



Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource

Acknowledgements and Background to Development



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Learning Exchange



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There were too many students at ISSofBC, BELC and VCC to mention by name, but their input, participation and feedback were invaluable to the understanding of their learning gaps and needs.

Background to the Development of the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource

The development of the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource was informed by two main threads of research: focus groups and surveys with newcomers, teachers and administrators in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program (target clients and users); and expert information on digital literacy from the Coordinator of Computer and Drop-In Programs at the UBC's Learning Exchange program. An environmental scan of existing digital literacy programs, best practices information, curricula and materials aimed at newcomers was also conducted.

Approach to Research

The main target users of the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource are learners and teachers in the LINC program. With that in mind, a large part of research to support the Curriculum Resource centred on understanding the characteristics and digital literacy needs of LINC newcomers at different Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) English levels of ability. In total, 587 newcomers and 71 professionals in the teaching or settlement/employment field responded to research questions for this project.

Data was collected from three different LINC providers: ISSofBC, Burnaby English Language Centre (BELC) and Vancouver Community College (VCC) in the spring of 2019. Online surveys were used to gather information from:

- 498 LINC newcomers working toward Canadian Language Benchmark levels 4 to 6;
- 46 LINC Teachers;
- 19 LINC Administrators.

In addition, at ISSofBC

- 4 focus groups were conducted with the aid of first language interpreters in 11 different languages, reaching 89 LINC newcomers working toward Literacy to CLB 3 levels of English.
- 6 interviews were conducted with Employment and Settlement staff.

The surveys of LINC teachers and Administrators and interviews with Employment and Settlement staff were needed for two reasons. One was to ensure a different perspective on clients' digital literacy abilities, to counter the possibility of clients either over or underestimating their own digital skills as it was hypothesized they might. The second was to gain their professional estimate of the needs of newcomers based on practical experience and interactions. For example, LINC teachers noted that security and privacy are concepts that need to be taught, not only because many people are not aware of the ability to protect their privacy

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online but also these concepts are new for clients who come from countries lacking the freedoms enjoyed in Canada. The clients themselves would not have been able to identify their lack of knowledge of these concepts.

The environmental scan of existing resources for digital literacy for newcomers revealed some community programs that newcomers could attend (such as UBC's Learning Exchange) or software that could be accessed online, but very few that specifically targeted newcomers with English as an additional language, or were adapted for learners with low and very low levels of English. As the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource project progressed, other Canadian government-funded projects to raise the digital literacy levels of newcomers were learned to be in development, but with later completion dates than the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource.

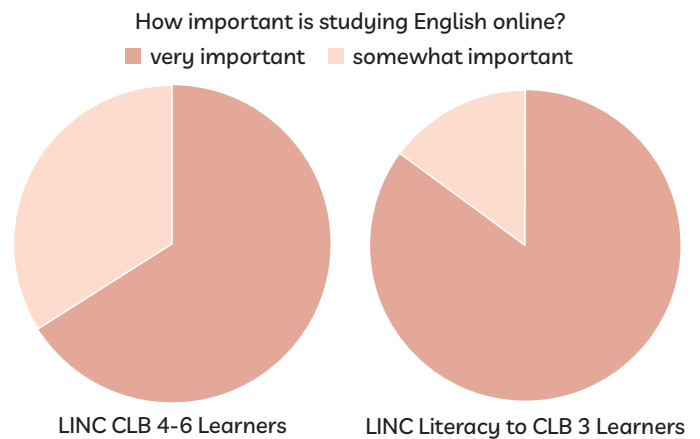
“ One surprising finding from the research was that learners assigned a much greater priority to using a computer and the internet than LINC teachers, Administrators or Employment and Settlement Counsellors thought they would. ”

Expert Experience

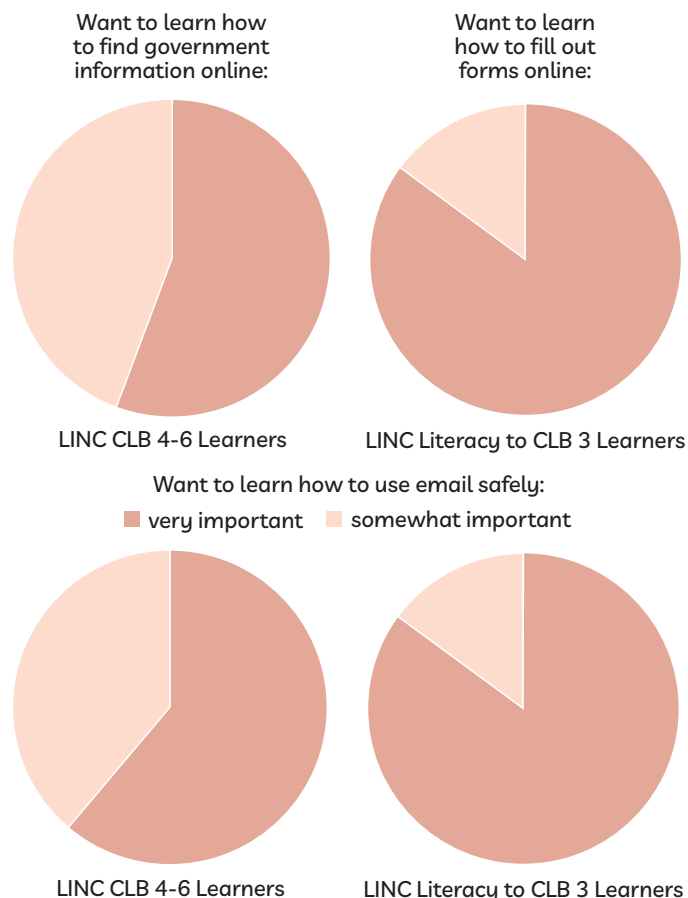
UBC's Learning Exchange program has been teaching digital skills in the Vancouver and surrounding community for 18 years and was a key source of information on the components of and successful approaches to teaching digital skills. Learning from their knowledge and experience was achieved through observation of digital literacy classes at the Learning Exchange, reviewing Learning Exchange documents, and most importantly, frequent and in-depth consultation with the Learning Exchange Coordinator of Computer and Drop-In Programs at all stages of the project. The Learning Exchange Coordinator of Computer and Drop-In Programs also reviewed drafts of Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource lessons and materials including online activities, and provided specific feedback and guidance by email and phone.

Key Findings

A large focus of the research with newcomer LINC learners was on the everyday real world tasks involving digital literacy that learners want and need to learn to do. Studying English online was stated as a key need, with 66% of CLB 4 to 6 learners and 85% of Literacy to CLB 3 learners suggesting that this was their highest priority. Tasks for settling in Canada were also a high priority. For example, 56% of CLB 4 to 6 learners wanted to learn how to find government information online while 78% of Literacy to CLB 3 learners wanted to learn to fill out forms online. Online safety was another concern, with 46% of CLB 4 to 6 LINC learners and 78% of Literacy to CLB 3 learners students wanting to learn to use email safely.



One surprising finding from the research was that learners assigned a much greater priority to using a computer and the internet than LINC teachers, Administrators or Employment and Settlement Counsellors thought they would. 80% of Literacy to CLB 3 learners regard using a computer as a high priority, while fully 100% of CLB 4 to 6 learners surveyed responded that using a computer is a very high priority. This was in contrast to the thoughts of those who teach and support these clients: only 66% of Employment and Settlement counsellors, 40% of Administrators and 28% of teachers estimated that computer literacy is a high priority for newcomers. At least one teacher was also worried that teaching digital literacy skills would negatively impact the time needed for teaching language skills.



A key take-away by the development team from these findings was that the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource would need to be very user friendly – for example by including all visuals and learner handouts – to make it easy for LINC teachers to deploy in the classroom without too much extra preparation. As well, it was considered that the digital literacy lessons would need to be very detailed to help teachers themselves understand the technical information so they would then feel comfortable to teach it, particularly to learners with very low levels of English.

Curriculum Components

From the direct research with stakeholders, UBC Learning Exchange, and newcomers themselves, important components to include in the digital literacy curriculum resource emerged:

- Since LINC is an environment where learners are grouped by CLB levels, the digital literacy curriculum resource needed to be organized by CLB levels, with smaller CLB groupings preferred as more manageable for teachers.
- To address the range of learners' skills, lessons needed to start from absolute basic digital components, such as using a mouse and navigating a webpage, and build from this foundation to more complex digital skills such as attaching documents and understanding phishing email.
- To help LINC teachers impart technical information at all language levels, including where it is most needed at Literacy and CLB 1, lessons needed to include suggested teaching language so that teachers could easily see how to simplify concepts.

- To help and encourage learners to review and practice the skills being learned in class, the lessons needed to include hands-on digital practice activities that learners could do after class, at home or at another place with available computers and internet access.
- Because a priority for LINC teachers is incorporating portfolio based language assessment (PBLA), to support and encourage teachers to use the digital literacy curriculum resource for the benefit of learners, lessons needed to offer PBLA assessment tools that incorporate the digital skills being learned.

Best Practices

Along with the initial research with stakeholders and learners noted above, two key resources that informed the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource Best Practices were the UBC Learning Exchange Best Practices document and the ATESL Best Practices for Curriculum Framework Development.

Insight was also drawn from field testing of the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource completed in the fall of 2019. Various lessons and tasks in all seven modules were field tested with 12 classes (11 teachers) from Literacy to CLB 6 at ISSofBC, BELC and VCC. Two of the classes were stand-alone, while the rest were regular LINC classes that each completed two digital literacy curriculum resource modules at the same time as working to improve their English levels. Approximately 181 students participated in the field test classes and 148 provided feedback about their experience through online surveys (CLB 4 to 6 learners) or focus groups (Literacy to CLB 3 learners). The teachers in the field test also completed an online survey about using the lessons and materials with their classes, including what was successful and what could be changed.

While the feedback from teachers and learners validated the CLB levels, the quality of materials and efficacy of the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource lessons, the project developers also used the feedback to make revisions to the resource, particularly to the suggested timing for lesson components. Both learners and teachers indicated that they wanted more time with the lessons, in order to learn, practice and review. This key point of feedback subsequently framed two of the 13 best practices given in the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource Best Practices document.

For the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource, the Best Practices document represents key guidelines for successfully incorporating digital literacy support and instruction into a service provider organization's programming. Teachers and Settlement Workers wanting to support newcomer clients might be tempted to immediately jump to the lessons for specific CLB levels, but reading the Best Practices to ensure they are reflected in programming and instruction is an essential first step that should not be missed.

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