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Learners: Learners who Become Tutors

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Learners Who Become Tutors

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

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

In almost every site, there were tutors who had started their participation in the program as learners. In many cases, tutors or coordinators recognized something special in these learners and encouraged them to become tutors. Often, the learners resisted because they felt they didn't know enough about computers or technology to teach others. However, when they reflected on their experiences, these learners who became tutors often spoke of how, as learners, they had been quick to help those nearby. It was this willingness to offer assistance rather than technical expertise that made them good candidates for becoming tutors.

Learners who became tutors were able to build confidence and skill around the use of technology in novel ways that were not accessible to them as solely learners. In addition, they continued to increase their effectiveness in helping others learn what they had learned. Learners who became tutors reported that they were motivated to tutor for a variety of reasons:

- They continued their trajectory of growth by moving into a tutor-mentor role.
- They appreciated the time that volunteer tutors contributed to help them as learners and they wanted to give back to their community, too.
- They saw the need for their contributions within their communities. For example, one learner who became a tutor noted how her experience tutoring digital literacy skills was vital to other learners like her. She shared that coming to the lab to learn combatted the isolation experienced by many seniors, especially Spanish speaking women like her.
- They were encouraged by their tutors. Learners who became tutors indicated they never thought of themselves as capable of tutoring until their tutor suggested and encouraged it. As a result, they developed new skills they did not know they had, which had the potential to open new doors of opportunity.
- They had special empathy for new-to-computer users; they naturally connected and built trust with new learners. Because they had recently gone through the learning process, they found personal fulfillment in witnessing and supporting the success of other learners.
- Tutors and the coordinators that support programs can help grow and sustain volunteer facilitated digital literacy programs by encouraging learners to become tutors.
- Program coordinators can tap into the rich personal experience and unique perspectives of their learners when recruiting new tutors. In doing so, coordinators should assure learners that they do in fact have the skills to become tutors as long as they are willing to be patient and supportive.

Voices from the Field

A learner who became a tutor shared her perspective on what made her a good tutor. She said,

"Patience and understanding... And I think empathy... I lost my job after 17 years... so I understand what they're feeling. Their emotions. A lot of them are trying the same as I am. That kind of stuff... You gotta put yourself in their position. They're frustrated and after having a job and now all of a sudden you don't have a job. And myself, I felt like was almost nothing." ~ Tutor



On the Ground

Not only does tutoring help learners acquire digital literacy skills, it also helps the tutor continue developing their skills. The tutor learns to work with different kinds of people and also refines and expands their application of digital literacy in their own lives.

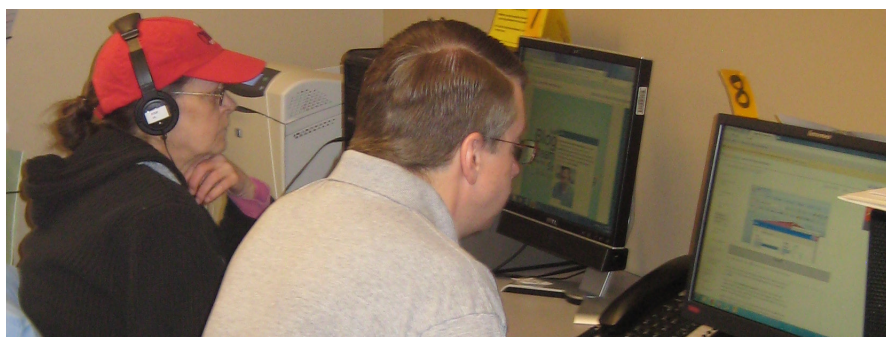
"If you have the patience to tutor, you will learn yourself. I was a learner, and keep learning. I keep coming here [to the lab] and paying attention to what the other volunteers do when they work with students. It is helping me learn, too." ~ Tutor

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What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

Peer tutoring is a tried and true part of any leadership program in the world of adult literacy and adult education. As learners share their acquired skills and knowledge with others, they are reinforcing what they've learned and internalizing new roles. It's not unusual to find a "regular" in the lab working with a new student when a coach/tutor is away or helping someone else. It's informal help, but it establishes a different role for that "regular" student. We often like to remind the burgeoning tutor to remember their first experience at LEAP and not only recognize but celebrate their progress. Peer tutoring cements this benchmark accomplishment.

~ 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