

Laubach Literacy Ontario

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Dear Community Based Program,

We are pleased to announce the completion of the **Factors Affecting Success Project**. The results are in, the analysis has been done, and they are available on this site and through Alphacom.

Twenty-two community based programs, representing 16 of 20 regional networking areas, participated in this ground-breaking research that spanned three years. The report covers agency profiles, student demographics and most importantly provides first of its kind research related to factors associated with success in Ontario community based literacy programs!

Some Background Information

In the summer of 2002, representatives from Laubach Literacy Ontario, Laubach Literacy of Canada, the University of Windsor, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario gathered in Windsor, Ontario to consider common province-wide interests, concerns, and issues related to community-based literacy programs. From these discussions, a research priority was identified and a direction for the project emerged.

Through 3 phases, the project focused on three questions:

1. "What are the demographic characteristics of individuals who attend community-based literacy programs in Ontario?"
2. "What are the characteristics of community-based literacy programs?"
3. "What is the relationship between student and program characteristics to outcome?"

Survey Highlights:

- Nearly half the sample of students (45%) felt they had a learning disability, but only one third of the entire sample said that they had been diagnosed with a learning disability.
- Most students said they preferred one-to-one tutoring (69%) when they entered the program. Thirty-seven percent indicated a preference for a small group format (2-5 students) and 16% indicated a preference for a large group format (6 or more students).
- The average length of time a student spent in an LBS program was 8 months.

Student Success Indicators - Highlights:

- Virtually all students, 97%, indicated that attending their program was a good use of their time.
- Almost all students reported improvement in areas pertaining to other personal and adaptive skill areas.
- Eighty-eight percent thought that their confidence in completing reading and writing tasks in daily life was higher than when they began the program.
- Eighty-two percent thought their confidence was higher with regard to reading and writing tasks in the workplace.

Program Factors Associated with Success – Highlights:

Students seemed to do better in LBS Programs if their agency had the following characteristics or program practices:

- provided some one-to-one instruction,

- had diversified sources of funding,
- was affiliated with one or more literacy organizations,
- had at least one full-time staff,
- had trained literacy practitioners,
- offered more than 11 hours of practitioner training,
- had student representation on their Board of Directors, and/or
- provided orientation to literacy issues to their Board of Directors.

Students with the following characteristics were more successful:

- were not required to attend a literacy program in order to receive monthly allowances,
- had an average of 10 years of previous schooling,
- were at a higher reading level,
- were employed, and or
- had an improved level of health

A synopsis of the recommendations:

1. The study showed “overall, program characteristics had a greater impact on student outcome than did student characteristics.” Agencies could consider conducting a self-study process to determine if current agency characteristics reflect the factors of success identified in this study.
2. The FAS project can serve as an example for future studies, highlighting key steps in conducting research, such as the importance of a literature review, funding, and sound methodology. With the distribution of this report, it is expected that others in the literacy field will identify research issues of interest and be inspired to undertake their own projects designed to advance the literacy field.
3. Participants in this project should be tracked over a longer period of time as many were excluded from the analyses examining outcome because they had not yet completed their literacy program.
4. The administration of a standardized measure of basic academic skills at intake and exit would allow for finer changes in skill level to be detected.
5. Conducting psycho-vocational assessments on a random sample of individuals with and without self-reported learning disabilities would provide a more accurate estimate of the prevalence of learning disabilities in adults attending LBS programs and, more importantly, advance our understanding of the literacy training and vocational needs of adults with learning disabilities.

An executive summary of the final report is posted below and has been sent to all community-based programs in Ontario. The full report is also posted below.

Over the next few months, LLO will host a discussion group on Alphacom to discuss and collect feedback on the full report. Although this was not a deliverable of the current project, we feel that it is important for agencies to engage in peer discussions about the findings and the potential best practices that are supported by the research. This discussion will be a public discussion titled: **LLO FAS Focus**.

A copy of “Conducting Applied Research: A Quick Guide” will be posted shortly. This guide summarizes content delivered by Dr. Joe Casey, the researcher for this project, in a workshop at the LLO conference 2005.

Those community-based programs that participated in the research have also been sent a copy of the database tool used to tabulate this research and accompanying instructional manual on CD with this mailing. This tool will allow programs to track the characteristics of the learners in their respective program as well as program characteristics. It will give programs the ability to collect data that could be analyzed to determine factors within their own program that affect learner success. This data will allow programs to determine areas of strength and weakness, giving measurable support to program changes and innovations to demonstrate continuous program improvement. This research tool is available from LLO on a cost recovery basis of \$ 15.00, and can be ordered via email at literacy@laubach-on.ca

Please note that the statements contained in this covering letter are based on LLO's interpretation of the information contained in the full report. We would encourage you to access the full report online at your own convenience.

Laubach Literacy Ontario supports its member agencies in the achievement of higher levels of literacy throughout the province.

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