

Free research paper about literacy in america

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Literacy in the United States is one of grave concern as it is a leading factor in much of the negative activities in the society. Timothy Shanahan reiterates that literacy is important to the development of the society as the ability to read and write is fundamental to full participation in American society," (Shanahan, XIII). Adults who have limited money to meet their basic needs and individuals with limited literacy capabilities find more challenges pursuing their goals in the economic and working world. Individuals who perform in the lowest literacy strata do not experience the current complexities associated with literacy. In fact, they find that there are risks as the nation's financial system and societal fabric continue to vary. Still, it is clear that a society where the majority of the citizens show limited literacy skills possess fewer resources that will suffice the goals and objectives of the society. Conversely, people face economic exploitation because they do not possess the acceptable standard of using language. Still, while a number of individuals choose to ignore the problems associated with literacy, the problem is of grave importance to the overall growth and development of the country.

Majority of the population believe that literacy is a simple question of being able to read, (Illiteracy: The Downfall of American Society," par. 1). Although a small child can complete a simple picture book it does not mean that the child accomplishes the age-appropriate levels of literacy. Similarly, an adult reads at the most elementary level is functionally illiterate. The fact is that the society expects adults to read and understand the basic material so as to function in the society. In its broadest sense, " literacy appears to live something of a dichotomous existence," (" The Evolving Definition of

Literacy,' par. 1). On the surface, literacy is a term that is used and understood " as the subject of intense academic debate that aims to attach a concrete definition to what is a complex, dynamic and often mercurial concept," (" The Evolving Definition of Literacy,' par. 1). In essence, the average person defines literacy as the ability to write and read. But, the definition is vague as literacy includes more than the ability to write of read. In the United States, the issue of literacy is controversial as the definition of literacy varies depending on the individual defining literacy. The issue of being literate or illiterate is intense as it holds significant implications on how the society educates its people.

Kirsch et al, uses the definition if literacy from the National Adult Literacy Survey to show that literacy in the modern society deviates from the traditional definitions as it now " encompasses a broad range of skills that adults use in accomplishing the many different types of literacy tasks associated with work, home, and community contexts," (Kirsch et. al, p. 2). The definition: " using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential," (as cited by Kirsch et. al, p. 2), suggests that literacy is a structured set of skills that one uses to accomplish all types of diverse tasks. Based on this perspective, complete literacy ensures that an individual is able to master and use prose literacy, quantitative literacy, and document literacy.

One of the most current drives to improve literacy stems from the ' back-to-basics movement'. The move calls on early childhood programs improve the level of literacy in grade schools in order to train students better in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The harsh reality is that the classroom can be

extremely frustrating and fearful for many learners. Therefore, many students shy away from learning or expressing their shortcomings as they fear ridicule. As a result, this fear serves as a barrier to achieving a high level of literacy in the country and encourages individuals to accept a mediocre way of life. Educators who are aware of the personal history of students will stand a better chance of helping students to achieve their personal literacy goals, and thereby improve the standard of education and living for everyone. Morris Young in his article “Sponsoring Literacy Studies” writes “literacy over the last 40 years has undergone incredible transformation,” (Morris, p. 10), yet individuals fail to embrace the technological improvements that seek to improve literacy.

In fact, Young sees literacy as a great cognitive step in human development, with specific social and cultural contexts that examines how the advent of new digital composing technologies transforms literacy practices, (Morris, p. 10). The idea that literacy studies faced transformative, foundational, and innovative changes suggests individuals in the United States have no excuse for not becoming literate. Young refers to Brandt’s views that sponsors of literacy serves as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (as cited by Young, p. 10). Through Brandt’s theoretical views, one sees that sponsors of literacy helps educators to “enable, support, teach, and model” (as cited by Young, p. 10) literacy practice and thereby see literacy as an opportunity for literacy expansion.

Interestingly, with all the innovations in literacy enhancement, recent studies

in the latter part of April, 2013, conducted by the United States Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy, revealed that thirty - two million adults in the United States cannot read, (" The U. S. Illiteracy Rate Hasn't Change in 10 Years," par. 1). The truth is that this thirty - two million represents fourteen percent of the entire population. In addition, twenty - one percent of adults in the United States read lower than a fifth grade level, and approximately nineteen percent of those who graduated from high school cannot read, (" The U. S. Illiteracy Rate Hasn't Change in 10 Years," par. 1). According to E. D. Hirsch, Jr. " to be truly literate, a person must be conversant with a specific body of knowledge known to educated people, or, more precisely, the cultural knowledge of the dominant society,"(as cited by Groggin, n. p.). But, how much of the population possess these traits? The idea that the acquisition of literacy confers momentous cognitive growth, suggests that learned thinking contrast oral or non-literate thinking. In fact, the literate individuals gain credit from their superior abilities that enables them to reason rationally, to assess evidence, and to recognize and maneuver the language of arguments.

Nonetheless, theorists on literacy sees this view as one that is antisocial as it goes against the socio-cognitive thoughts on how student read and write. In essence the acquisition of literacy in any form stems from an immersion in social context and not from dissociation from the social paradigms of literacy. The issue with literacy spans more than one's ability to read or write. In fact, it reaches towards the understanding that when one learns to read one recognizes that the writer writes to the reader and one writes so that the words can be read. The belief leads one to question the statistics

that place the United States above other countries in literacy as people based literacy on a simple act of reading and writing and not on understanding the purpose of what one reads and writes. In fact, Carnevale and Gainer writes " People continue to lack " standard" language-using habits and therefore [are] non-literate, even if they possess other forms of literacy," (Carnevale & Gainer, XXII).

In concluding, literacy in the United States concerns all educators. From a sociological standpoint, literacy impacts on the way the society grows. Technology now changes the way one lives in this industrialized world. In fact, the civic, economic, and social success of the society depends on the level of literacy that one achieves in life. Although demands for literacy continue to grow, social and economic factors continue to prevent many individuals from attaining the highest demand for a literate society. The reality is that many Americans are unable to read well enough to access full advantage of the benefits that society offers and contribute to the overall sustenance of the of the society. Individuals not fully literate get less pay and less work opportunities. In addition, these individuals are less likely to provide proper health care for their families. Arguably, literacy in the United States impacts on the crime rate in the country as poverty incites harmful activities.

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