

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Research Briefs and Case Studies

Tutor-Facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition in
Hard-to-Serve Populations: A Research Project

2015

Learners: Measuring Success

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

See next page for additional authors

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](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Castek, J., Jacobs, G., Pendell, K., Pizzolato, D., Reder S., & Withers, E. (2015). Learners: Measuring Success (Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief). <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/16208>

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. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Authors

Jill Castek, Gloria Jacobs, Kimberly D. Pendell, Drew Pizzolato, Stephen Reder, and Elizabeth Withers



Measuring Success

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*



Measuring Success

Key Discoveries

- Participating learners reported having few school experiences that made them feel successful. Many of these individuals came into the digital literacy program with limited knowledge about computers, low self-confidence about learning, and anxiety that they would break the computer. They also indicated they sometimes felt embarrassed by having low digital literacy skills.
- While common measures of success for digital literacy programming revolve around various assessment tools and workforce outcomes, success for many of these individuals can be reconceived as meeting discrete life goals. For example, learners identified goals such as being able to share emails and photographs with geographically distant family, use the online bus schedule and Google maps to get from point A to B efficiently, or do comparison shopping online without needing to travel to several different stores.
- Success should not be measured solely using results of standardized tests that compare all learners on the same metric.
- Paths to digital literacy are motivated by the goals learners self-identify and set out to learn rather than by a prescribed scope and sequence with a determined end point.
- Fixed sets of curriculum materials are not sufficient to meet the digital literacy learning needs of the great variety of adult learners. Approaches that evaluate outcomes in terms of performance on learners' individual goals are better suited to explore vulnerable adult learners' success in acquiring digital literacy.

Voices from the Field

"Now I can say yeah, I can start succeeding in the society now, because before I was thinking away, and I was looking for jobs and all of that and everybody say, 'Oh, you have to go to the website.' Oh my god, that was frustrating me a lot because everything was 'website, website' that's the only word I heard. Now when they say, 'Oh you have to go to website' I can say, 'Oh yeah, can I get the address?'"

~ Middle-aged immigrant learner

On the Ground

"We have a fair number of senior citizens here that are struggling to maintain independence. The changes in technology are outpacing their knowledge. I run into folks that were highly computer literate 20 years ago, but everything has changed so much that they really don't know how to do much of anything at all with the Internet. It's really become an important part of our daily lives. For a lot of seniors that we're serving, that's a really, really important factor for them for just mainstream functioning. Confidence is what most people are lacking when they come in. That's why we're trying to cultivate patience, trying to offer a lot of praise, a lot of support, and letting them know that they're making progress. And really trying to get that confidence level up."

~ Program Coordinator and Tutor



Measuring Success

What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

In my nearly 25 years of working in adult education, I have always felt and believed that success should be measured by what I term “real world outcomes.” These can be big outcomes like passing the GED, getting a (better) job, or talking to a child’s teacher in English for the first time. Or these can be smaller, daily, but no less important outcomes such as learning how to use an online bus schedule.

~ Adult Education Coordinator



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