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Program Design: Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition

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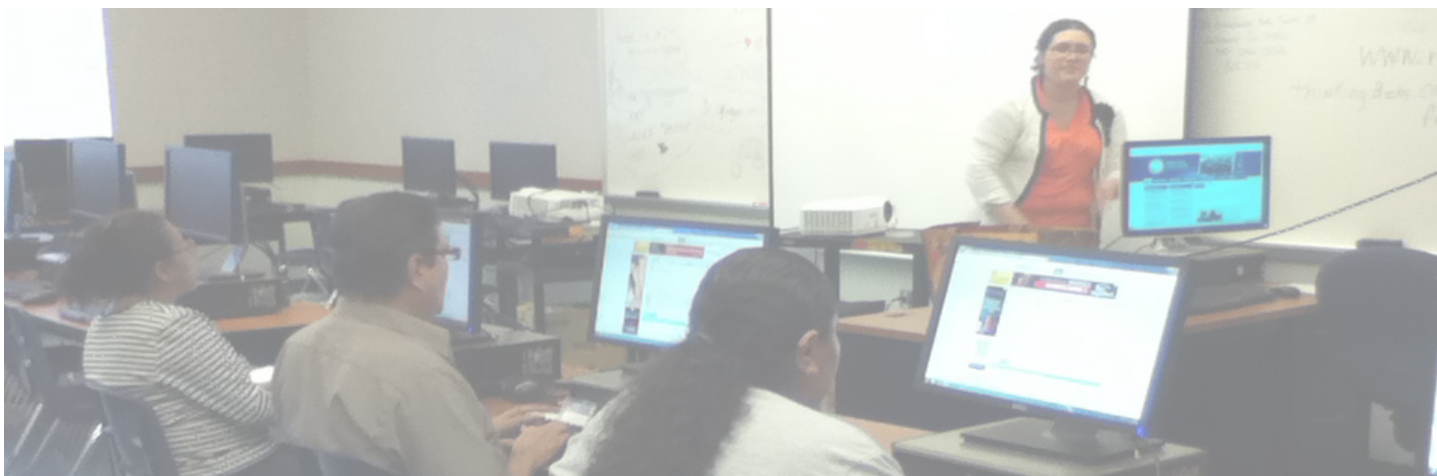
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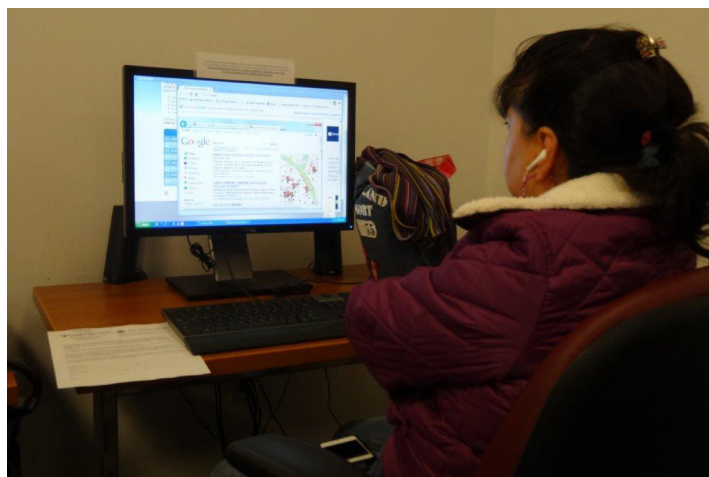
Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition

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*



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Key Discoveries

Tutor facilitation requires the tutor to think about the learner needs, what resources are provided within the structured online materials, how the lab is structured, and what skills the learner controls. A successful tutor finds a comfortable balance between the learners' needs and the resources available in order to maximize learning, all while maintaining a positive demeanor that is encouraging and supportive.

- Although learners indicated that the interpersonal skills of the tutors were most important, they appreciated tutors' knowledge of computers and the Internet. If tutors did not know an answer, they knew how to find the answer, and often used that as a teachable moment and modeled for learners how they learn.
- Tutors addressed the language, cognitive, and physical needs of learners. Tutors adjusted the computer for learners with vision needs and instructed learners to use the English or Spanish version of the structured online materials as needed. Tutors figured out ways to help learners for whom English was a second language, even when they didn't know the learner's native language.
- Tutors provided help at just the right moment. They let learners struggle just enough to allow learning to occur and to encourage independence. They were skilled at stepping in before a learning struggle escalated into frustration.
- Tutors knew how to use the structured online materials interface, as well as how to use computers and the Internet. This was especially important because some learners were confused about the difference between the online learning plans and the internet. Tutors needed to be able to explain the difference and to demonstrate which was which.

Voices from the Field

Mary was an older woman working one-on-one with a tutor. She appreciated the online material, but for her, the tutor's presence was a key part of her learning. Mary felt that without her tutor, learning the material would be so much harder. She said,

"I mean there are things on the computer, on the Learner Web, that helped me understand my phone, but like I say, this thing [the computer] doesn't answer you. It's just words coming out. [My tutor's] the one who will explain it to me and sometimes I say ah, I've seen this on the computer, and now I know what this is."

On the Ground

Tutor facilitation is the art of paying attention to learners needs given the resources available. Some of these needs are higher level, such as needing to land a job in order to pay their expenses and support a family, while some are in the moment, such as figuring out how to navigate a particular interface:

"In this program, people have such immediate needs that they want to meet. And I totally get that. So they come in and they say, 'I want you to help me upload this resume.' And we're saying, 'We can help you with that but we need to teach you Internet skills... And once you get a job, you will do well at that job because you'll have the computer skills you need.' And I have to say with some people that works really well with others it's really a tough sell."
~ Program Manager, Workforce Center

One tutor discussed how learners come in with idea that they need to learn or accomplish certain things, but based on experience, she'll know that other subskills need to be in place before the greater goal can be achieved. For example, she would know that a learner needs to be able to use a mouse and keyboard before being able to write a resume.

"I always assure them that this is kind of the stuff [basic digital literacy skills] we have to get through and it's gonna take us a couple of days, but then you're going to get to writing a resume."
~ Tutor

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What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

The model of tutors and learners learning together is one that we have tried to connect to all our programs. The teacher as facilitator rather than expert supports greater discovery, curiosity, and engagement in the learning process. For our students to be successful when they go on to college or career, they must have the capacity to be an active and engaged learner.

~ Program Director



Acknowledgements & Further Information

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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/

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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