

“I pledge my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance in the completion of this assignment. All work contained herein is my own. All referenced work is cited correctly.”

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How Can We Improve Literacy in West Lafayette?

During the first semester of my freshman year at Purdue, I joined a group called Purdue Pharmacy Ambassadors. I was presented an opportunity to help out at a local center called the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy (LARA). LARA focuses on helping to improve the literacy of people ages 16 years or older. This opportunity made me wonder how many people need help for a higher education.

For the inquiry paper, I knew I wanted to write about some topic that involved literacy. I thought about exploring solely adult literacy, but then I decided that literacy is important at all ages. I decided to write this paper on how we can improve literacy for all ages in West Lafayette.

I went searching for articles on Academic Search Premier and came across an article titled “How to Improve Reading Instruction” written in the *District Administration*. The article talks about how there is a need for the improvement of reading literacy in our youth today. The author inserts the fact that 26% of eighth graders in 2003 lacked basic reading skills (Mahurt, Enns 76). Within the article, Sarah Mahurt, a Purdue University professor, includes a list on how teachers can improve their class lessons and make them more helpful to students. These strategies include some things such as the following: engage the student in dialogue, assign more writing on the reading, and avoid worksheets (Mahurt, Enns 76). These specific points are gone

into more detail by the Professor Mahurt on why these strategies are important and helpful.

After seeing this list, it made me think of other possibilities to improve the literacy and literacy rates of our society.

I found this article to be credible. The authors both have degrees specializing in literacy, language, and reading. I consider both Capella University and Purdue University, where these professors work, to be reputable and accredited universities. Also, the source that published the article seems to be credible because it contains forty one volumes.

While searching for articles on more current literacy rates on EBSCOhost, an article from *Literacy Today* written by Robin Close caught my eye. This article talks about legislation and research developments in the United States and Canada. Close states that the literacy programs that have been set up to help young children in the United States are based on scientific research. It made me think that there is a quite good method to their so called madness. Close heavily mentions the *No Child Left Behind* Act started by the Bush Administration throughout the article. It also states that because of the *NCLB* legislation, literacy rates are up and the gap between races is slightly closing (Close 22). Other reading and literacy programs like *Reading First* and *Head Start* are also mentioned in the article (Close 22). I was glad to see that literacy is such an important topic in our society, and that we want to help in many ways such as these programs. However, most of the legislative programs Close talks about are for children. What about adults who need help with literacy?

In her article, Close makes a reference to a website for further inquiry about the scientific research that they are doing to jump start these programs. Seeing this website sparked my interest and made me want to know more about the research being conducted.

The article written by Robin Close is credible. She thoroughly cites sources and makes reference to any organizations she has commented about in the article. Close also includes dates to show that the information she is using is recent and credible to the topic. I think Close did an excellent job on making sure there were very few opportunities for opposition to the facts in her article.

The website I was led to by the previous article is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. I was expecting to find a document or article on the specific research that was performed to help in these programs; however, I found a site with a list of booklets created by the government that will help with childhood literacy. I followed a link to a booklet titled Helping Your Child Become A Reader by Margaret Spellings. The booklet contains a checklist on what you should be doing as a parent to ensure that your child grows up to be a reader (Spellings 35-38). The checklist is age specific and seemed very helpful.

If you click in the link for the full text version there is a quote from the First Lady Laura Bush, “As parents, the most important thing we can do is to read to our children early and often. Reading is the path to success in school and life. When children learn to love books, they learn to love learning (Spellings 7).” Including this quote seems to make the booklet more personal and credible since Laura Bush is a teacher. As for the credibility of the rest of the article, I think that the author and government did a good job. The author of Helping Your Child Become A Reader is the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. I find that to be a credible position to have when writing a booklet about literacy.

I was still thinking about how much Robin Close talks about *NCLB* in her article, and I decided to research more about it. I used Google as a search engine and found the U.S. Department of Education’s website on *No Child Left Behind*. This site includes a link titled

“How *NCLB* is making a difference in your state” so you can see the progress your state is making with this organization. I clicked on Indiana and was taken to a page on how Indiana has improved because of the funding provided by our government. Specifically, there is a paragraph that looks like an abstract of an article from the *Fort Wayne News Sentinel* on June 9, 2005. According to the U.S. Dept. of Education, this article talks about how an Indiana school, Meadowbrook, turned itself around from being on the School Improvement Status list to having its students rank above average on statewide math tests. All of the stories listed on this page are cited from Indiana newspapers. Having citations to local newspapers makes the site appear more credible.

All of the stories from the U.S. Department of Education’s *NCLB* site got me thinking about other literacy projects throughout the state funded by our government. As I was searching through newspaper articles on Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, I found a *South Bend Tribune* article by J.G. Perkins titled “Students LEAPing Ahead With This After School Program.”

In this article, Perkins talks about an after-school program funded by *NCLB* called Literacy Enrichment After-school Program, also known as LEAP. Perkins, who is a LEAP tutor in the South Bend Community School Corp., gives an in depth account about the program. He talks about some of the strategies they use like: unwinding after school by doing puzzles or reading, having a snack time before tutoring starts, and the actual tutoring part that consists of reading skills, spelling, and grammar (Perkins B5). Perkins also talks about the outcome of the students enrolled after one school year. He states that “Of the 50 students remaining, 33 reached grade level reading or higher.” (Perkins B5) Stories like this make me think that it will be possible to find a solution to the question I have posed.

Perkins seems to be a credible author because he knows first hand what goes on at the after school program because he is a tutor there. With the facts that are used throughout the article, Perkins appears to be more credible because he has done some research.

All this talk about childhood literacy took me back to the question I asked earlier: What about adults who need help with literacy? I went searching for the home page of the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy on Google. According to the website, LARA offers five different programs to adults in search of higher education: work skills development, work place literacy, English literacy, corrections education, and special needs. This site offers links to the local schools in Lafayette. I really liked that the site was actively helping people to further their education before they even stepped into the Resource Academy.

Wanting to know more about adult literacy, I searched for newspaper articles on Lexis-Nexis and discovered an article titled “Time, Money Will Improve Literacy.” This article written by Brenda Green O’Connell on December 30, 2005 from the South Bend Tribune, discusses the adult literacy problem in the U.S. today. O’Connell states facts from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. NAAL says that 14% of adults in the United States lack basic literary skills (O’Connell B5). The article includes many facts about the connection between literacy and income. It says that people with higher literacy earn a great amount more money than someone who lacks certain skills (O’Connell B5). The author seems credible because she states facts from a known organization, and she is the executive director of the Literacy Council of St. Joseph County. It is a very persuasive article and makes me want to get more involved.

This inquiry paper has helped me come closer to answering the question I posed about literacy. Through my research I have already found many ways to improve literacy; however, I do not believe I have found exactly what I am looking for. I believe the most important thing

that we can do to develop literacy skills is to get involved with the community. For paper four, I plan to focus more specifically on West Lafayette and the programs instituted here that help to improve the literacy for all ages.

Con: 8.0. Excellent inquiry and exploratory research. Good critical analysis of sources.

Str: 8.0. Excellent organization.

Des: 8.0. Very good.

Sty/G/M: 7.75 (5 errors) Very good.

Rough: 8.0.

Total: 39.75 = A

Annotated Bibliography

Close, Robin. "U.S. and Canada: Developments Over The Summer." Literacy Today 44 (2005): 22-23.

The author talks about legislation and research related to literacy. She mentions many programs that the government sponsors on literacy. This would be useful if you are looking for background information and facts.

"LARA Programs." Lafayette Adult Resource Academy 2004. 28 Mar. 2005

<<http://www.lsc.k12.in.us/laraweb/>>.

This website discusses the basics of the program, LARA. The specific page includes the programs they sponsor in order for adults to further their education and improve their literacy. This site would be helpful if you wanted to get help with your education and were inquiring about courses or classes offered by LARA.

Mahurt, Sarah, and Beverly Enns. "How To Improve Reading Instruction." District Administration 41.10 (2005): 76.

The authors include facts and background information. They also include a list of helpful ideas for teachers. This article would be helpful to teachers who are having trouble with students struggling in reading and reading application.

O'Connell, Brenda Green. "Time, Money Will Improve Literacy." South Bend Tribune 30 Dec. 2005: B5.

The author relates literacy and employment in this article. She provides important background information. This article would help if you are investigating how literacy affects employment and income.

Perkins, J.G. "Students LEAPing Ahead With This After School Program." South Bend Tribune 27 July 2005: B5.

This article discusses a specific program that helps develop better literacy skills among youth. This would be useful if you are looking into the specifics of school and government programs that focus on literacy.

Spellings, Margaret. Helping Your Child Become A Reader. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2005.

The author discusses the important steps you need to take to ensure your child has a bright future. She even includes a checklist on how to accomplish this. This booklet would be helpful to parents who have never had children before or who need advice on how to develop literacy early in childhood.

United States. Dept. of Education. NCLB Making a Difference in Indiana. Oct. 2005. 27 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/importance/difference/indiana.pdf>>.

This website lists several articles from Indiana newspapers that comment on the current literacy situation in Indiana. This site would be useful if you are searching for solutions to local problems or background information that is close to home.