

Lexile Perspectives

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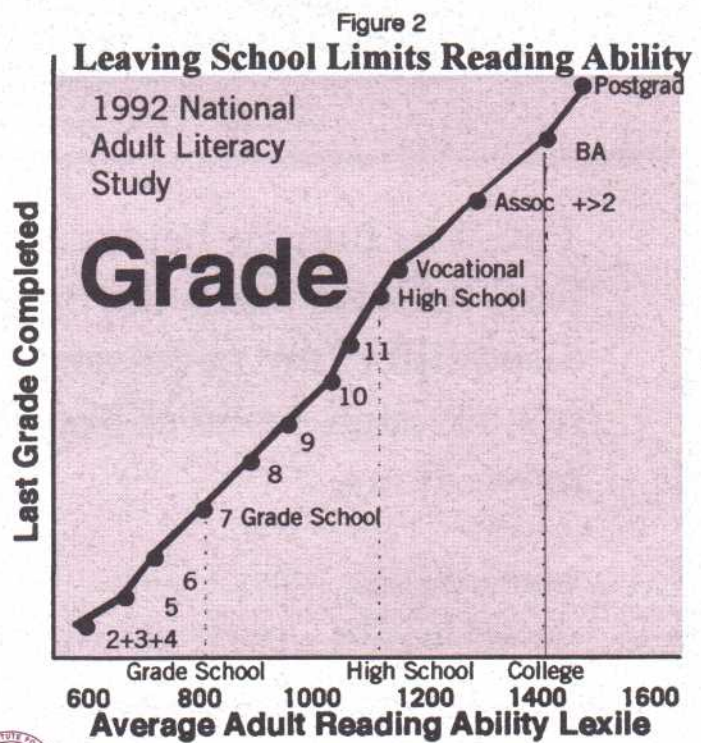
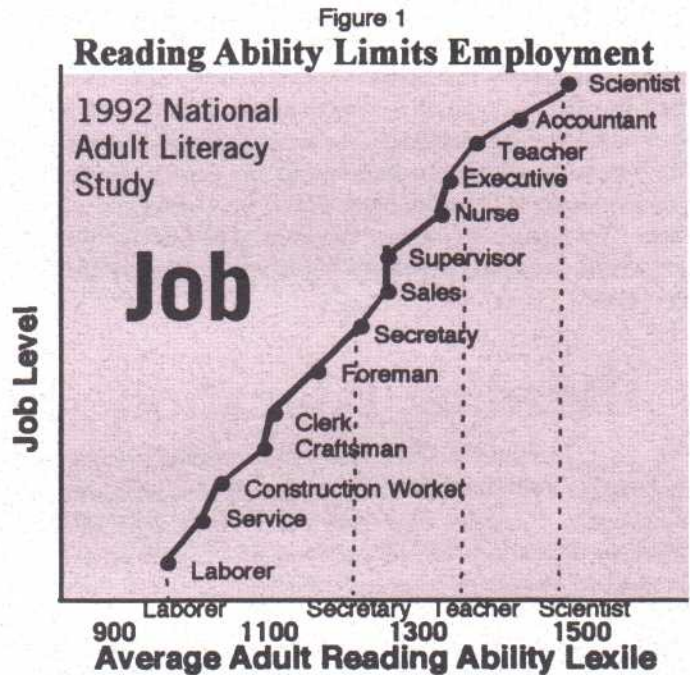
Job

Twenty-five thousand adults reported their jobs to the 1992 National Adult Literacy Study (Campbell et al., 1992). Their reading ability was also measured. **Figure 1** summarizes the relationship between reading ability and employment. In 1992, the average laborer read at 1000 Lexiles; the average secretary at 1200; the average teacher at 1400; the average scientist at 1500.

When we can see so easily how much increasing our reading ability can improve our lives, we cannot help but be motivated to improve, especially when what we must do is so obvious. If we want to be a teacher at 1400 Lexiles but read at only 1000, it is clear that we have 400 Lexiles to grow to reach our goal. If we are serious about teaching, the Lexile Framework shows us exactly what to do. As soon as we can take 1400-Lexile books off the shelf and read them easily, we know we can read well enough to be a teacher. But if we find that we are still at 1000 Lexiles, then we cannot avoid the fact that we are not ready to qualify for teaching, not yet, not until we teach ourselves how to read more difficult text.

School

Reading is learned in school. The 1992 National Adult Reading Study shows that there is a strong relationship between the last school grade completed and subsequent adult reading ability. **Figure 2** shows that, on average, we are never more literate than the day we left school. The average 7th grade graduate reads at 800 Lexiles. The average high school graduate reads at 1150 Lexiles. College graduates can reach 1400 Lexiles. For many of us, the last grade of school we successfully complete defines our reading ability for the rest of our lives. Once we leave school — and we no longer benefit from the reading challenges that school provides — we tend to stop learning. The overwhelming implication of **Figure 2** is that, if we aspire to become a truly literate society, then we must maintain schooling for everyone and help everyone stay in school as long as possible.



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Income

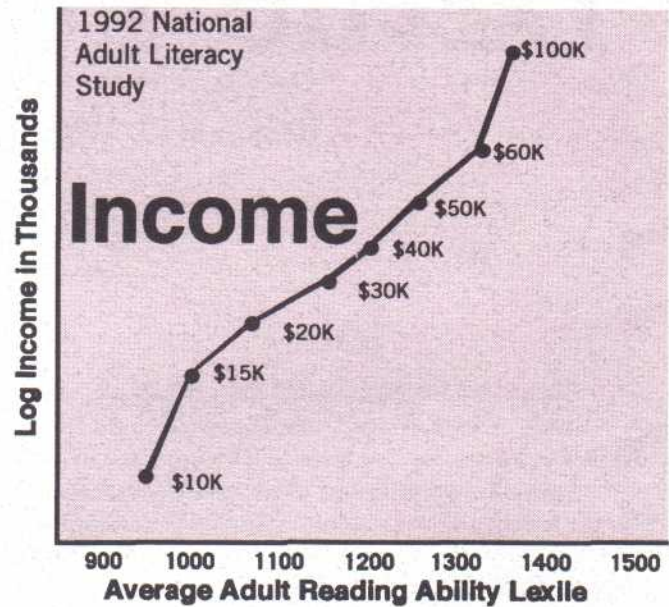
Reading ability also limits how much we can expect to earn. **Figure 3** shows the average incomes of readers in the 1992 National Adult Literacy Study at various Lexile reading abilities. From 1000 to 1300 Lexiles, each reading ability increase of 150 Lexiles doubles our earning expectations. If we read at 1000 Lexiles and want to double our potential, then we have to improve our reading to 1150 Lexiles. When students can see the financial consequences of reading ability on an easy to understand scale that connects reading ability and income, then they have a persuasive reason to spend more time improving their reading abilities. The simple relationship in **Figure 3** makes the road to riches obvious and explicit. No need to berate students, "Do your home work!" Instead, we can show them, "You want more money? You want to be a doctor? Here is the road. Learn to read better. It's up to you. But we'll help you learn."

Reading Education

Education can only succeed if we connect learning to each learner's selfish motives. We need to involve our students individually, to engage their desires and arouse their drives. When we do that, student education will drive itself. Then, all we need do is to add support and guidance. Otherwise, we will continue to deceive ourselves into running a penitentiary system that keeps some troublesome kids off the street, but only for a while.

Remember, when we know text readability, all we need do to learn how well a student reads is to ask them to read a page or two aloud. If they succeed, we can give them a harder page. If

Figure 3
Reading Ability Limits Income



not, we know their reading ability is below the readability of the text we asked them to read. No need for debate. No need for guesswork. No need for confusion or reproach. The student's status is plain to us and plain to them. We have not tricked them with a mysterious test score. All we have done is to help them see for themselves how high they can read.

Sources

Campbell, A., Kirsch, I.S., & Kolstad, A. *Assessing Literacy: The Framework for the National Adult Literacy Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1992.

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The way human beings learn best is by "discovering" first, because that's the only way to create the cognitive disequilibrium necessary for learning to take place. It's through re-inventing the wheel that the students move along.

Martin Brooks

quoted in "The Open Book", April 1992, p.2.