

Adult Literacy in the U.S.

Carolina Lumetta

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Introduction

I learned to read at the young age of three, and I've cherished delving into literature ever since. I can hardly imagine a world bereft of my favorite literature heroes, a world with no informative book nearby to answer questions, or a world in which I could not clearly express myself in writing. Tragically, I discovered that this world exists for millions of adults in the United States today. I knew that some adults were illiterate, but I was curious as to the extent of this illiteracy issue. The results of my research shocked me.

At first, I narrowed my focus to include only homeless adults. Because I have personal connections with the local homeless shelter, I knew that people with no permanent address and often no income are at an even greater literacy disadvantage. As I prepared to tackle a mountain of research, though, I was disappointed to find that not much on my topic had been published. With increasing frustration, I ravaged databases, but the same problem prevailed. Books, articles, research papers, and journals regarding child literacy and education abounded, but adults were neglected. It was not until I expanded my focus to include all illiterate or low-literate adults that more research appeared from the database's shadows. Even with a seeming plethora of sources, a common theme in nearly each one was lamenting the fact that there is not enough research. As more questions arose in my mind, fewer answers were available. Long before I finished researching, I was convinced that several of the sources were correct in criticizing our society for not doing enough in adult literacy. The lack of information alone attests to this!

The first essay in this portfolio responds to the need for increased attention on adult illiteracy. The expository essay shows the extent of the literacy problem in the United States and presents information on what is currently being done about it. Adult basic education programs

comprise part of a solution, and the persuasive essay argues that this method is one of the most beneficial and in need of support.

Summary-Response Paper: Illiterate Americans

Carolina Lumetta

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Illiterate Americans. (1993, September 14). *New York Times*, Late Edition (East Coast) [New York, N.Y.], p. A24. Retrieved 05 October, 2017 from <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/14/opinion/illiterate-americans.html>.

Summary

In the editorial “Illiterate Americans,” the *New York Times* (1993, p. A24) reports that the American education system is lagging behind societal changes. The Education Department conducted a study which showed that about half of American adults are functionally illiterate. The study admits that society is better educated than in previous years, and many people seem to think they can get by without learning to read, but this mindset is outdated, according to *New York Times*. Due to an increased focus on diversity and equal opportunity, the job market requires higher education levels in addition to proficiency in a field. According to the article (1993, p. A24), “As a nation, we are still shedding the durable assumption that a literate elite would make the decisions for a less educated majority.” *The Times* reveals a trend that shows that educated people don’t rely on federal assistance, they make enough money to live in the suburbs, and most enjoy decent job security. Conversely, illiterate adults struggle to maintain their place in the workforce when they can’t read schedules or pay stubs. If adults can’t read, they will be uninformed regarding social issues and will also be unable to employ critical thinking and act accordingly. The *New York Times* (1993) concludes by commenting that the U.S. education system is woefully underprepared and must be revitalized if the country is to obtain social equality.

Response

Even twenty years ago, people noticed that the education system needed renewal for the American dream to continue. In the information age, electronics and technology require more college-educated professionals, which leaves the illiterate on the fringes of society. Some may be able to hold down a job, but it is difficult to even find one if a person cannot read a 'Help Wanted' poster. The article also brought up a good point that the move of the middle class to suburban areas left the urban populations poorer and more isolated. Research showed that children from low-income families struggle to procure a good education because inner-city school funding has been severely depleted. This can create a catastrophic chain: children don't learn to read, they grow up and might find a low-paying job, their children don't learn to read (due to the deteriorating conditions and the fact that they cannot receive parental assistance), and the problem is perpetuated.

The author(s) of this article may have been well-informed, but the piece itself lacks clarity. It begins with a startling statistic, segues into a mild approach claiming that the situation of illiteracy is exaggerated, and then somehow switches to a call for action on the part of American schools. These sudden changes obscure the main point. The editorial concludes with a bleak warning that illiterate people will have no place in the modern workforce, and it would be prudent to heed the warning regardless of the style in which it was offered.

Another problem with this source is a lack of depth. Although the writers make valid points, they fail to provide sufficient supportive data. The article doesn't explain the increased focus on diversity, the move of the middle class, or solid examples of the illiteracy cycle. The article also fails to provide any ideas for solutions. The facts may be right, but readers leave with more questions than answers.

The article points to a change in expectations as a cause for the focus on equality across the country, which is the perfect starting place. Change is not possible with low expectations. This applies to life in general and to education in particular, so it is important to recognize the illiterate and help them maintain their positions as working members of society. While creating measures to teach children to read and keep them in school is laudable, we must not forget about adults who need better education to obtain and keep a job, to have a home, and to be well-informed in today's world.

Expository Essay: A Nation Enslaved

Carolina Lumetta

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Frederick Douglass offered this simple truth: “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” Although the slavery of that era is now obsolete, millions of Americans are still enslaved - shackled by illiteracy. Thirty-six million adults living in the United States either cannot read, or they function at severely low literacy levels (Farrell, 2015, p. 75, Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 3, 13). This high figure points to a serious problem which is exacerbated by the fact that the literate American public is largely oblivious to it (Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 3). Experts bandy the term “literacy” around extensively, but the definition is hard to grasp. At its unadorned core, literacy is the capacity to understand the written word. Literacy surveys have presented the following definition: “the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written information to function and participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Waters & Harris, 2009, p. 251, Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 14). The low-literate and illiterate population, therefore, includes anyone who struggles due to a lack of understanding in the written word. Illiterate adults have been neglected by society and politicians. Their education could reap benefits in the workforce, in the family, and in their individual lives.

Experts often study at-risk youth, striving to improve child education and better prepare them for a successful life, but adults are neglected in this area. For centuries, America has struggled with inhabitants who function at low literacy levels. Minorities, people whose incomes are below the poverty line, a large amount of the homeless population, and even families are trapped in a cycle of low literacy. NSBA Public Education director Patte Barthe (2014) points to adults as the true victims of illiteracy. Compared to other countries, American students, both youth and adult, underperform. Barth postulates that this deficiency in education could be indicative of a cultural issue in which Americans simply don’t care and this apathy is passed

down to children. Numerous studies link parental literacy levels to that of their children (Herbers, Cutuli, Supkoff, Heistad, Chan, Hinz, & Masten, 2012, p. 372, Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 12, Waters & Harris, 2009, p. 254). If a parent cannot help their child with homework, support them in school, or even read a story, that child will be five times more likely to drop out of school. Low-literacy parents hinder their child's academic progress simply by failing to foster a learning environment at home (Chaney, 2014).

This issue needs to be addressed at its root: the adults. However, this root is a difficult one to find. Adults who can't read find a variety of coping techniques to disguise their ignorance. Some function through memorization or logical guesswork; some cheat or lie on applications (Woods, 2016). Illiterate workers look for jobs which don't require reading, and they even refuse promotion because the increased responsibility would reveal this shortcoming (Waters & Harris, 2009, p. 254). These workers are finding their jobs harder to keep due to the advent of the information age. Five million jobs remain unfulfilled because employers can't find qualified employees (Corporate Voices, 2010). The low-literacy population could step into these roles if they find the courage to do so.

Of course, this resolve would be useless if there was no way for adults to learn reading skills. In 1991, President George H.W. Bush signed the National Literacy Act, designed to enhance adult basic education. This act provided state grants, instituted Literacy Resource Centers in each state, required local governments to set aside funds for adult education, and created the National Institute for Literacy (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational & Adult Education, 2013, p. 21). However, this measure was not enough to significantly address the needs of the low-literate population. The emphasis on education persisted across presidential terms, and President Obama set the lofty goal for the country to have the highest proportion of

college graduates by 2020 (p. 29). Most recently, though, President Trump's proposed 2018 budget cuts 16% of state grants for adult education and family literacy (Adult Literacy Advocacy). ProLiteracy, a nonprofit organization committed to improving adult basic education, has called for concerned citizens to write in protest to representatives and legislators, but the low-literacy population cannot speak for themselves in this way. A 2017 literacy case study shows that the amount of funds necessary for adult basic education is not equivalent to the need. In fact, a "lack of critical data on the link between literacy programs and specific outcomes for adult learners has limited the capability of programs to articulate their relative value to their communities, funders, and legislators" (Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 5). The same study authors point out that better educated adults contribute to a more talented workforce and a more informed society. Their success relates to employment rate and income increases as well as tax contributions. Instead of costing governments excess funds in health care and federal aid, adults with higher literacy levels can alleviate those costs and contribute to the local economy (Waters & Harris, 2009, p. 252). Given these benefits, adult basic education supporters tell legislators to view funding these programs as "a solid investment in social impact" (Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017, p. 11).

Adults can halt the cycle of illiteracy and ignorance by participating in these basic education programs, and legislators can help make a national difference by financially supporting these learning opportunities. When an adult learns to read at higher levels, the numerous benefits combine to create a happier individual with a better quality of life. This individual can vote with better confidence in a person's views, access better employment opportunities, and take promotions when they come. Parents will help their children with schoolwork, and in turn, those children will have a better chance to graduate and pass along their

love of learning to the next generation. Without this perpetuation, illiterate America will continue to live enslaved. As Mr. Douglass said, only when people have equal access to knowledge and the tools to succeed can they truly be free.

References

- Barthe, P. (2014). Our real literacy problem. *American School Board Journal*, p. 46-47.
- Chaney, C. (2014). Bridging the gap: Promoting intergenerational family literacy among low-income, African American families. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(1), 29-48.
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.1.0029>.
- Corporate Voices for Working Families. (2010). *From an "ill-prepared" to a well-prepared workforce*. Washington, DC.
- Farrell, J. (2015). Literacy volunteer organizations: providing alternative education for adults. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 75-78.
- Herbers, J. E., Cutuli, J. J., Supkoff, L. M., Heistad, D., Chan, C., Hinz, E., & Masten, A. S. (2012). Early reading skills and academic achievement trajectories of students facing poverty, homelessness, and high residential mobility. *Educational Researcher*, 41(9), 366-372. doi:10.3102/0013189X12445320.
- Morgan, K., Waite, P., & Diecuch, M. (2017). *The case for investment in adult basic education*. Retrieved from: <https://proliteracy.org/Resources/Need-for-Literacy-Research>.
- Parker, J. M. (1989). Building bridges in midtown Manhattan. *Urban Education*, 24(1), 109-115.
- Adult Literacy Advocacy. (n.d.) *ProLiteracy*. Retrieved from <https://proliteracy.org/letters-for-literacy>.

Waters, L., & Harris, S. (2009). Exploration of the lived experiences of illiterate African American adults. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33(4), 250-258.

Woods, A. (2016). Homeless and illiterate: A San Franciscan's struggle. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com/homeless/article>.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2013). *An American heritage—Federal adult education: A legislative history 1964-2013*. Retrieved from http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Adult_Ed_History_Report.pdf.

Persuasive Essay: ABE Programs Can Improve Literacy and Effectively Educate Adults

Carolina Lumetta

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Although America has been gripped by a literacy crisis for decades, we have yet to see viable solutions to resolve this issue. Although many lawmakers and educators recognize this crisis, they seem fixated on addressing the educational failure in children, thus neglecting the current victims of illiteracy. ProLiteracy president Robert Wedgeworth claims this child-focused approach “ignores research and reality” and jeopardizes the positions of low-literate adults in the labor market (Eli Research Inc., 2005, para. 3). This gross neglect of adults in need of further education perpetuates the problem. Adult basic education (ABE) programs require greater national attention and better management to reach their own full potential. Rejuvenating ABEs by using and training new teachers, combining a variety of skills in the curriculum, and keeping adult learners involved will improve the economy, the workforce, and our society.

Health care industries, businesses, the military, and even jails witness billions of dollars wasted every year due to poor literacy (Eli Research, Inc., 2005). A shocking 70% of the country’s inmates function at low-literacy levels. Eli Research Inc. (2005) reports that one year of incarceration costs the country \$22,650 per person. Conversely, one year’s enrollment in an adult basic education program yields a net cost of \$583 per student. Other studies link repeated incarceration with poverty and low-literacy (Chaney, 2014, Eli Research, Inc., 2005, para. 9). Employers suffer from high turnover rates, but much of the problem could be assuaged if employees learned basic reading and writing skills necessary to reaching their full potential.

Any attempt to address the issue of adult illiteracy meets a myriad of hurdles, one of which involves recruitment. Although ABE programs are designed to meet the needs of low-income, low-literacy adults, it can be hard to target this population. Ironically, one group distributed informational flyers promoting reading and writing classes, perhaps forgetting that their desired audience would not be influenced by this method of advertising (Kozol, 1985, p.

46). Even when an adult is willing to participate, programs are often situated in inconvenient locations. The commute via bus can get expensive and procuring childcare invites a whole new host of roadblocks (Norris & Kennington, 1992, p. 3, 5).

ABE programs also lack qualified teachers who provide a welcoming learning atmosphere. Bosworth (2008) calls for a complete teardown of the current system: “The existing federal adult basic education program should be tossed out to begin anew with a more employment-focused and technology-based program” (para. 41). Other experts such as Jonathan Kozol (1985) along with Norris and Kennington (1992), while just as passionate about the issue, propose radical adjustments in facilitation and implementation instead. As it stands, adult education programs are not reaching enough people or are failing in their mission to empower learners with the written language. As of 2006, only 2.6 million of roughly 48 million low-literate or illiterate workers were enrolled in ABE programs. An even smaller number of them achieved their goals of functional literacy or GED success, and these are just the employed learners (Bosworth, 2006, para. 11). Homeless and unemployed adults in need of basic education suffer the double stigma of lacking a permanent address and the ability to read their address even if they had one (Norris & Kennington, 1992, p. 30). Some cases are extreme. Norris and Kennington (1992) relate,

“One instructor working with Spanish-speaking men, many of whom were residing under a local bridge, was asked to bring maps to the classroom. She assumed her students were referring to street maps of the immediate area. What they really wanted, however, was a map of the United States because they had absolutely no idea where they were” (p. 9).

Such stories are not common, but the fact that they are true should incite the U.S. to action.

Various experts and educators have presented solutions to the aforementioned problems. A better way to find and invite learners is to mobilize volunteers who walk to the low-literacy neighborhoods, talk with families, and inform them about available classes (Kozol, 1985, p. 104). Adult learners tend to show reluctance in class settings, which presents another dilemma for instructors. Past experiences inculcated suspicion towards school, so instructors struggle to engage adults. A solution to this would be to allow them a role in creating the curriculum. This radical change would be unthinkable in a public-school setting, but it easily implementable in ABE programs. Adults in these situations have already lost some of their self-respect and confidence. “Asking learners what they want [and giving choices in some small ways] represents the return of at least a modicum of control” (Norris & Kennington, 1992, p. 32, 58). Once adult learners feel included and valued, the remaining hurdles dwindle.

In his book *Illiterate America*, Jonathan Kozol (1985) proposes using untapped resources such as students and retirees to fill the gap of unqualified teachers. Current students in either high school or college are often good teachers because they can empathize well with other students. Their youthful eagerness is another asset: “Dozens of conversations with young people in the past few years convince me that a reservoir of pent-up energy exists throughout the university and teenage population” (p. 110). Most young students possess the added benefit of not being constrained by heavy family and work duties, so they can dedicate more of that energy to improving the education of others. Retirees likewise have more time because they have already graduated from their family and job commitments. Several older individuals, according to Kozol (1985), are more than willing to offer their decades of experience to this task, and he deems it foolish to ignore their offer. Kozol (1985) writes that even more helpers are right on the

illiterate community's doorsteps. Literate neighbors offer a helpful perspective because they can see exactly what struggles their low-literate counterparts face (p. 114).

Kozol (1985) maintains that Americans have been "sedated" by the government into thinking that great plans are being implemented and that adult illiteracy is being solved. On the contrary, adult basic education still needs many improvements before becoming fully successful. Previous presidents have all done something to highlight education, but none of their terms have significantly assisted adult basic education (p. 51). Now President Trump's proposed budget cuts from adult education funding (Office of Management and Budget, 2017, p. 17-18), which will further exacerbate these problems.

A different solution was presented by Brian Bosworth (2008), the president of a research firm focusing on postsecondary education and economic development. He proposes that employers act as sponsors, paying the tuition for their employees, explaining that employer investment benefits the investor as well because the result is more credentialed workers who will most likely keep a job for a longer period of time. A low turnover rate compounded with better-educated employees also boost local and national economy. Bosworth (2008) insists that although such a venture is costly, it is well within an affordable range for the U.S. He encourages collaboration between the federal government and the states to promote adult education and employer investment. Section 127 of the tax code allows a tax credit for sponsoring employers, but it lacks enough incentive for a major surge of businesses willing to foot the bill. Bosworth (2008) suggests that this credit be increased to provide more incentive to employers and that the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit (LLTC) also be increased to at least 50%, thus providing better services to nontraditional, adult students. The government could also assist by providing five years of matching grants for schools which become more accessible and helpful to adult students

who maybe missed their educational opportunities the first time around. This long list of economic improvements sounds grandiose and unattainable, but Bosworth (2008) writes that these changes would have “little fiscal consequence.” As more adults receive a better education, more adults will fill the unemployment gap and contribute to the economy. The investment will be paid back by greater productivity and less spending on basic training for short-term workers.

Based on these sources, it is clear that ABE programs have many obstacles, while also struggling with a lack of support from the nation’s leaders, educators, and employers. Although several solutions have been presented, it takes awareness of the issue to implement them. By tapping into a different pool of teachers, encouraging employers to invest in their employees’ education, and ensuring that adult learners feel empowered and respected, ABE programs could significantly improve adult education. This in turn would improve our society.

References

Adult Literacy Facts. (n.d.) ProLiteracy. Retrieved from [https://proliteracy.org/](https://proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts)

Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts.

Bosworth, B. (2008). The path not studied: The crisis in adult education. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 24(4).

Eli Research, Inc. (2005). Heightened awareness needed for nation's adult literacy problems. *Report on Literacy Programs*, 17(21), 169. Retrieved from www.eliresearch.com.

Kozol, J. (1985). *Illiterate America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Norris, J. A. & Kennington, P. (1992). *Developing literacy programs for homeless adults*. Krieger Publishing Company. Florida: Malabar.

Office of Management and Budget. (2017). *America first: A budget blueprint to make America great again*. Washington, DC.

Annotated Bibliography

Carolina Lumetta

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Adult Literacy Facts. (n.d.) ProLiteracy. Retrieved from <https://proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts>.

ProLiteracy, a nonprofit adult education organization, presents several statistics regarding adult illiteracy in the United States. The authors begin by stating that being unable to read or write at high enough levels in the 21st century negatively affects every aspect of an adult's life: basic daily tasks, job readiness, equality, health, and poverty. They relate that children who grow up in functionally illiterate families are 72% more likely to function at low-literate levels as adults. Because they cannot read many important documents, the article also states that illiteracy and poverty are related. The fact that a large percentage of illiterate adults live below the poverty line attests to this correlation. ProLiteracy lists several figures showing that even employed adults struggle to earn enough because they often can't obtain promotions. This situation costs the government significant amounts of money every year in a depleting workforce and increasing crime. This statistic segues into ProLiteracy's next demographic: inmates. Seventy-five percent of the nation's incarcerated citizens either never finished high school or function at low literacy levels. Further research shows that educated adults are less likely to return to prison. All these statistics startle readers and compel them to do something, but the information does not provide deeper reasons or solutions. While ProLiteracy as an organization sponsors, creates, and promotes numerous avenues of adult education, the information presented seems too vague. Reporting the high probability of uneducated adults with a criminal record to return to prison raises questions in a reader's mind regarding the connection between crime and illiteracy that are not answered. The numbers are helpful in obtaining

a glimpse at the big picture, but the report does not go into enough detail to be used as a primary source.

Barthe, P. (2014). Our real literacy problem. *National School Boards Association / American School Board Journal*, 26, 46-47.

Barthe, the director of the NSBA Center for Public Education, forcefully writes that the problem of American illiteracy rests on adults, not children. She points out that the ignored population of illiterate adults is a larger problem than the statistic of failing high school students. Adults who did not receive a full education tested at severely low levels in national standardized tests. Barthe also relates that even younger adults who dropped out of high school tested higher than older adults who have spent years out of school.

While American possesses one of the most highly educated populations in the world, the college graduation rate is one of the lowest. Barthe postulates that the underperformance of American adults might be due to a demographic shift, especially because more immigrants have been moving to the States. She also questions the efficiency of the standardized testing system, which has been inaccurate before. Barthe concludes by calling for action from the national education system in all areas, including adult basic education. She says that to society must “ask if there is something in American culture that contributes to our collectively weak literacy as adults. If we are truly to be a nation of lifelong learners, we first need to show that it’s something we value in society as well as in our own lives.” Barthe’s experience as a director gives her an inside look at the American education system. Her heavy use of statistics is helpful in assessing literacy rates, but her argument could be stronger if she used more adult examples rather than high school numbers. Despite her strong opening which states that adults are the main

problem, she focuses extensively on high school dropouts and international comparisons. Many other factors affect adult illiteracy which were never mentioned in this piece.

Bosworth, B. (2008). The path not studied: The crisis in adult education. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 24(4).

Bosworth calls for the United States to make radical changes in strategies to address adult low literacy. He uses workplace data to show that productivity and economic growth are suffering due to a lack of qualified workers who can effectively employ critical thinking skills. Bosworth gives historical context to prove his point. The debut of baby boomers in the workforce increased the overall educational attainment, but this impact leveled off in the 1990s. Additionally, education appears to have declined, so new workers are not any more educated than their predecessors. Although the workplace is more diverse than it has been in previous decades, Bosworth relates that the current generation of employees gives no indication of improving college or workforce readiness, and he places blame on inadequate adult basic education. Bosworth calls postsecondary education “the most important predictor of personal economic success and intergenerational mobility.” While improvements to childhood education help prevent adult low literacy, the writer also claims that the government must teach current adult workers who struggle due to inadequate education. While ABE programs have seen some success, Bosworth uses national statistics to show that even this option isn’t reaching enough adult learners. The writer says that instead of relying on volunteer organizations, employers and federal grants must take charge and offer incentives for pursuing postsecondary education. Bosworth shows that his proposed changes can also be cost-effective because the government’s investment will be paid back by a growing economy due to a better

workforce. His critique of ABE programs provides a valuable differing view, and his unique ideas prompt readers to think outside the box to fix the decades-old issue of low literacy.

Cardoza, K. (Writer). (2013). *Turning the page on illiteracy: Adults go back to class* [Radio series episode]. In American graduate: Let's make it happen. NPR.

Cardoza writes investigative journalism pieces in NPR, which, in 2013, aired a series on adult education. This series exposed the difficulties low-literate adults face, the issues surrounding their continued education, and what the national response should be. In this segment, she tells the stories of Ashley and Jason, two adult students. Ashley's family and friends took advantage of her when they found out that she couldn't read. They stole money, presented inaccurate information, and belittled her for her ignorance. So Ashley started taking classes at a local nonprofit literacy center, testing into the kindergarten level. In two years, she is still reading at a low level, but she now has the confidence to continue her education. Cardoza implicates inadequate and uncaring childhood education for part of Ashley's adult literacy struggles. She writes that teachers are paid regardless of student success and that this opens the door for lackadaisical teaching. Cardoza also uses adult illiterate Jason White as an example. He used a variety of excuses to mask the fact that he couldn't read, but his coping mechanisms failed when he could not advance his career unless he took an exam. White also enrolled in adult basic education classes and is slowly making progress, Cardoza reports. Cardoza writes that these two examples are indicative of millions of illiterate or low-literate adults across the nation: people who are misused and scared to admit that they need help. These stories help researchers see what exactly is going on, and even one person's story provides more useful information.

Chaney, C. (2014). Bridging the gap: Promoting intergenerational family literacy among low-income, African American families. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(1), 29-48. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.1.0029>.

Cassandra Chaney, researcher and associate professor of Family Studies at Louisiana State University, wrote this literature review focusing on African American family literacy. The detailed report outlines literacy-related issues, the reasons African American children are far more at risk of becoming illiterate adults, and a variety of solutions for all parties involved. A self-professed “Black family scholar,” Chaney writes about the disparity between black and white students in cycles of literacy, the primary difference being that white students generally have better access and more opportunity. She uses several sources to demonstrate the link between inadequate education and incarceration. By outlining societal problems resulting from low-literacy, Chaney builds a strong base for her next several points. Focusing primarily on family literacy responsibility, she shows that it is not enough for schools to bear the brunt of educating millions of children; literacy must be fostered at home if African American children are to succeed. Chaney allows no excuses. She addresses several problems low-income, low-literacy families encounter but also writes that family members are responsible for fostering a positive literacy environment regardless of these factors. Chaney’s perspective and detailed research combine to create a well-informed piece, and her unique emphasis on minority groups and family strengths builds a cohesive paper. Educators and families can appreciate her candid tone and long list of solutions. Her obvious passion for better literacy among the African American community seeps through her words, creating a memorable work.

Chenault-Kilgore, M. (2017, September 28). Why adult literacy matters. *Home News Tribune* [East Brunswick, N.J.], p. A5.

Chenault-Kilgore wrote of the local problem in New Jersey of illiterate or low-literate adults. She interviewed experts, teachers, and adult basic education advocates, and compiled their answers to show the current problem, solutions, and necessary changes. 17% of New Jersey's adults fall into the low literacy category, and education officials are concerned that this problem is perpetuating in the next generation. Chenault-Kilgore emotionally writes that low literate parents (perhaps unintentionally) have a negative and "devastating" impact on their children. New Jersey seems to realize the problem, though, and is working to fix it. The author interviewed the chief executive officer of Literacy New Jersey, who said, "If we don't fundamentally change something in that home around the parents, we're never going to fix it. We're trying to fix one half of the problem and do nothing about the other half. If we would spend five cents for every dollar we spend on youth education on adult education then we can be a team together." The interviewed experts also agreed that financially supporting adult basic education programs can be cost-effective. Chenault-Kilgore concluded that the largest hurdles are stigmas of embarrassment and the need to persevere through difficult assessments and assignments. Because this is a more recent source, it provides beneficial information on current adult literacy efforts. It appears that not much has changed in the past decades. Not enough attention is focused on adults which results in not enough funding. It is heartening, though, to see New Jersey creating organizations to effectively identify and solve the problem. One of the weaknesses of this article, though, is that Chenault-Kilgore does not

go into detail on teaching styles for the adult programs. This information would be helpful to other educators and researchers, but it is a crucial piece missing here.

Comings, J., & Soricone, L. (2007). *Adult literacy research: Opportunities and challenges*. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

These writers performed years of hands-on, peer-reviewed research to present an accurate portrayal of adult literacy in the U.S. They analyzed the history of adult literacy, including the government's role in basic education programs, and concluded that while improvements in this area lead to immediate benefits, not enough work has been done to alleviate the illiteracy problem. The writers struggled to compile research because there was not much of it. They used some other general education research that had been previously done, but they were also disheartened by the seeming lack of scientific and research interest in adult literacy. Because of this, they call for rigorous evaluation of current adult education programs. The writers admitted, though, that research in this area is difficult due to several obstacles such as informed consent, student disabilities, lack of spaces and resources, and lack of funding. They reveal that research and funding are related, so adult literacy improvement is caught in a "cycle of constraints." Foundations don't want to fund an area that is not well-researched, and researchers can't adequately focus on an area that is not funded. The writers offer valuable recommendations and solutions, urging researchers to transform the obstacles from hindrances to opportunities.

Danforth, D. (2015). My first day in adult basic education. Retrieved from

www.idonline.org/firstperson/My_First_Day_in_Adult_Basic_Education.

Danforth writes an emotional, diary-like piece on his thoughts and feelings on the day he reentered the world of academia. Previous negative school experiences in K-12 triggered fear for him as he began an adult basic education class. Danforth vividly describes his motives to embarking on a terrifying journey for him: "I have to because I am lost in a sea of small jobs. I have to because society will not see me as someone worth investing in. I have to because there is no hope, no future. Despite the pain and feelings of uselessness, inadequacy and failure, I am here to confront my demons." Although sources such as these would not normally be cited in a research paper, this article presents a first-person look at a low-literate adult. Facts help assess the literacy problem, data reveals trends, and researchers can theoretically plan all the solutions they want, but all that information is useless if no one knows what the adult learners feel. Danforth's testimony highlights the need for sympathetic and capable teachers. He reveals the panic adult learners feel when they know that they need better education but find it hard to muster the courage to seek it. The piece is an emotional appeal but not a flippant one. It is a rare inside look which anyone interested in adult literacy should reflect upon.

Eli Research, Inc. (2005). Heightened awareness needed for nation's adult literacy problems.

Report on Literacy Programs, 17(21), 169. Retrieved from www.eliresearch.com.

Eli Research conducted studies regarding adult literacy and also interviewed ProLiteracy heads to assess the problem. According to their interviews, ProLiteracy president, Wedgeworth, protests the government's apparent child-focused educational approach. Eli Research concurs that neglect of adult illiteracy results in a negative economic impact.

Industries and governmental services report millions of dollars wasted every year due to a lack of understanding of the written word. Eli Research outlines specific examples of wasted money and contrasts these examples with ABE program costs. Their argument uses logical appeal to show that adult basic education is a minor cost worth investment compared to the current economic problems in the U.S. This financial approach is useful because many educators have good ideas but don't know the economic impact. Eli Research does not present practical solutions, instead writing that greater awareness is the first step the nation needs to take.

Farrell, J. (2015). Literacy volunteer organizations: providing alternative education for adults. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 75-78.

Jacqueline Farrell is the director of an adult basic education operation called Literacy Volunteers on the Green (LVG). In affiliation with ProLiteracy, this Connecticut-based, nonprofit organization addresses the issue of adult functional illiteracy. Farrell relates from prior research that 36 million American adults are functionally illiterate, meaning that they struggle to work and live in the 21st century due to little or no understanding of the English language. The ten-year-old program works with hundreds of volunteers and students, including non-English speakers which Farrell calls English Language Learners (ELLs). For research purposes, this report focuses primarily on the ELL group. Trained volunteers taught small, free classes to all willing adult learners. These classes were designed to accommodate work/family responsibilities and transportation constraints so that as many adults as possible could attend. Each student was assessed according to a research-based national test and then met with a tutor weekly. Farrell notes that a common misconception is that adult learners are uneducated. In the ELL group, many

already had graduate degrees, but their degrees were earned in non-English-speaking countries. Farrell relays that the LVG program has been wildly successful in improving student literacy, motivation, and self-confidence. Farrell applauds such volunteer programs and uses the LVG's success to encourage others to start new programs and create new materials for adult learners. This article is impressive and heartening. 100% reported drastic improvement and satisfaction. It is also encouraging to see Farrell's focus and concern for minority groups such as ELLs. This grassroots organization is also unique in its size. To have over 100 volunteers and 500 students shows that much needs to be done in addressing adult illiteracy. Student motivation compounded with excellent and caring teaching resulted in the organization's laudable success. Farrell supported her findings with national research, which bolsters her position considerably and inclines her audience to heed her call to action.

Herbers, J. E., Cutuli, J. J., Supkoff, L. M., Heistad, D., Chan, C., Hinz, E., & Masten, A. S.

(2012). Early reading skills and academic achievement trajectories of students facing poverty, homelessness, and high residential mobility. *Educational Researcher*, 41(9), 366-372. doi:10.3102/0013189X12445320.

Herbers et. al. spent years conducting research on low-income, homeless students, and their report reveals the educational obstacles these students struggle to overcome. One of the most severe problems the report outlines is high mobility. Homeless students especially move often – too often to become established at a school. This frequent mobility hinders their ability to continue their studies, which results in data indicating that homeless students are far more likely to drop out of school and never receive a high school diploma. Herbers and the research team show that although educational services

exist, many of the learners in this at-risk population do not know about them. To solve this, the writers suggest that these services actively seek out and engage low-income families to inform them of educational help. Families who take advantage of ABE programs and even child literacy programs find that a better literacy atmosphere exists at home and that their children are more likely to succeed in school. The writers' presentation of problems unique to low-income children (many of whom also have low-literate parents) is informative for educators. School teachers can use this information to better serve the at-risk students in their classrooms, and adult education programs can better provide for their students as well.

Kirsch, I.S., Jungeblut, A., Jenkins, L., & Kolstad, A. (2002). *Adult literacy in America: A first look at the findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey*. (3rd ed.) Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The writers for the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement lamented in 2002 that adult illiteracy wasn't being considered a national issue. Instead, society seemed to view low literacy as a personal problem, and this viewpoint was creating stigmas among adults who could not read or write well. President Bush and then-governor Clinton made the goal that every American adult would be literate by 2000, but inadequate and ineffective initiatives resulted in the death of this dream. Although the National Literacy Act of 1991 was implemented, it couldn't effectively alleviate low literacy issues because there is no universally-accepted definition of illiteracy and no accurate census numbers to identify this population or the extent of their literacy-related problems. The writers show that part of the reason for the

Act's failure was due to a lack of data. The National Literacy Survey only gathered data from 1 million responses and then extrapolated. Kirsch et. al. use more recent data to show that there are probably around ninety million adults in the illiterate to low-literate range, so this extrapolation is inexcusable. The writers also lambast the style in which the data was collected: the method demeaned low-literate adults and failed to address the complexity of the literacy problem or present possible solutions. They equate literacy to societal currency. This government report is surprisingly self-critical of past initiatives and current failures. They also write that increased awareness and better data methods would better inform researchers who could then work on solutions that would actually work.

Kozol, J. (1985). *Illiterate America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Jonathan Kozol has written extensively on the America problem of illiteracy both in adults and in children. This particular book goes in-depth on all the circumstances, issues, and history surround the apparent failure of the education system. His first couple chapters present statistics as well as practical issues illiterate people face every day. He uses interviews to show how many people at the low-literacy end of the spectrum are often taken advantage of by bill companies, scammers, and even family members. Chapter three begins his discussion on the economic side of the issue. Being unable to read affects the nation's economy, too. Filling out forms incorrectly or making mistakes costs the government billions each year. So far, my study of Kozol's book has been enlightening, especially regarding how illiterate people function in an increasingly educated world. However, some of his examples verge on a ranting tone. Some seem to be pulled from extreme and uncommon situations, and he even admits that some of his

examples might not even support his own position. This uncertainty indicates that he is trying, perhaps too hard, to appeal to his readers' emotions rather than their logic. The most helpful information so far from this book has been his first-hand experiences and interviews with the illiterate population.

Leavitt, L. L. (2011). 21st century workforce initiatives: Implications for information literacy instruction in academic libraries. *Education Libraries*, 34(2), 15-18.

Leavitt, an assistant library head at Michigan State University, writes in this journal entry that workforce initiatives must change because new technology and required skills are also changing. New information leads to a need for new skills which require specialized education. Leavitt writes that this situation makes employees with degrees much more valuable than they were in past years. Using national research, she shows that people possessing at least an associate's or bachelor's degree experience a significantly lower unemployment rate than those who have only a high school diploma. Workplace skills such as critical thinking, flexibility, and collaboration are taking the forefront now, Leavitt writes, and low-literate adults struggle to fill these positions. She affirms that "sense-making" will be the #1 skill required of workers by 2020. Concerned for the future workforce with these new demands, Leavitt points out that current college students already struggle with these and that current projects and research centers are failing to provide solutions. She offers a new voice: librarians. Leavitt, as a librarian herself, knows that this perspective is left out of the conversations to address adult education issues, but she maintains that librarians can be influential by offering resources and safe places for teaching. Very few of my other sources address this source, but Leavitt brings up a good point. Libraries are already providing multiple free services, especially to inner-city

communities, many of which are low-literate. Using librarians and their services to raise awareness and promote better adult education is an idea worth seriously considering.

Lesgold, A. (2015). Putting a focus on adult literacy. University of Pittsburgh, School of Education. *PittEd - School of Education Magazine*, 7.

The Pitt School of Education agrees with multiple other sources that adult education research is lacking, but Lesgold writes that the school aims to work towards a solution. Lesgold chaired the National Research Council committee which recently investigated adult illiteracy, and he called it “a sobering experience.” Based on the committee’s research, he lists the vital necessity of print and digital literacy. However, he found that ninety million adults lack proficiency in these areas and that sixty-two percent of high school seniors also lack the literacy skills necessary for these proficiency levels. Data also indicated that this problem manifests itself more often and more severely in African-American minorities and citizens with low-income. To address this issue locally, Lesgold and a Pittsburgh University team created an online high school for adult learners. This system allows learners control over their own education, it is affordable, and it is already seeing success in helping dropouts and low-literate adults earn degrees. Online coursework can be difficult, but if it is working for Pittsburgh, then other educators should analyze it. If this option truly is as beneficial as Lesgold promotes, then adult education programs nationwide would be wise to implement it. Obviously, all people have different learning styles, but an online school would eliminate the much of the need for classroom space, the transportation issues, and the financial concerns. Lesgold and the Pittsburgh University team used a unique idea, and they appear to be making it work.

MacGillivray, L., Ardell, A. L., & Curwen, M. S. (2010). Supporting the literacy development of children living in homeless shelters. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(5), 384–392.
doi:10.1598/RT.63.5.4.

These authors, all of whom are researchers affiliated with various universities, collaborated to study and write on the education levels of homeless children. They write that although the McKinney Act of 1987 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have made improvements in ensuring a good education for children living in homeless shelters, but the writers also postulate that these acts have not done enough. Extensive field research has shown that children living in homeless shelters fail to obtain an uninterrupted school experience. This is due to a variety of factors including frequent moves, transportation, family legal issues such as guardianship, and health. Many parents struggle to obtain and keep a job, so their children can easily play hooky from school because their mom is busy at work. The researchers interviewed from five different perspectives: a shelter director, a principal, a teacher, homeless parents, and their children as well. Each interviewee offered personal observations and ideas for solutions as well. The director noted that more emphasis needs to be laid on family bonding through literacy practices such as reading stories. The principal and the teacher both were saddened to see homeless students being bullied. They would like to see schools work to accept, understand, and better serve the needs of these at-risk students. A single mom living in a shelter recognized that learning relates to success, so she was striving to make every experience a learning one for her son. The authors were surprised by the resilience of children in these living situations. They adapt and learn quickly, needing only the motivation, support, and tools necessary to succeed in education. The authors concluded

each perspective by presenting ideas for teachers to implement. This source is one of the more informative ones I've encountered in my research. One of the authors even stayed at a homeless shelter for a time to see what really happens. Their writing style is readable and portrays their passion for this topic. Their focus on implications for educators is helpful because it provides clear ideas to use in classrooms.

Norris, J.A. & Kennington, P. (1992). *Developing literacy programs for homeless adults*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.

Norris and Kennington wrote a in-depth book on how to create and implement adult basic education programs for homeless adults. They begin by outlining several unique struggles homeless adults face and how ABEs can help alleviate many of these. The majority of the book is dedicated to showing specific examples of successful teaching and organizational methods. The authors review past attempts to teach adults and critique them. They also conducted personal field research to supplement national data. Their engaging writing style, practical tips, and well-informed ideas combine to create an invaluable guide for educators. Although some aspects might need updating since the book was written twenty-five years ago, the problems surrounding homeless adults are largely the same. The only important factor not addressed was technological literacy, which is more of a problem today than it was in 1992. Despite being slightly outdated, this source provides some of the best suggestions and information I've encountered in my research so far.

Parker, J. M. (1989). Building bridges in midtown Manhattan. *Urban Education*, 24(1), 109-115.

Parker spearheaded an adult basic education program in Manhattan, and he uses his observations and research to address the issue of adult illiteracy. His organization ran into

the problem of a lack of suitable materials for their adult students. Parker notes that most of the learners functioned at an elementary grade level and that all the books were written for that age group. He recognized that this age polarization would damage the self-confidence of the adult learners, so his organization came up with a unique solution. Instead of creating new materials for an adult age range, they coordinated with a local daycare for the adults to come and read children's books to the children. Parker relates that this system had a positive effect on both morale, motivation, and learning efficiency. The arrangement also reiterated the responsibility parents have towards creating an educational and literacy-rich home environment. Parker's rich observations and solutions provide a glimpse into the practical issues surrounding adult literacy. His incorporation of quotations from the adult learners offers a realistic perspective. One quote by a new learner appeals to the reader's emotions: "What I got to give? I can't even read." Parker uses this to segue into discussing the importance of retaining dignity while catching up with school children. His sources are varied, but his strongest argument is his own experience and observations at the learning center.

Perry, K. H., & Homan, A. (2015). "What I feel in my heart": Literacy practices of and for the self among adults with limited or no schooling. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 46(4), 422-454. doi:10.1177/1086296X14568839.

In this report, researchers Perry and Homan explore the experiences of a variety of adults in the low literacy spectrum. Although the interviewees are international rather than American citizens, their thoughts regarding reading and their motives for learning are the same cross-culturally. The researchers found that even people who cannot read or who only know how to read a little bit still find ways to engage in literacy practices. Some

write in a journal, some compose poetry, some focus on oral stories, and all use some type of literary practice for personal pleasure and fulfillment. The authors also address the negative stereotypes surrounding illiterate persons: the assumptions that someone who cannot read is stupid and useless to society. Perry and Homan uniquely focus on literacy as a social and personal practice whereas other research singles out literacy as only a workplace skill. While Perry and Homan accede that better adult literacy would improve the workplace and consequently the overall quality of living, they add that increased literacy is a personal talent worth cultivation in every individual. Some of their study subjects desired this literacy for religious, family, and equality reasons. A common theme Perry and Homan noticed was that each person wanted an escape, either a momentary one in a world of fiction or an ideological one in a world of empowerment through knowledge. Their hands-on research and personal tone throughout the paper clearly shows that even research in adult literacy can miss some major points. The writers urge readers and educators to remember that better adult literacy improves the learner's quality of life in more than just the financial way.

Rose, M. (2012). *Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education*. New York, NY: The New Press.

In this book, Mike Rose explores the lives and struggles of adult students. He reveals that many times students who do not attend college right out of high school find it hard to reenter the world of academia. He calls this population "the second-chancers." He introduces his topic by asking the rhetorical question of why going back to school (for any level of education) is so hard for nontraditional students. Since our country was predicated by a desire for a chance at independence, Rose writes that society ought to be

more supportive and willing of this largely ignored population. Rose also laments the lack of literature on this topic. Rose draws on his personal experiences and multiple interviews to make a case for the nontraditional, sometimes illiterate, student. Using these stories as well as well-supported research, he exhorts society to better serve the second-, third-, and even fourth-chancers. He also lambasts the negative stigma surrounding an adult learner, denouncing the quick assumptions that a 40-year-old male student must have served time and is now being forced to get his GED. While some students are compelled by their life experiences, this is not always the case, and Rose is quick to point out that every student has a unique story which should be told and heard. His focus on the people provides a useful perspective, and his tone conveys his heartfelt desire to see society change for the better in helping nontraditional students.

UNESCO. (2005). *EFA global monitoring report: Education for all - literacy for life*. Paris, France. Retrieved from UNESCO website:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141639e.pdf>.

Chapter five of this global report focuses on adult literacy as a right. Although there is debate on this topic, UNESCO maintains that literacy is nationally-recognized as an education right for people of all ages. Despite years of inadequate research and inaccurate data, improvements have been and continue to be made, according to the report, which looks at global studies to ascertain the viability of adult education programs. UNESCO reports that adult literacy possesses multiple benefits in social, cultural, educational, political, and economic spheres. The report laments, though, that not enough data has been collected internationally to see if adult education programs are also cost-effective. The authors write that this question of financial viability must also be addressed if such

programs are to succeed long-term. The report cites numerous studies conducted in the last fifty years, and the incorporation of this data lends credibility to their findings. However, throughout the points, the authors admit that they still need more research, more studies, and better research standards worldwide. One of the main problems they present is that the world still lacks a globally-accepted definition. Although the report focuses on global adult education, their conclusions apply to all countries, even well-developed ones such as the U.S.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2013). *An American heritage—Federal adult education: A legislative history 1964-2013*. Retrieved from http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Adult_Ed_History_Report.pdf.

In this national report, the U.S. Department of Education recognizes an adult literacy crisis, claiming that “at least 93 million adults function at low literacy levels that inhibit their ability to succeed in college and the workforce.” However, this information is cited from a 2009 source, so this number could be ambiguous. The report includes information on President Obama’s 2020 education goal: to focus on postsecondary education, career and technical education, and adult education so that the U.S. has the globally highest proportion of college graduates. This source cites higher investment numbers than Comings and Soricone (2007) did in their analysis of adult literacy. According to this report, the government in 2013 planned on increasing funding to multiple education areas, the goal being to increase the number of U.S. citizens possessing a high school diploma, an associate’s degree or certificate, and a bachelor’s degree or higher. In the 2013 budget proposal, President Obama also suggested creating a billion dollar competitive fund for CTE (career and technical education) academies. While President

Obama's goal was ambitious, this report implies that his administration took the promise seriously and strove to create better funding. The financial information is helpful in assessing funding over the years, but the department's literacy statistics use old numbers based on old data. Because data and ways to retrieve it are continually changing, the statistics should be continually updated. This discrepancy supports Comings and Soricone (2007) that not enough research has been conducted.

Waters, L., & Harris, S. (2009). Exploration of the lived experiences of illiterate African American adults. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33(4), 250-258.

This co-authored entry in *The Western Journal of Black Studies* explores the lives of various illiterate adults in the African American community and translates their findings into practical implications for adult education. Waters, a Texas school district supervisor for at-risk children, and Harris, professor and director of the Center for Doctoral Studies in Educational Leadership at Lamar University, created this literature review summarizing years of research on the condition of illiterate adults. They reveal that the problems start early in at-risk children and transfer to the next generation. In 2001, 71% of African American fourth-graders could not read at their grade level. Because research indicates that African Americans comprise a majority of school dropouts, the authors stressed the importance of continued research, evaluation, and improvement in this area of education. The authors also referred to a study on adult literacy. The study organizer interviewed eight adults, asking questions regarding cultural background, coping techniques, and reasons behind their willingness to renew their education. The answers revealed numerous flaws in the American education system including apathetic teachers. One student sadly stated, "I had the knowledge to learn, I just never had a teacher." The

authors use these failures in the education system to both implicate and motivate “the educated community” to change these circumstances that result in an illiterate adult population. This in-depth literature review compellingly presents facts which should be hard to ignore. Waters’ personal interest in this, being an African American woman and a supervisor, lends earnestness to the report’s tone. The large amount of research supports their position and compels readers to act. The incorporation of personal stories and experiences expertly makes the information act as glue, sticking in the minds of the audience, refusing to release its hold.

Woods, A. (2016). Homeless and illiterate: A San Franciscan's struggle. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com/homeless/article>.

Alden Woods, in choosing a topic for the Hearst National Writing Championship, decided to write about someone who couldn’t read his work. A 57-year-old homeless man living in San Francisco was realizing a new world opening to him as he began reading classes. Alden writes that Edward’s entire life so far has been one of periodic homelessness and little to no schooling. Edward admitted in an interview that he used to be too proud and headstrong to ask for help with reading, which he considered a waste of time. He’s spent decades covering up his illiteracy, faking and guessing where possible or completely avoiding any situation which would require him to read. Woods writes that this situation has taken a toll on Edward’s employment and his family life. He’s been estranged from his family for years, been addicted to alcohol and drugs, and always seems to be looking for a shelter to spend the night. Due to his transient lifestyle, Edward only sporadically attends classes, which workers told Woods is typical of homeless adult students. Edward happily told Woods that finally learning has rejuvenated him. "I'm back

to life," he said. "I'm living again." This story which Woods submitted for review is full of emotional appeal. This illiterate grandfather wants to be able to read to his grandchild, but that day may never come due to the incredibly slow process it's taken Edward to get to a first-grade reading level. Woods' story exposes the struggles of homeless adults to get the kind of education they never received as a child. He does not place blame, which is appropriate because adult illiteracy is often a mix of inadequate education and bad personal choices. This source is useful in gaining a perspective on how illiteracy manifests itself in a specific group: homeless adults.

Conclusion

Through this literature review, my goal was to assess the nation's adult literacy situation and explore current solutions. My research took more time than expected to finetune my focus and find credible sources. A common theme throughout was the lack of data, resources, funding, and research. Literacy is constantly evolving, so frequent research must be conducted until, in a best-case scenario, there is no longer any illiteracy or low literacy in the United States.

During this research project, I had the opportunity to teach a writing class for homeless adults at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission. This experience solidified the reports I was reading. As an instructor, I encountered many of the same problems that other researchers enlarged upon. Attendance was an issue due to a variety of reasons: unwillingness to complete assignments, being called in to work, and a lack of childcare. Various stigmas also revealed themselves. Some students pretended they understood the assignments or that they had more reading skills than they actually did. The curriculum I used focused on reading and writing for the workplace, but it also incorporated grammatical rules aimed at helping the students become better writers. This marriage of immediate practical applications and what some would consider "soft skills" engaged the adult students. As the course continued, they became more comfortable and began eagerly requesting information on writing skills not fully covered in the workbooks. As I read about various failings in teaching styles, I actively made an effort to gather the students' perspectives and make the homework both fun, informative, and relevant. Although the class was only ten weeks in duration, almost every student left with more confidence in writing. My experience, brief as it was, shows that the adult literacy problem in the U.S. is both real and local.

I agree with Kozol and countless others that more must be done for adult literacy, and the responsibility lies in the hands of both the government and the community. If energized and capable people work towards the grand goal of eliminating illiteracy, real change will drastically alter society. The economy would improve and so would personal lives. This utopia is attainable despite years of seemingly ineffective research. Another area requiring research is homeless illiterate adults who face numerous additional challenges to success. The deeper we look into society's problems, the more areas for improvement we'll find, but this introspection is vital. Without it, adult illiteracy will never be vanquished.