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English 2020-013

December 16, 2014

Illiteracy: An Overlooked Issue

Ever since the birth of society, there has been a set of standards that societies have establish in order to organize or in some cases categorize population. Such standards served as a reference to exclude or include certain people from being part of organizations or demographic groups. Also, those standards influenced the way people lived. For instance, in less advanced societies, people who possessed cattle would be considered people of honor or people of more reputation, and they may only be around people who possesses cattle, so people aspired to have cattle to they could be part of the honorable society. Nowadays, modern society has also established new standards that define the way people think and live. Those new standards are called educational standards.

In opposition to the standards established for people in the past, educational standards provide people with equal chances to be successful, and promote equal opportunities for all peoples. In today’s society, the educational standards have significantly increased due to the working demands. So great are those demands that often times basic education (obtaining a high school diploma) or even literacy is taken for granted. Literacy is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “the ability to read and write”. This definition implies that a person should be able to read and write accurately and without difficulty to be consider literate. But just like educational standards are subject of constant change, the concept of literacy has also changed. The notion of literacy has increased even more since the introduction of computers. Not only is the average person expected to know how to read, how to write, and how to perform some basic mathematical calculations, but the average person is also expected to know how to use the basic features of a computer, to type at decent speed, and to navigate the internet without the help of another person. Those expectations make people overlook the number of illiterate people in our own communities, and just assume that every person has the same academic level that society demands.

According to the CIA, 99% of all Americans (99% male, 99% females) of ages 15 and older can read and write. Based on this statistics results of the year 2003, some may say that illiteracy is not a problem for the United States and nobody should be concerned about the illiteracy rates in America, but if those statistics results are accurate, then the 1% has increased exponentially by now. Illiteracy is an issue that is silently spreading in the American communities. Although many would agree that particular service entities are taking care of this issue, Illiteracy on adults should be addressed directly by the Government. The US Government should invest more money on the improvement of Adult Education, because illiteracy damages societies, significantly hurts the economy, and restricts families from educational progress.

First of all, illiteracy is an increasing problem that damages societies (American Societies). This is can be clearly illustrated when examining the number of criminals, as well as the number of criminal incidents in a city. *New York Times’* National Education Correspondent, Sam Dillon, writes that there is an increased incidence of imprisonment among young males with no basic education or high school dropouts (A12). As stated in the article, when these young men, with no basic education, finds themselves exposed to society, they may resort to stealing, or selling illegal drugs as an easy way to make money. The majority of thieves, and criminals in general have something in common. That is, they lack education, and they sometimes do not know how to write or read.

Furthermore, the government should try to fix this problem, as a way to prevent society, and new generation to get infected with criminals. To do this, the government should consider that putting more cops in the streets or placing the criminals in jail is not sufficient. The government should strive to make something useful out of those criminal men, and corrupt youth. The government should use the opportunity of having the criminals isolated from society to educate them, so that when they come out prison, they can be an asset for their community. According to de Greef, Seagers, and Verte, one of the reasons why adult students fail to succeed is because they feel excluded from society. They believe that emphasizing social inclusion when trying to teach basic education to adult students produces gratifying results (357). In the case of the criminals, the government should use these methods of social inclusion to make the former criminals aware the opportunities that society can give them, if they try to educate themselves and fix their lives. This will make former criminals more productive for society. Thus making societies free from crime and unproductive ex-convicts that illiteracy produced.

Not only does illiteracy damages societies, but it also hurts the economy in a great way. When people are not able to read or write, they are less likely to find a job. Due to their lack of training, illiterate people may expend months without having a job, and making any money. This significantly increases the rates of poverty all over America. Writer Isserman makes this explicit when he writes, in September 2011, the United States Census Bureau reported that one out of six Americans were living below the set standards of poverty in 2010, that is a four member family had an income of $22,314. Among those families, a huge proportion were uneducated people. Specifically, 20% of the Black population, and 26 percent of the Hispanic population (84). Moreover, these people may cost the government a lot of money because the government has to offer shelter to poor people, so they can be kept out of the streets, begging, and therefore, making American cities’ streets look unattractive. People who do not have a basic education can find it hard to be able to be accepted in different jobs they may apply. This is because, many of the companies that are leading in the market today look for people with high educational standards, with the best training and capabilities, so they can be productive and be effective at what they are hired to do.

For those reasons, the government should not only try to feed the poor, it should try to provide them with learning opportunities. Adults that have not finished school will always struggle with finding a job, so the wiser thing to do is to make them participants on classes that will allow them to obtain an average academic level. In this way, they will be able to reach the educational standards necessary to get a job easily. O’Neill and Thomson analyzed some of the strategies that encourage learning among adults low or no basic education. Their research studies the process adults have to go through to go back to school, and keep up with the assignments, so that they can obtain a complete basic education. They state that it is extremely difficult for adult students to return to the student life, but they also state that those sacrifices paid off in the long term, because education open the doors of opportunities to them(162-163). Indeed, education, and basic training will allow adult students to have a wider skill set, than if they don’t educate themselves. The more people is trained and educated, the more they will be beneficial for the community, and the more productive they will be in their own financial life.

Another reason why the government should invest more money on the improvement of adult education, is because it restricts families from educational progress. When adults are illiterate, and they decide to form a family, they may encounter situations on which they are unable to answer to their children questions about certain basic topics, like math or grammar. In like manner, other parents will prefer to have their children working instead of attending high school, or even elementary school. So, as illiteracy on adults grows, the risk of illiteracy on young people increases exponentially. This could be reflected on the increasing rates of Americans who lack of reading skills. This lack of interest on improving reading skills is often presented on youngsters or children. As *New York Times’* K-12 correspondent ,Rich, states, “Fourteen states in 2012 enacted policies either mandating or strongly recommending that schools hold back students who could not read properly by third grade. Districts in Arizona and Colorado also offered summer school for struggling third-grade readers for the first time this year, then will consider whether to hold back some of them before the new school year begins.”(A12) That policy was enacted after those fourteen states identified the lack of dedication that from students to read. The lack of dedication from students to read may be because of disinterest by the student, but it also may be because parents simply promote education, or they simply are not aware of the importance of reading, as part of their children’s education.

In order to fix this problem, the government should require schools or institutions that work with young students as well as adult students to bring illiterate families together, so they can learn together. By engaging the parents in an illiterate family, educators will be able to promote education, while also promoting family unity. According to Davis and Smith, there are various methods that can help adolescent students and adult students learn more effectively. They emphasize their study on the importance of discussion as a learning method that benefits students of different ages, and motivates them to improve their skills. They stated that by implementing discussion groups in a classroom of people of different ages, they will feel more engaged on the learning of the subject they are studying, and it also will make them feel less threaten by the idea of sharing classes with people of different ages(68-69). Implementing study discussion groups for families is significantly important to spark the interest of a young student, especially if such a student is part of an illiterate family. The government should be aware of the necessity to make a parent an active participant on the learning process of his or her children.

Illiteracy delimits families from achieving educational success. Also, it extremely damages economy and it damages societies. For these reasons, The US Government should invest more money on the improvement of Adult Education. Illiterate in America should be addressed with more efforts, and without hesitations. Especially, it should be eradicated by educating families, and focusing on engaging illiterate parents. Likewise, Illiteracy should be addressed by the government in order to prevent its detrimental effects on the economy of the US and the financial status of people. Finally, the government should reduce the number of illiterate people in America, so that criminal are taken out of the streets for education and return back to the streets for social contribution. To make all of these affairs a reality, the government should invest money, and most importantly, time.

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