

Title: Locus of Control and Course Completion of Adult Basic Education Literacy Program Participants

Author: Maurice C. Taylor

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Abstract

The relationship between locus of control and course completion in an adult basic education program was investigated. Instruction was individualized; each learner was tutored by an adult volunteer. Learners were referred by social service agencies or were encouraged to participate by friends and family or through radio and television advertisements. Early in their program 62 adult learners responded to an 11-item modification of the Rotter I-E Scale. As hypothesized, adult learners who completed the literacy program were significantly more internally controlled than those learners who did not complete the program. In addition, the dropout group included a much higher proportion of learners referred by social service agencies.

In adult basic education (ABE), many learners drop out of programs designed to improve reading and writing skills. Kent (1973) described a dropout rate of approximately 60% during a six-month period. Without successful completion in a literacy program, opportunities for further skills development are limited. Since completion of programs would seem to depend on personal commitment, it is likely that locus of control is related to course completion. Rotter (1966) states that people vary in the degree to which they recognize a contingent relationship between their own behaviours (actions) and the resulting reinforcements (outcomes). Certain people (externals) generally believe that reinforcements are controlled by forces external to themselves such as fate, chance, luck, powerful others. Others (internals) tend to believe that their own behaviours are the the individual. Rotter (1966) further states that belief in locus of control is attributable to the history of reinforcement patterns experienced by an individual.

Newsom and Foxworth (1980) hypothesized that a greater percentage of internal than external subjects would complete a goal. They investigated this relationship among students in ABE classes. Subjects were enrolled in a federally sponsored retraining program and received training allowances to attend school. In contrast to the hypothesis, the proportion of internals and externals completing the course did not differ significantly. Since receipt of training allowances was conditional on attendance at school, one might speculate that this masked any relationship between completion and locus of control. Tseng (1970) hypothesized that locus of control would correlate with job proficiency, employability and training satisfaction of clients in a vocational centre. He found that in comparison to externals, internals showed significantly higher instructor ratings on job proficiency and personal quality, higher self-ratings on training satisfaction and higher need for achievement. In examining the relationship of locus of control and work relevant variables, Valecha (1972) found that white internals were in higher level occupations, made better progress on the job, had more stable work histories, worked more hours per week and had higher incomes than white externals. No such relationships were found for black subjects.

The above studies have provided some evidence of the relationship between locus of control and variables associated with job success. Support was not shown for a relationship between locus of control and course completion. It is possible that in the Newsom and Foxworth study, the completion rate was more a function of outside influences such as monetary allowances for attendance at school. It seems reasonable to expect a relationship between locus of control and course completion. Those individuals

who are inclined to associate the receipt of reinforcements as being dependent on their own actions and behaviours should more readily complete a course. Therefore it was hypothesized that adult learners who complete a literacy program are more internally controlled than those adult learners who do not complete it.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 62 adults (29 female and 33 male) enrolled in an ABE literacy program in Eastern Ontario comprised the research subjects. This was the total group admitted between September and January. All subjects volunteered to take the literacy training; they were not eligible for a federal training allowance and could not afford the community college tuition fee. Learners were referred to a one-to-one tutorial program through a well established network of social service agencies, word of mouth, and radio and television advertisements. Tutors were also volunteers. Subjects were assigned to reading and writing skill levels: beginner (decoding words), intermediate (reading to learn) and mature (refinement of skills). Ages ranged from 18 to 56. Language of instruction was English. Learners met with their tutors for a weekly three-hour session. In many instances learning sessions took place twice a week.

Measuring Instruments

A modification of Valecha's abbreviated 11-item Rotter I-E Scale was used to measure locus of control. These items were chosen based on their adult-oriented and work-related content. In contrast to Valecha's scale, the original forced choice format of Rotter's I-E Scale was used. The range of scores was from 10 to 20, with the larger scores indicating an external orientation. One filler item was included in the scale. A biographical profile was developed for each subject which included type of referral, reading level, age and progress through the course.

Procedure

The modified scale was administered to an adult learner by his or her tutor during the first two weeks of the literacy program. Data from six subjects were not obtained. Since many subjects could not read, the scale was presented orally to the learner by his or her tutor. The adult learner then indicated which of the alternatives best described his or her feelings. The tutors were trained to administer the modified I-E Scale. Programs for adult learners began on three separate occasions: October, December and January. Because of time constraints for data collection, completion of the program was defined as active participation in the program for a period of three months. It was argued that students who completed three months had shown themselves to be personally committed.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed with two independent variables: completion (yes, no) and reading level (beginner, intermediate and mature). The means and standard deviations for locus of control scores are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, those who completed were more internal than those who did not complete. While there was a tendency for beginner readers to be more external than intermediate and mature readers, these differences were not large. Data were analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance (unweighted means) with locus of control scores as the dependent variable.

As hypothesized, adult learners who completed the literacy program were significantly more internal than those who did not complete the program, $F(1,50) = 17.03$. It had been expected that those learners who were better readers would be more internally controlled. Although in the hypothesized direction these differences were not significant, $F(2,50) = 0.29$. No interaction was found between the two independent

variables, $F(2,50) = 0.78$.

Adult learners who completed the program tended to be more internal in their belief of control of reinforcements. Internally controlled individuals are described as likely to believe in their own potential to change their world. Generally speaking, in this study, learners who completed the program were able to overcome problems of transportation, weather, conflicting work schedules and the frustrations of the academic learning. Externally controlled individuals generally believe their destinies and outcomes are controlled by forces extrinsic to themselves, such as fate, chance, luck or powerful others. Therefore it is not surprising that those individuals who did not complete tended to be more external.

The 40 learners who completed the program were referred by the following methods: social service agency (15), advertisement (13) and family member or friend (12). Of the 16 learners who did not complete the program, 12 were referred by a social service agency and four learned of the program through advertisements. This greater proportion of unsuccessful agency referrals is certainly consistent with what is known of locus of control. The fact that those who do complete tend to be more internal and participate is consistent with the theory.

If it can be further demonstrated that dropouts in ABE programs, such as basic training for skill development and college preparation, have an external orientation, then counselling techniques specific to the adult learner can be designed to increase their feelings of self-efficacy. Shifting adult learners to more internal orientations in a group setting through locus of control change techniques could be conducted as part of the ABE (course content) program. During the program orientation, adult learners with external orientations could be identified and streamed into small groups to be instructed in skills that would help in changing external behaviours and attitudes towards internality.

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- Maurice C. Taylor, Ph.D. Candidate, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, The University of Toronto, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.