ISSofBC

Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource

Best Practices

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Learning Exchange

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ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource Best Practices

Overview

Best Practices documents, like curricula, mean different things to different people. For the purpose of the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource Project, best practices are defined as a set of key guidelines, in this case, for incorporating digital literacy support and instruction into a service provider organization's programming.

Due to its practical nature, the main sources for this document were focus groups with target learners, interviews with stakeholders such as teachers, Program Administrators and Employment Counsellors, and field testing of lessons and tasks. An environmental scan of current digital literacy programs and resources was also conducted. Two key resources informing the Best Practices were the UBC Learning Exchange Best Practices and the ATESL Best Practices for Curriculum Framework Development.

These Best Practices are not meant to be all-encompassing, but instead are designed to offer practical suggestions for the inclusion of a digital literacy component in existing LINC classes and/or the set up and delivery of a stand-alone digital literacy course for newcomers.

Who should use this document?

The Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource was developed primarily to assist LINC teachers in addressing digital skill interference in everyday language tasks. These Best Practices will aid teachers in getting the most out of this curriculum resource. This document can also be used by settlement workers who, based on client need, organize digital literacy workshops. Administrators of newcomer programs wishing to include a digital literacy component into their service provider's offerings should also familiarize themselves with this document.

Why is it important to incorporate digital literacy into newcomer programs?

Many real world tasks that newcomers need to complete on a daily basis rely on having strong digital skills. Since newcomer programs often have access to computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones for use in classes or workshops, the opportunity for incorporating digital instruction into language instruction is ever present.

Teachers and settlement workers usually have some idea of which clients have low digital literacy levels and have a general idea of where those clients are struggling in terms of digital skills. However, those offering digital support and/or instruction may not be aware that broader digital skills, such as sending an email, can be broken down into smaller discrete skills, such as understanding commands like compose or send. The challenge for teachers and settlement workers is being

able to identify the discrete digital skills learners need to master in order to complete a particular real world task and then finding materials or resources to aid in teaching those discrete digital skills. The challenge for administrators is finding a ready-made resource that would allow staff to offer digital support and instruction to clients without having to invest heavily in materials development and training.

What we know about digital literacy for newcomers...

Digital skills need to be practical, useful and relevant.
Many newcomer learners will be fearful of learning how to use a computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone and feel that digital skills are beyond their ability or understanding. In addition, they may not see the need to learn how to use digital devices since someone else, such as a spouse or child, can perform digital tasks for them. It is important to get buy in from learners. Find out what kind of digital challenges learners have in their daily lives and what skills they need to learn in order to overcome those challenges. Show learners how mastering basic digital skills can have a positive impact on their daily lives. Learners who are excited to learn new digital skills will be more engaged and motivated to continue learning on their own.

Digital skills do not correspond to language skills.
It is possible for a newcomer learner to have strong language skills and be able to communicate well on a wide number of topics but who is not comfortable holding a mouse or does not know how to access information on the internet. Conversely, it is not unusual to find learners who are just beginning to learn English but are already digitally literate and who have no trouble using online resources to aid in their language learning.

Newcomers are not always good at assessing their own digital literacy.
Some learners will tell you that they desperately need to "learn the computer" in order to find and job and function in Canadian society; when in fact, what the student is looking for is instruction in particular software such as MS Office 365. Others will say that they know how to use online programs, when they have simply memorized a series of steps to reach the desired program but have little to no understanding of how to actually navigate websites. Relying on a self-assessment alone may not give you accurate information to plan digital skills instruction. Giving learners a simple digital task to perform and observing how the

In the following pages, there are best practices on:

- **What we know about digital literacy for newcomers**
- **What administrators need to know about digital literacy for newcomers**
- **What teachers/facilitators need to know about digital literacy for newcomers**
- **What teachers need to know if they are using this curriculum resource in a LINC class**

Administrators, teachers, and settlement workers should familiarize themselves with all of the best practices in order to create optimal conditions for client success.

learner responds to the task will help give you a better understanding of true digital skills. In addition, asking the learners specific questions about when, where, how they use computers, laptops, tablets, etc. in their daily lives will give you better insight into what type of instruction and practice is needed.

Research shows a tendency for others to overestimate learners' digital skills. Low level learners, whether they be language learners or digital skill learners, develop coping skills in which they learn things by rote. For example, a low level language learner may have developed the ability to leave a message for their teacher on a school voicemail, but that does not mean that that learner is able to answer the phone and carry on a conversation. Similarly, a learner's ability to scroll through information on their smartphone, or their ability to log onto an online language learning site, does not equate with the learner having strong digital literacy skills.

Being able to access information on a smartphone or access an online language learning site may demonstrate steps that the newcomer has learned by rote rather than showcasing skills that demonstrate true understanding of how/what they are doing. If the learner has learned to access information or sites by rote, it is unlikely the learner can transfer those steps to other tasks or applications. It is often not until learners are unsuccessful in tasks that require strong digital literacy skills that teachers realize the need for instruction and practice in digital skills.

This can be addressed by giving a simple digital task as diagnostic and observing whether learners are able to complete the task without either the teacher's or a classmate's assistance. If a student gets stuck or becomes frustrated at a specific point in the task, make note of this and refer to the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource for lessons and activities that address the area of weakness.

What administrators need to know about digital literacy for newcomers...

Not a all learners have access to computers, laptops, tablets, etc. at home. While the learner may answer "yes" to the question, "Do you have a computer in your house?", that computer may be used primary by another family member and the learner may not have access to it. School-age children are often given priority access to computers, laptops, tablets, etc. in the home in order to complete homework assignments or simply to study for classes. Introduce learners to locations where computers can be used outside of class time, such as libraries, neighbourhood houses or community centres. A field trip to these places would help alleviate anxiety on the part of the learner.

Volunteers and interpreters should be utilized. The use of volunteers is encouraged. If volunteers are also able to speak the first language of the learners, especially when working with low language level learners, this can be beneficial, since the focus of the lessons is on helping learners improve digital skills rather than learning new vocabulary, etc. The more volunteers your organization is able to recruit, the better. Field testing has shown that having one volunteer for every 4 to 8 learners is optimal; however, any volunteer assistance in the classroom is valuable.

If you are planning a stand-alone digital literacy course:

Keep class size small.
Unless your organization has the capacity to supply volunteers on a consistent basis, try to keep your group size to a maximum of 12 learners. Even in a class of 12 learners, having volunteers present to help individuals who struggle is invaluable. Larger groups benefit from having multiple volunteers present in the classroom that learners can call upon when they are struggling to keep up with the pace of instruction or when they find a particular digital skill challenging to understand.

Try to group learners by digital need and language level.
A stand-alone digital literacy course works best when most learners approach it with similar abilities and needs. If possible, set up your course for a specific CLB level range (e.g. Literacy to CLB 2, CLB 2/3, CLB 3/4, etc.). Conduct a needs assessment and/or diagnostic prior to beginning the course to determine where individuals are at in terms of digital literacy and try to group learners by digital competency.

What teachers/facilitators need to know about digital literacy for newcomers...

Give yourself enough time.
Each lesson in each module of the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource includes expected timing of instruction and activities. However, this timing does not take into account review of previously taught skills or any supplemental activities or materials you may wish to add. Field testing has shown that trying to complete a single lesson within a 3-hour time period is extremely aggressive. Depending on the language level of the learners and experience with digital devices, it is not unreasonable to double the amount of time allotted to completing a module. Lessons may also be divided into smaller sections so that more review of previously taught components can be built in.

Review and practice are essential.
This statement may seem obvious; however, field testing has shown us that teachers often feel pressure to complete certain components of a lesson within the time available. This may not allow learners the time needed to understand and internalize what they have been taught. At the beginning of the class, be sure to review what was taught in the previous class. Leave time at the end of the class to review the highlights of the current lesson. Concept check questions will help you check in with learners to see if they have understood what was taught. There needs to be ample time to practice all new skills. Since individuals need differing amounts of time to process information, this may mean that you are not able to complete the lesson, or portion of the lesson, that you had planned. Be prepared to allow as much practice time as needed without worrying about completing the lesson.

Ensure prerequisite digital skills are taught.
A needs assessment or diagnostic task can be administered to determine which broad digital skills learners need to learn (e.g. basic online skills). Each module in

the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource contains a lesson on a different broad digital skill. These lessons also reference prerequisite skills from lessons in other modules. Be sure all prerequisite skills have been mastered before teaching a new digital literacy skill. For example, the lesson on email requires that learners have mouse and navigation, keyboarding, and basic online skills before they can master composing an email.

Break down the discrete digital skills.
Broader digital skills, such as sending an email, are comprised of smaller, more discrete digital skills. It is not always necessary to teach a complete digital lesson if the discrete skill causing digital interference in the language task is identified. It is important to know where to begin. Administer the Digital Task for a particular module and CLB level from the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource as a diagnostic. Monitor the learners carefully. Note where the learners get stuck, become frustrated, or call for help. This will help identify the discrete skill in the lesson that is the starting point for digital instruction. For example, if a student is able to log into a web-based email account and read messages in their Inbox but is not able to locate the 'compose' or 'send' commands, this is where instruction would begin.

If you are using this curriculum resource in a LINC class:

Identify which learners need digital skills instruction.
Not all learners enrolled in a LINC class struggle with digital literacy. While there may some benefits to teaching a digital literacy lesson to an entire class (e.g. learners becoming familiar with the English terminology for a specific digital task, or learners practice following instructions, etc.), field testing has shown that learners who do not require digital instruction may become easily bored and frustrated. Start by administering a simple digital task as a diagnostic to determine which learners struggle with digital skills or use the Diagnostic/Needs Assessment tool included with this Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource. Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource Instructor Manual provides suggestions on how to organize digital skills instruction in a LINC class.