on illiterates and literacy programs. (SK)

ADULT ILLITERATES AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS:

A SUMMARY OF DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY PROJECT
FAR WEST LABORATORY

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National Adult Literacy Project
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PREFACE

The National Adult Literacy Project (NALP), sponsored by the National Institute of Education, is one component of the President's Initiative on Adult Literacy. The Initiative is designed to promote collaboration between the public and private sectors in order to offer literacy instruction more effectively and economically to the many adults who need and want it.

Work on NALP was begun in September 1983 by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL) in San Francisco and The NETWORK, Inc. in Andover, Massachusetts. Research, development, dissemination, and policy analysis activities were undertaken in the project to contribute to meeting the need for improved adult literacy policies and practices. This report presents the results of one of these activities.

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INTRODUCTION

During the past several years, increased attention and resources have been focused on combatting the problem of adult illiteracy in this country. Institutions, organizations, and groups within the public and private sectors have funded, designed, and operated a variety of programs to teach literacy skills.

At the same time, "adult literacy" has emerged as a field within, but separate from, "adult education." The field of adult literacy, however, is less well developed than are programs designed to teach literacy. No professional associations or journals are devoted exclusively to adult literacy, few research or evaluation efforts have been conducted, and documentation of the work that has been done is limited. Even the most basic questions about adult illiterates and literacy programs remain to be answered completely and accurately:

- How many adults in this country are illiterate?
- What are the characteristics of adult illiterates?
- What programs are currently working toward combatting the literacy problem?
- What are these programs like?
- How many illiterates are taking part in and benefitting from literacy programs?

Answers to questions such as these would not only contribute to the field of adult literacy by providing a common knowledge base, but would also help in planning and conducting literacy programs.

The objective of the work reported here was to determine the extent to which answers to basic questions about illiterates and literacy programs could be provided by summarizing existing data. As a first step, several hundred documents were identified through a review of available literature and contacts with individuals representing governmental agencies, professional associations, and literacy programs. Some documents were widely circulated, but most were documents with limited circulation--in-house reports, manuscripts prepared for journal submission, papers presented at professional meetings, newsletters, and memoranda. As documents were obtained, they were reviewed for information that could help to answer the questions posed above, and for references to other documents that might provide useful information.

Only the most up-to-date, valid information contained in the documents reviewed was selected for inclusion in this report. Some information was excluded because it was so out of date as to provide a distorted picture of illiterates and literacy programs in the 1980's. Other information was discarded because it was "suspicious" (e.g., the source was not clear, the data were inconsistent with other findings, arithmetic or typographical errors were obvious).

In the next section, data on the number and characteristics of adult illiterates are summarized. A summary of data on literacy programs follows. Conclusions are then drawn about the extent to which basic questions about illiterates and literacy programs can be answered using available data, and recommendations made for future work.

ADULT ILLITERATES

In this section, available data are summarized on the number of adult illiterates in the United States and on the characteristics of the illiterate population. The data are from a variety of sources. Three sources are used extensively:

- Ongoing surveys of the Bureau of the Census.
- The Adult Performance Level (APL) Study, conducted by the University of Texas at Austin from 1971 through 1975.
- The 1970 Survival Literacy Study and the 1971 follow-up study conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

Number of Adult Illiterates

Studies of illiteracy conducted in the 1970's and 1980's focused on adult populations differing in age and other characteristics. These studies also used different ways of defining literacy and determining who among the target population was literate or not according to the definition adopted. Even so, there were similarities in the results obtained:

- 24 million people age 25 and over (18% of the total population in this age range) were classified as illiterate, or educationally deficient, by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), using as the definition of illiteracy the completion of less than 9 years of school as determined in the 1980 Census (NCES, 1984). The figure rose to 45 million (34%) when illiteracy was defined as less than 12 years of school.
- 23 million people age 18 through 65 (20% of this age range) were judged to be functionally incompetent in the Adult Performance Level Study (1977), based on their performance on indicators "that require individuals to employ communication skills, computation skills, problem solving and interpersonal relations skills in a variety of adult-related situations" (p. 12).
- 18.5 million people 16 years of age and older (13%) were found to be functionally illiterate in a survey by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. (1970) in which

literacy was defined as the ability to fill out application forms for such common items as a Social Security number, a personal bank loan, Public Assistance, Medicaid, and a driver's license.

- 21.1 million people 16 years and older (15%) were found to "suffer from serious deficiencies in functional reading ability" or require "serious effort . . . to respond to the printed word in real-life situations" (p. 57), according to the results of a later Louis Harris and Associates (1971) study of functional literacy.

Studies have also been conducted of illiteracy among special groups within the general adult population. Sticht (1982), for example, reported that 5.6% or 18,006 Armed Forces enlistees in 1981 had reading grade levels between 5.0 (fifth grade) and 6.9 (ninth month of sixth grade). One-third or 107,610 scored between 7.0 and 8.9, 33.4% or 111,415 between 9.0 and 10.9, and 26.7% between 11.0 and 12.9. Sticht's conclusion was that "reading levels of military accessions are now approximately the same as the young population from which the military recruits. . . . However, as in the civilian world, many military recruits are low in basic skills" (p. 51). Gold (1984) reported on illiteracy in penal institutions. She noted that, according to the Bureau of Justice, 425,678 inmates were in state and federal prisons in August 1983. Sixty-one percent or nearly 260,000 of these individuals had less than a high-school education; of this group, 26% had 8 years of education or less.

Based on the findings reported here, it can be concluded that over 20 million adults are illiterate. If high-school completion is accepted as the definition of literacy, then the number of illerates swells to 45 million.

Characteristics of Adult Illiterates

Adult illiterates come from every conceivable demographic group. However, illiteracy tends to be more common among certain groups than others. Groups with high rates of illiteracy are:

- The old.
- Minority groups.
- The poor.
- The unemployed (or those employed at low-skill jobs).
- Residents of the South and rural areas.

These five groups are not discrete. In fact, the overlap is considerable. Members of one group are commonly members of one or more other groups. As examples, the old are frequently poor, and minorities are often poor and unemployed.

The Old

Both grade-completion data from the Bureau of the Census surveys and competency-level data from the APL and Harris studies support the notion that illiteracy is high among the elderly. Bureau of the Census data for 1982 reported by NCES (1984) revealed that 39.4% of the 65-and-over age group had completed less than 9 years of school, compared to 13.5% of the 35-64 group and 4.4% of the 25-34 group. A similar trend was apparent in data for the completion of 12 years of school: 55.9% of the 65-and-over group had completed less than 12 years, compared to 27.9% of the 35-64 group and 13.7% of the 25-34 group.

In the APL study, 35% of adults age 60-65 were estimated to be functionally incompetent, the highest percentage among the five age groups studied. The lowest percentage of illiterates was found among the 30-39 age group (11%). The percentage for the youngest group (18-29) was only slightly higher.

In the 1970 Harris study, the oldest group (50 and over) proved to be the most deficient in reading ability, with an illiteracy range of 5-17%. The 16-24 age group was the most literate; the range for this group was 1-9%. The 25-29 and 30-49 groups had an identical illiteracy range of 2-11%. Similar results were obtained in the 1971 Harris survey.

Minority Groups

Illiteracy tends to be much more common among minority groups than among whites. For example, as reported by NCES (1984) based on 1982 Census data, the percentage of whites 25 years of age and older completing less than 9 years of school was 14.7, compared to 24.7 for blacks and 40.5 for Hispanics. The percentage of whites completing less than 12 years of school was 27.2; for blacks the percentage was 45.1 and for Hispanics, 54.1.

In the APL study, less than 20% of the whites were estimated to be functionally incompetent, while more than 40% of the blacks and of Spanish-surname groups were estimated to be so. Both the 1970 and 1971 Harris studies resulted in striking differences between whites and blacks, with the range of illiteracy much higher among the black population.

Many minority-group individuals who are deficient in literacy skills are also lacking in language skills. According to 1980 Census data summarized by NCES (1984), 2.2% of the total population 18 years old and over (3.6 million people) reported speaking English

not well or not at all. Although the percentage was less than 2 in most states, it was at least twice that in California, Hawaii, New Mexico, New York, and Texas.

The most significant percentage of non-English or limited-English speakers is found in the various Hispanic communities, including Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans (Bliss, 1984). Fourteen percent of Hispanics age 21 and older speak only Spanish; another 29% normally use Spanish. Although most Hispanics experiencing difficulty with the English language are foreign born, "it is still estimated that up to 25% of Hispanic-Americans born in the United States may have difficulties with English" (Bliss, 1984, p. 2).

The Poor

There is a strong tendency for illiteracy to be high among the poor. Of those persons 22 years of age and older who completed 5 years or less of school, 35.2% had incomes below the poverty level, according to 1981 Bureau of the Census data (NCES, 1984). As number of years of education rose, the percentage below the poverty level steadily decreased; for persons with one year or more of college, the percentage of poor was a substantially lower 5.2%.

Additional Bureau of the Census data for 1981 (NCES, 1983) support the relationship between literacy and income. For men 25 and older with less than 8 years of school, the average annual income was $9,017. With 8 years of school, the income was $11,376. Men who completed 1-3 years of high school earned $13,650, on the average. Those who completed 4 years of high school had an average annual income of $18,139, over twice that of men with less than 8 years of school.

In the APL study, 40% of those individuals reporting a poverty income were classified as functionally incompetent, compared to only 8% of those individuals with incomes of $15,000 or greater. In the 1970 Harris study, the range of illiteracy among individuals with incomes less than $5,000 was 5-18%, higher than that for the $5,000 to $9,999 group (2-13%), $10,000-14,999 group (2-10%), and the $15,000 and over group (1-7%). In the 1971 Harris study, income level was also found to be related to reading ability, with the most significant break between those earning less than $5,000 and those earning more.

The Unemployed

As might be expected, illiteracy is higher among the unemployed (or those employed in low-skill jobs) than among the employed. NCES (1982) reported previously unpublished Bureau of Labor Statistics data showing that in 1980 the unemployment rate was 8.5% for individuals 18 years old and over with 8 years or less of school and

11.3%* for individuals with 1-3 years of high school. In contrast, the unemployment rate for high-school graduates was 6.5% and for college graduates, 2.0%.

In the APL study, 36% of those unemployed were estimated to be functionally incompetent, compared to 15% of the employed. No findings related to employment were reported in either of the Harris studies.

Residents of the South and Rural Areas

Illiteracy among individuals who reside in the South is higher than among individuals in other parts of the United States. Evidence of the high rate of illiteracy in the South can be found in 1980 Census data summarized by NCES (1984) on the percentage of people age 25 and older in each state who completed less than 9 years of school. The percentage in 19 states was higher than the national average of 18.3%; over one-half of these states are in the South. Data by state on the percentage of people completing less than 12 years of school reveal a similar trend. Most of the 18 states with percentages higher than the national average of 33.5% are also in the South.

It should be noted that states with the largest numbers of people not completing 9 or 12 years of school are not in the South. For the most part, they are states with the largest populations (e.g., California, New York).

APL data provide additional evidence of the high rates of illiteracy in the South. As noted in the final report, "while all other regions of the country are estimated to have about 16% functionally incompetent adults, in the South, there are approximately 25%" (p. 38).

Results of the Harris studies indicate the intensity of the illiteracy problem in both the South and the East. In the 1970 study, the South had the highest range of functional illiteracy (4-15%), followed closely by the East (4-14%). In the 1971 study, people in the East and South scored slightly lower than in the Midwest and West.

Illiteracy also tends to be more common among residents of rural areas than of urban or suburban areas, according to Census,

*Data showing a higher unemployment rate among high-school dropouts than among individuals with less education were reported earlier by Hunter and Harman (1979) and two possible explanations offered for this unexpected finding: (1) many individuals with less than 8 years of school are not in the labor force at all, and (2) the on-the-job experience gained by early dropouts may offset the disadvantage of a lack of formal education.

APL, and Harris data. Based on 1976 Bureau of the Census data, Hunter and Harman (1979) reported that "in rural areas only about 46 percent complete high school, whereas in suburban areas, the percentage is 70; in central cities, 61" (p. 33). They also noted that "over 15 percent of adults in rural areas have not even completed grade school. . . . Of the total suburban population, only about 7 percent have not completed grade school" (pp. 33,36). In the APL study, the greatest percentage of functionally incompetent adults was in rural areas. Similarly, in both Harris studies, the range of functional illiteracy was highest among residents of rural communities.

Summary

- Over 20 million adults in this country are illiterate by commonly accepted definitions, according to studies of the 1970's and 1980's. If all adults who did not complete high school are included in the population considered to be illiterate, then the number of illiterates rises to 45 million.

- Adult illiterates come from every demographic group. Groups with high rates of illiteracy include the old, minority groups, the poor, the unemployed (or those employed at low-skill jobs), and residents of the South and rural areas.

ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

Available data on adult literacy programs are summarized in this section. Programs aimed primarily at teaching basic literacy skills--the reading, writing, and communication skills needed to function in today's society--are discussed first. These programs include the State-Administered Program of the Adult Education Act, volunteer programs, community-based programs, and programs in correctional institutions. Programs designed to teach the basic skills required to perform the job or task requirements of a particular environment are then discussed. Military programs, programs in business and industry, federal occupational training programs, and programs at colleges and universities are in this latter group.

For each of the program areas, available information is presented on:

- Program characteristics, such as goals, target audience, level and source of funding, number and characteristics of administrative and instructional personnel, and frequency and location of classes.
- Number of participants/programs.
- Participant characteristics, such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, employment status, and area of residence.
- Characteristics of participation, such as persistence in the program, reasons for separation, and achievement gains and other benefits derived from the program.

State-Administered Program of the Adult Education Act

Program Characteristics

Since 1965, direct federal support for adult literacy has been provided primarily by the Adult Education Act (Public Law 91-230, as amended), principally through the State-Administered Program. The Act and the State-Administered Program it authorizes have as their purpose:

- To expand educational opportunities for adults and to encourage the establishment of programs of adult education that will:

-- Enable all adults to acquire basic skills necessary to function in society.

-- Enable adults who so desire to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school.

-- Make available to adults the means to secure training that will enable them to become more employable, productive, and responsible citizens.

Adults eligible for participation in the State-Administered Program are those 16 years of age and older who:

- Lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to enable them to function effectively in society or who do not have a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education and who have not achieved an equivalent level of education.

- Are not currently required to be enrolled in school.

The State-Administered Program is not a single, uniform program but three distinct programs responding to the needs of three distinct groups in the population. The three programs are:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE).

- Adult Secondary Education (ASE).

- English as a Second Language (ESL).

The titles of these programs give the impression that the distinctions between them are clear. Such is not the case, either in available descriptive information or in actual program operations. As an example, the Business Council for Effective Literacy (BCEL) Newsletter for September 1984 includes a description of "ABE: The Largest Program." What is actually described is ABE, ASE, and ESL. Development Associates (1980), in its widely acclaimed evaluation report, noted a similar confusion in the programs themselves: "[In some projects] all students were considered to be enrolled in ABE, even some who spoke no English and others who were about to be examined for their GED" (p. 48). In reviewing information presented here and elsewhere about the State-Administered Program, this confusion among program components should be kept in mind.

The State-Administered Program is operated primarily through formula grants to the 50 states and the District of Columbia.*

*Commonwealths and territories also receive funds but, with the exception of Puerto Rico, the funding pattern differs.

State education agencies make project funding decisions based on proposals submitted by local education agencies and public or private nonprofit agencies. Ten percent of the total cost of any program must be covered by the state agency, with up to 90% covered by federal funds allocated to the state. A limit of 5% is placed on state administrative costs.

Federal allotments for ABE/ASE/ESL programs totalled $100,000,000 in fiscal year 1981 (U.S. Department of Education 1983a). Allotments for fiscal years 1965 through 1981 were $978,223,292. State and local matching funds during the same period added to over $600,000,000, even though only a 10% match is required.

From the same source come data indicating that paid personnel in ABE/ASE/ESL programs in 1981 numbered 57,000. Of these personnel, 72.5% were part-time. Of the total staff of 57,000, 78.8% were teachers. The remainder were paraprofessionals (9.8%), local administrative and supervisory personnel (6.9%), counselors (3.8%), and state administrative and supervisory personnel (.7%). The participant-teacher ratio was 50:1; the participant-counselor ratio was 1,043:1. Reports for 1981 from 40 states (with 35% of the total participants) show that 5,591 volunteers served as teachers, 282 as counselors, and 2,537 as paraprofessionals.

Earlier data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Learning and reported by NCES (1981) relate to the scheduling and location of ABE/ASE classes. Of the 85,721 classes reported by states, 58% were held in the evening. Nearly 50% of the participants attended classes in a school building (primarily secondary-school buildings), nearly 25% in learning centers, 10% in institutions, and the remainder in other locations.

Number of Participants/Programs

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1983a), the total number of participants in ABE/ASE/ESL in fiscal year 1981 was 2,261,252. Of these individuals, 1,607,092 (71.1%) were enrolled in ABE/ESL and 654,160 (28.9%) in ASE. As for number of programs, some 14,000 local programs are operating in 50 states (BCEL, 1984).

Participant Characteristics

Of the participants in ABE/ASE/ESL in 1981, the greatest percentages tended to be (U.S. Department of Education, 1983a):

- Minority group members (56%). Of this 56%, nearly equal percentages were Hispanics (22.4%) and blacks (22.2%). The remainder were Asian or Pacific Islanders (10.4%) and American Indians or Alaskan Natives (1.0%).

- Between 16 and 24 years of age (42.3%). A slightly lower percentage (39.2%) was in the 25-44 age range, 12.0% in the 45-59 range, and 6.5% in the 60+ group.
- Women (54.2%).
- Unemployed (46.5%) rather than employed (37.0%) or receiving public assistance.
- Residents of urban areas with high rates of unemployment (54.7%).

Other information on ABE/ASE/ESL participant characteristics reported by the U.S. Department of Education (1983a) includes the following:

- Of all participants, 26.5% were adults with limited English proficiency.
- Institutionalized adults totalled 6.1%.
- In 37 states, 4.8% of the 985,702 participants (or 60,898 individuals) were handicapped.
- In 42 states, 10.2% of the 906,889 participants (or 137,896 individuals) were immigrants.

Characteristics of Participation

In 1981, approximately 900,970 individuals or 40% of the participants left the program (U.S. Department of Education, 1983a). Numerous reasons were given. Some can be viewed as positive (e.g., to take a job, to enter a training program), while others are clearly not (e.g., lack of interest, family problems).

Volunteer Programs

Program Characteristics

Two major volunteer programs operate in this country: Laubach Literacy Action (LLA) and Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (LVA). In both programs, volunteers are trained to provide individual literacy instruction.

LLA is the domestic arm of Laubach Literacy International. LLA trains and certifies tutors to teach reading, writing, and English as a Second Language. Training is also offered in the organization and administration of adult literacy programs. Basic literacy skill books published by Laubach Literacy International form the core curriculum, complemented by follow-up materials emphasizing adult survival and coping skills.

Literacy Volunteers of America was formed in 1962 to work toward combatting the problem of adult and teenage illiteracy in the United States and Canada. LVA staff support local tutoring programs by providing assistance in tutor training, materials development, and program management. LVA uses materials developed by its staff, by tutors in local programs, and by commercial organizations.

As reported by BCEL (1984), of the local LLA and LVA programs, only a few have annual budgets as high as $30-40,000. Only three programs have achieved a six-figure budget.

As for staff, about 30,000 volunteers take part in LLA and 15,000 in LVA (BCEL, 1984).

Number of Participants/Programs

According to figures reported by BCEL (1984), LLA operates some 500 tutoring programs in 21 of the 50 states. About 42,000 adult illiterates receive tutoring. LVA operates approximately 200 tutoring programs in 31 states for some 21,000 participants.

Participant Characteristics

Two participant characteristics are suggested by available descriptions of LLA and LVA. First of all, as noted by Hunter and Harman (1979), the "generally middle-class" tutors and teachers trained by the two organizations would possibly have difficulty working with the "stationary poor," defined as "those hard-core disadvantaged adults who feel hopeless about their ability to change their situation and who do not see reading as a means of help" (p. 63). The implication here is that the individuals served by volunteer programs are not the "stationary poor," but rather are individuals who are motivated, for one reason or another, to acquire new skills.

Second, data provided by Bliss (1984) suggest that over 40% of the participants in LLA and LVA are foreign born or at least non-English speaking. According to Bliss, over 45% of the individuals served by LLA and about 42% of the LVA participants receive conversational ESL instruction rather than literacy instruction.

Characteristics of Participation

No data to report.

Community-Based Programs

Program Characteristics

Community-based literacy programs, in contrast to the State-Administered Program and the national volunteer programs, serve a specific geographical area and constituency. Community-based programs are concerned with improvement of the quality of life for an entire community. Thus, literacy is often only one of a number of program goals. Further, literacy is viewed broadly--as economic, social, and political literacy, rather than as a set of encoding, decoding, and computational skills (Association for Community-Based Education--ACBE, 1983).

Other characteristics of community-based programs, as pointed out by ACBE (1983) and Hunter and Harman (1979), include the following:

- Leadership and administration come, at least in part, from their constituencies, including urban blacks, reservation and urban Native Americans, Hispanics, farmworkers, welfare mothers, and other low-income groups.
- Their methods are nontraditional, to meet the needs of those whom traditional education has failed, and learner centered, to help learners meet objectives they set themselves in response to their own needs.
- They are independent organizations, with a flexibility that affiliated institutions may lack.

According to ACBE (1983), funding levels for community-based programs vary, with some programs reporting no funds, only donated time, facilities, and supplies. As for staffing, the use of community personnel and of volunteers seems to be quite common. The setting for instruction is frequently characterized as "non-threatening," "nonacademic," "familiar," and "accessible."

Number of Participants/Programs

No data to report.

Participant Characteristics

Community-based programs serve primarily individuals at the lowest reading levels (ACBE, 1983). These individuals tend to live in poverty, either in inner-city areas or in rural communities. They are often members of minority groups.

Characteristics of Participation

No data to report.

Programs in Correctional Institutions

Program Characteristics

Literacy programs operate in federal and state prisons, as well as in a few local jails. The programs are primarily volunteer or Adult Basic Education programs.

According to a Program Statement issued by the U.S. Department of Justice (1982), inmates in a federal institution who cannot read, write, or do mathematics at the sixth-grade level are required to attend an Adult Basic Education program for a minimum of 90 days. Wardens are required to establish incentives to encourage inmates to complete the program. Programs are to be coordinated by a member of the prison's education staff. Coordinators are to interview each inmate in the program at least once every 30 days to review progress. At the end of 90 days, the inmate may withdraw from the program without disciplinary action occurring, even if the sixth-grade level of achievement is not attained.

At the state level, literacy instruction varies from state to state and from institution to institution, as revealed in a 1982 survey by Contact Literacy Center reported by Gold (1984). Volunteer programs in state prisons employ methods from one or both of the major volunteer literacy organizations, or they employ their own methods. Adult Basic Education programs offer an array of instructional organizations: large-group instruction, small-group instruction, individualized instruction, or a combination of these three.

An estimated $4,750,000 made available to states through the Adult Education Act was spent on correctional institution programs in fiscal year 1983 (Gold, 1984). Although the Act allows up to 20% of the funds allocated to states to be spent on institutionalized individuals, the $4.75 million figure represents only 5%.

Number of Participants/Programs

According to the 1982 Contact Literacy survey,* some 45,703 inmates participated in literacy and/or Adult Basic Education programs in 1981 (Gold, 1984).

*As noted by Gold, "information from the survey . . . is general and incomplete" (p. 1).

Participant Characteristics

No data to report.

Characteristics of Participation

An analysis of ABE enrollments and completions in federal institutions only three months after establishment of the mandatory 90-day participation policy provided evidence of positive outcomes (McCollum, 1983). In fiscal year 1982, 43% more inmates enrolled in ABE than in the previous year and 38% more completed the program. A large number of inmates remained in the program after their required 90-day participation was completed.

Military Programs

Program Characteristics

Literacy instruction in the military is provided through programs aimed at improving basic skills so that on-the-job requirements can be met. Each branch of the service establishes its own programs, with different criteria for entry and exit, different assessment devices, and different instructional methods and materials.

Major funds are now being allocated by each of the four branches of the service to the development of literacy instruction targeted to the special needs of military personnel. These curriculum development efforts are becoming more centralized, although day-to-day management of programs is still at the local level.

During fiscal year 1981, over $70,000,000 was spent for basic skills education in the four branches of the service (Sticht, 1982). The cost of Army programs was by far the highest ($57,848,000).

As Sticht also reported, over 95% of the trainees who received basic skills education attended programs designed and delivered by civilian educational institutions under contract to the military.

Number of Participants/Programs

During fiscal year 1981, basic skills education in the military involved more than 220,000 course enrollments* (Sticht, 1982).

*Enrollments refer to courses enrolled in, not to participants. Number of enrollments is not the same as number of participants, since one participant may enroll in more than one course.

The Army had the largest number of enrollments--over 174,000. Some 161,000 of these enrollments were in the literacy component of the Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP) II. An additional 4,000 or so enrollments were in the ESL component of BSEP II.

Sticht (1982) listed 15 basic skills programs conducted during duty hours in the four service branches. Four additional programs provided recruits with an opportunity to acquire a high-school diploma or its equivalent. According to a 1978 Department of Defense directive, these programs cannot be offered during on-duty time because they are not directly related to military requirements.

Participant Characteristics

Participants varied somewhat in ability level from program to program (Sticht, 1982). According to Duffy (1984), "there appears to be a two tier notion evolving: a 5th or 6th grade level requirement for recruit training and a ninth grade level for all post recruit personnel" (pp. 32-33).

Characteristics of Participation

Attrition was highest for those lowest in basic skills and was more highly related to demands during "academic" as contrasted with "performance" phases of training (Sticht, 1982). However, the majority of the least capable did not drop out from either phase of training.

As for the benefits of participation, Sticht reported that gains in reading ranged from less than one grade level to almost three grade levels, with no apparent relationship of gain to time or resources.

Business and Industry Programs

Program Characteristics

Business/industry involvement in adult literacy, as summarized by BCEL (1984), takes at least three forms: (1) awarding of grants and in-kind support to ongoing literacy programs, often in the community in which the business/industry operates; (2) involvement in local, state, and national planning; and (3) the operation of in-house programs for employees and/or tuition assistance for outside training. It is the latter involvement that is of concern here.

The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE--1983) reported the following findings from a 1982 Center for Public Resources study:

- Fifty percent of middle-size companies operated remedial training programs compare[illegible] 35% of large companies.

- Insurance and manufacturing companies were more likely to provide training in-house, whereas utility companies tended to use tuition reimbursement. Overall, 35% of all companies in the study used tuition assistance to finance outside training.

- Twenty percent of the companies surveyed conducted remedial training, to some extent, in conjunction with other companies in the community.

Number of Participants/Programs

AAACE, in its summary of "Business/Industry Efforts in Remedial Education" (1983), quoted an estimate from an unidentified research group that "some 300 of the nation's largest companies now operate remedial courses in basic Math and English for entry-level workers" (p. 1).

Also reported by AAACE is a finding from the 1982 study by the Center for Public Resources that 75% of the corporations with 500 or more employees conducted some kind of in-house "basic skills competency program" for current employees. Of these corporations, 43% provided remedial training that had an overwhelming emphasis on mathematics and speaking/listening skills.

Participant Characteristics

No data to report.

Characteristics of Participation

No data to report.

Federal Occupational Training Programs

Program Characteristics

The major federal occupational training effort now in operation primarily for adults is funded under the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA), which replaced the Comprehensive Employment

and Training Act (CETA) in 1982.* JTPA programs are aimed at preparing youth and unskilled adults for entry into the labor force and at providing job training for individuals who have special needs related to obtaining productive employment.

Individuals eligible for participation in JTPA programs include economically disadvantaged youth (from 14 through 21 years of age) and adults (age 22 and over), particularly: dropouts, teenage parents, the long-term unemployed who have limited opportunities for re-employment, the handicapped, offenders, individuals with limited English proficiency, displaced homemakers, Native Americans, migrant and seasonal workers, and veterans.

Fiscal year 1983 funding for JTPA programs totalled $618 million (U.S. Department of Education, 1983b).

Number of Participants/Programs

No data to report.

Participant Characteristics

Despite the target audience for JTPA programs, participants in many programs must now meet an entry-level reading requirement of ninth-grade equivalency or above (Berlin & Duhl, 1984).

Characteristics of Participation

No data to report.

College and University Programs

Program Characteristics

Colleges and universities have been concerned primarily with the conduct of programs for their own students who are in need of basic skills improvement. Community colleges, in particular, have "borne the brunt of adult illiterates in American higher education" (Roueche, 1984, p. 1). Some institutions, however, are beginning to develop programs for individuals who are not current students or even college-bound (BCEL, 1984).

*For detailed information on the characteristics of CETA programs and participants, see Taggart (1981).

Number of Participants/Programs

According to BCEL (1984), several hundred thousand students at institutions of higher education are known to be receiving basic skills help.

Participant Characteristics

No data to report.

Characteristics of Participation

No data to report.

Other Programs

Adult literacy programs are also offered by libraries, churches, cultural and ethnic organizations, labor unions, museums and galleries, social service agencies, departments of the federal government other than Education and Labor, and departments of state governments. Although information about these programs is limited, their contributions to adult literacy are significant.

Summary

- Although data are not available on the number of participants in all the various literacy programs, it appears that no more than 5 million people are taking part in ongoing efforts. At best, then, 25% of the estimated 20+ million adult illiterates in this country are receiving some kind of assistance in acquiring literacy skills. If one accepts the estimated number of illiterates as 45 million and considers only those program participants who actually benefit from literacy instruction, then the percentage of adults served by ongoing efforts probably drops to about 5%.

- Adult literacy programs are operated by a variety of institutions, organizations, and groups within the public and private sectors. The programs are quite diverse, particularly in goals (and consequently target audience), size, and characteristics of instructional personnel.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At present, it is not possible to provide a complete and accurate picture of adult illiterates and literacy programs in the 1980's using existing data. Most of the needed information is not available. Information that is available is often out of date, incomplete, or inaccurate. In some cases, existing data suggest additional questions to a greater extent than they answer questions previously posed.

The following recommendations are made for future work aimed at describing illiterates and literacy programs:

- Future work to describe the illiterate population should not focus on determining the size and demographic characteristics of the population. Although available information is incomplete, it is probably sufficient. The focus of new work should be on identifying characteristics of illiterates that may be related to their enrollment and persistence in a literacy program (e.g., reasons why they dropped out of high school, reasons why they never learned literacy skills). Such information could be useful in developing new strategies for recruitment and in ensuring that individuals who do enroll remain in literacy programs long enough to acquire the skills they need and want.

- A major effort to collect, analyze, and report on existing data on literacy programs should not be undertaken in the near future. In most cases, the institutions, organizations, and groups funding and operating literacy programs do not have the kind of data that are needed to construct a complete and accurate description of adult literacy services in the United States. With additional time and resources, more data than presented in this report could be obtained, but the picture would still be sketchy.

- A national survey to obtain new data on literacy programs should not be undertaken for the same reason given above. Information on persistence in a program, for example, cannot be provided in an interview or on a questionnaire if records were never kept on number of enrollees vs. number of graduates/dropouts.

- Major effort at this time should be devoted to creating an environment in which descriptive

data on program and participant characteristics would be readily available. Such an environment requires program staff with the skills needed to collect, analyze, and report on data; staff and participants willing to take part in data collection; and time and other resources. This environment is the same as the one needed to initiate/improve program evaluation efforts (cf. Alamprese, 1984). In fact, if program evaluation was a routine part of program operations, the descriptive data sought here would probably have been gathered and summarized as part of the evaluation effort.

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