

2015

Program Design: The Learner Path

Jill Castek

Portland State University, jcastek@email.arizona.edu

Gloria Jacobs

Portland State University, gljacobs@pdx.edu

Kimberly D. Pendell

Portland State University, kpendell@pdx.edu

Drew Pizzolato

Portland State University

Stephen Reder

Portland State University, reders@pdx.edu

Elizabeth Withers

Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

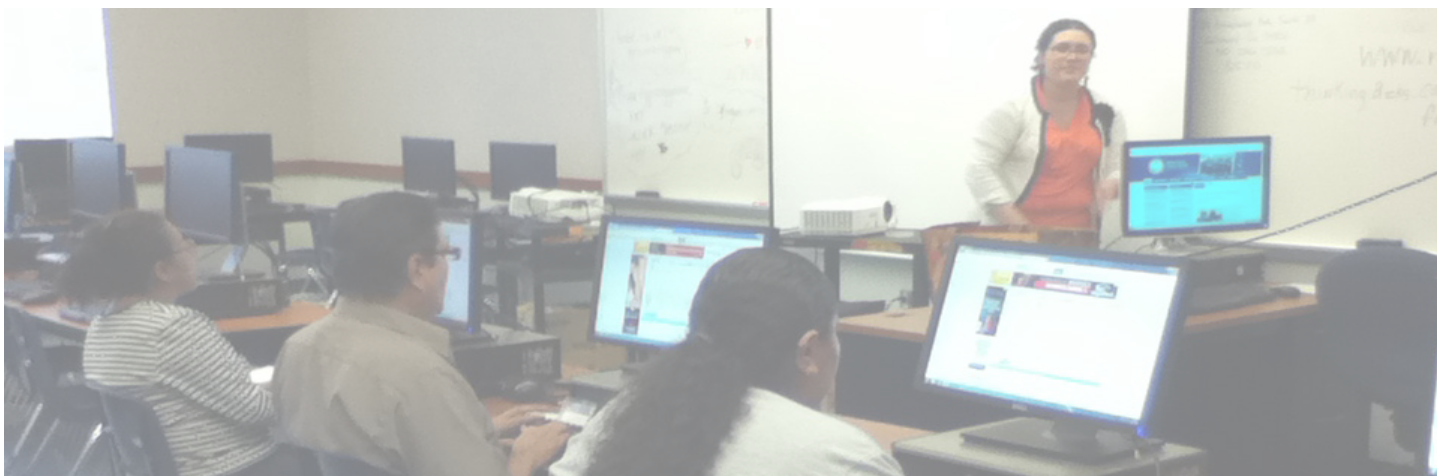
Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/dla_research_briefs

 Part of the [Applied Linguistics Commons](#), and the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Castek, J., Jacobs, G., Pendell, K., Pizzolato, D., Reder S., & Withers, E. (2015). Program Design: The Learner Path (Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief). <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/16201>

This Research Brief is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Briefs and Case Studies by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.



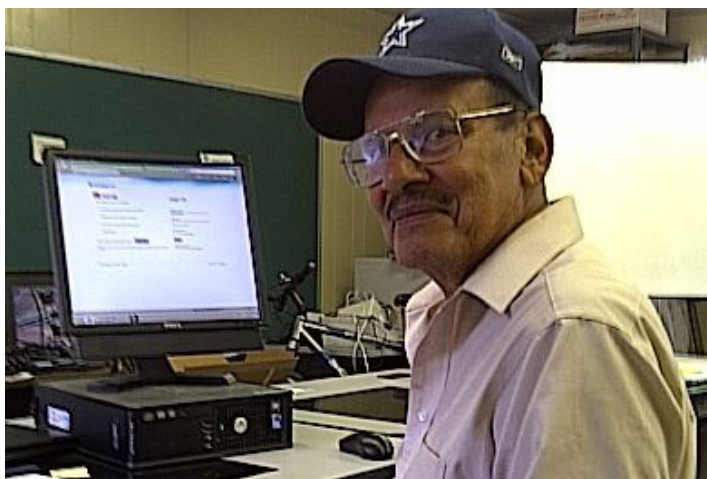
The Learner Path

Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: *What Research Tells Us about Program Design*

Overview

These findings are from an Institute of Museum and Library Services funded research project that interviewed more than 100 participants within a multi-state Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) project. The BTOP project included six lead partners who developed local networks of community organizations to provide adults with an opportunity to learn to use computers and the Internet.

While these networks created a variety of implementation strategies and ways to serve learners' needs, they shared these key features:



- *curriculum on the Learner Web, an online platform designed specifically for adult learners, which included digital literacy material in English and Spanish*
- *in-person tutor support*
- *the opportunity to work at their own pace and identify their own goals*



Literacy
Language &
Technology
Research

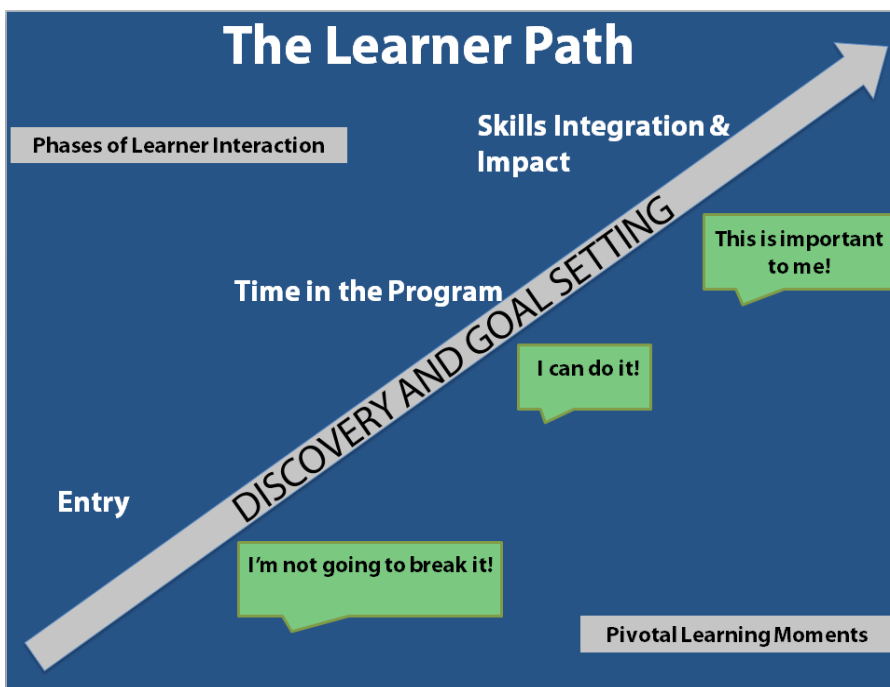


Portland State
UNIVERSITY

The Learner Path

Key Discoveries

Participants share a common learner path as they begin acquiring digital literacy. They go through a period of goal setting and discovery. Once they begin working with a tutor, successful learners tend to experience pivotal moments that set them up for success. The learners complete their journey with a growing set of skills and a new sense of independence that includes the confidence to explore on their own, the willingness to experiment as a way to learn, and expanding their knowledge of where to turn to for help when needed. Along the way, learners discover new challenges and opportunities in the digital world. How these moments unfold, however, varies according to the needs of the learner and the context within which they are learning.



- **Entering the Program:** Learners enter a digital literacy learning lab for a number of reasons. Some come to the program out of curiosity or the sense that they are missing out on something important. They may have family members or friends who encouraged them, or they may have specific reasons for learning digital skills such as wanting to be able to use email or view family pictures on Facebook. Other learners come into the program because they have to; they are out of work and need to upgrade their skills in order to get a job. Those in the corrections setting are in the program as a way to become prepared for reentering society.

Voices from the Field

A learner who had completed the program reflected on one way the digital literacy acquisition process changed her life. She said,

"I'm finding that I can handle all these buttons. Our telephone has buttons, our car has buttons, our TV has buttons, many buttons. We record programs so we can watch them when we want to. And of course the computer is just full of buttons. And I'm not afraid of them anymore. In fact, I'm more curious and try them out. What does this do? What does that do?...On the computer some buttons do two or three things, if you do it right. And I just thought I'd never be able to learn that. And I am, and that gives me confidence."



The Learner Path

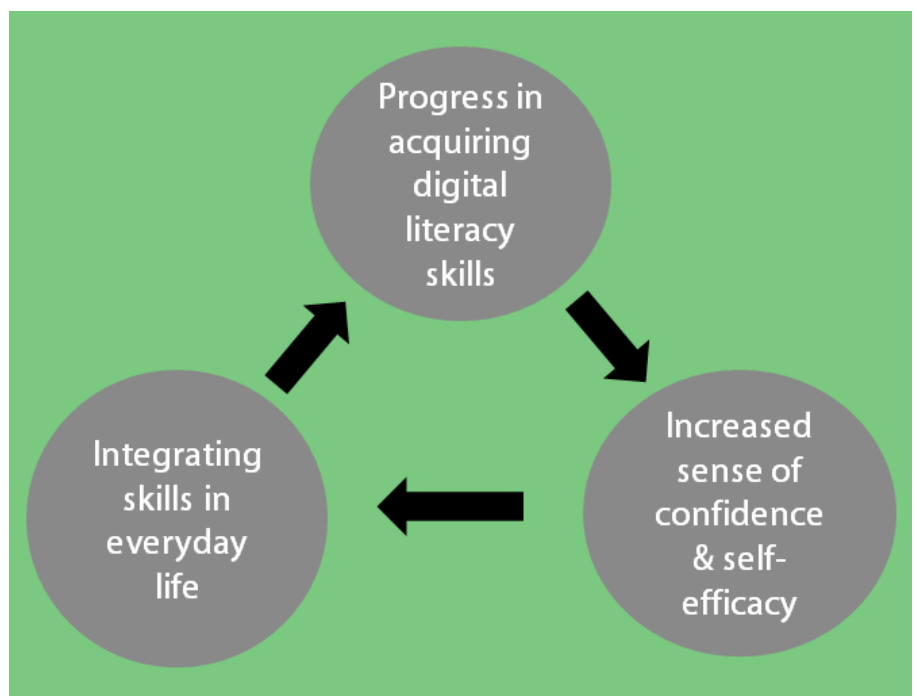
Key Discoveries

On the Ground

How the learners moved through the learner path varied according to individual learner needs and the learning context. For learners seeking employment, the pivotal moment of relevance was significant for propelling them forward in their learning. For learners in the correctional/reentry setting, the impact of the program on their growing sense of confidence and independence was especially meaningful. For many others, getting over the fear of technology was a significant hurdle. Each of these pivotal moments occurred with the support of the tutors. Whenever learners experienced roadblocks, the tutors were there to help. When the learners wanted to learn something new, the tutors were there to provide guidance. The tutors, however, encouraged independence by stepping in only when required and eventually, learners became were able to use and learn technology independently or find help on their own.

We know that learners come to our programs for a variety of reasons and with a wide variety of experience levels using technology. While it's important to assure learners that grasp of digital skills is within their reach and that these skills can have a major impact on their lives, it's even more important for learners to experience this themselves. Program designers and tutors need to find ways to foster these experiences in ways that make sense locally.

- **Discovery and Goal Setting:** Once in the program, learners go through a period of discovery and goal setting. Some learners come in with a set of digital skills they want to learn, but others “don’t know what they don’t know.” Tutors work with the learners to identify what their goals are and to introduce the learners to the online environment to discover new interests and explore new possibilities.
- **Time in the Program:** As learners progress through the program, they learn “I’m not going to break it!” (overcoming fear), “I can do it!” (confidence), and “This is important to me!” (relevance). As learners move through these moments and accomplish their goals, some begin to discover new things they are curious about and set new goals with the help of the tutors, family, friends, and other learners. At times, learners may experience roadblocks or moments of frustration. For successful learners, these roadblocks can be overcome with support from tutors, other learners, family and friends.
- **Skills Integration and Impact:** The learner’s path continues after they complete all their learning goals and end their time working with a tutor. Once outside the program, the learner continues to develop new skills, integrate those new skills into their everyday life, and experience a growing sense of independence. The learner’s life changes as the ability to use digital technology continues to open up new opportunities.

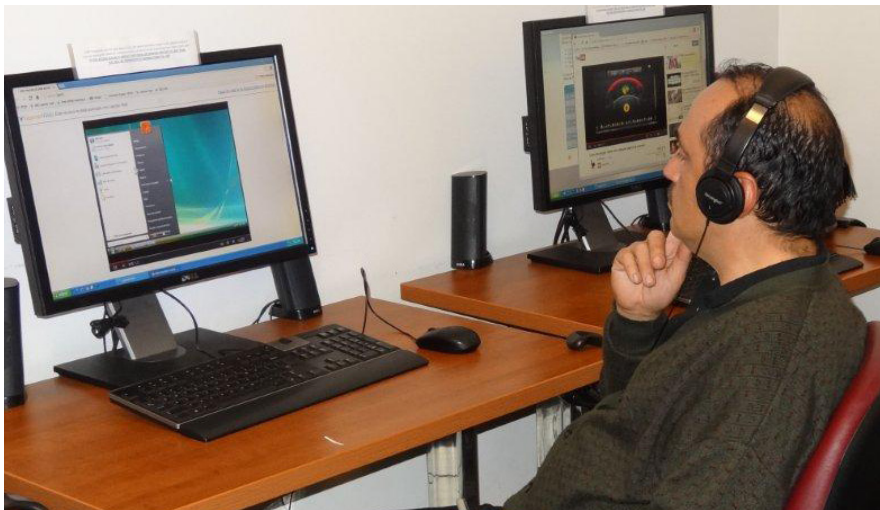


The Learner Path

What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

Because digital literacy can be gained in a relatively short amount of time, and because it does provide a learner with a positive learning experience, we now incorporate digital literacy in our Orientation to our program. Learners' digital skills are assessed and students have the opportunity to learn more about computers as well as practice keyboarding before they even begin other aspects of literacy instruction. Their early success with digital literacy becomes a foundation for greater success.

~ Adult Education Program Director



Acknowledgements & Further Information

These research efforts were informed and supported by a National Advisory Committee and a Research Applications Committee made up of professionals who support adult learners.

More information about the project, research findings, publications, and project data can be found in PDX Scholar at:
http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/digital_literacy_acquisition/

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services National Leadership Grant # LG-06-11-0340-11.



Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: What Research Tells Us about...

Language Learners

- Tutors' Perspectives
- The Role of Online Materials
- The Learner/Tutor Relationship
- Learners' Perspectives

Program Design

- Tutor-facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition
- The Learner Path
- Volunteering in a Digital Literacy Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Corrections Setting

Tutors

- Personal Qualities of Tutors
- Tutoring Strategies and Organizing Learning
- The Tutor/Learner Relationship

Learners

- Development of Self-confidence
- Measuring Success
- Impact
- Learners Who Become Tutors
- Self-paced Learning