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

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## Language Learners: Tutors' Perspectives

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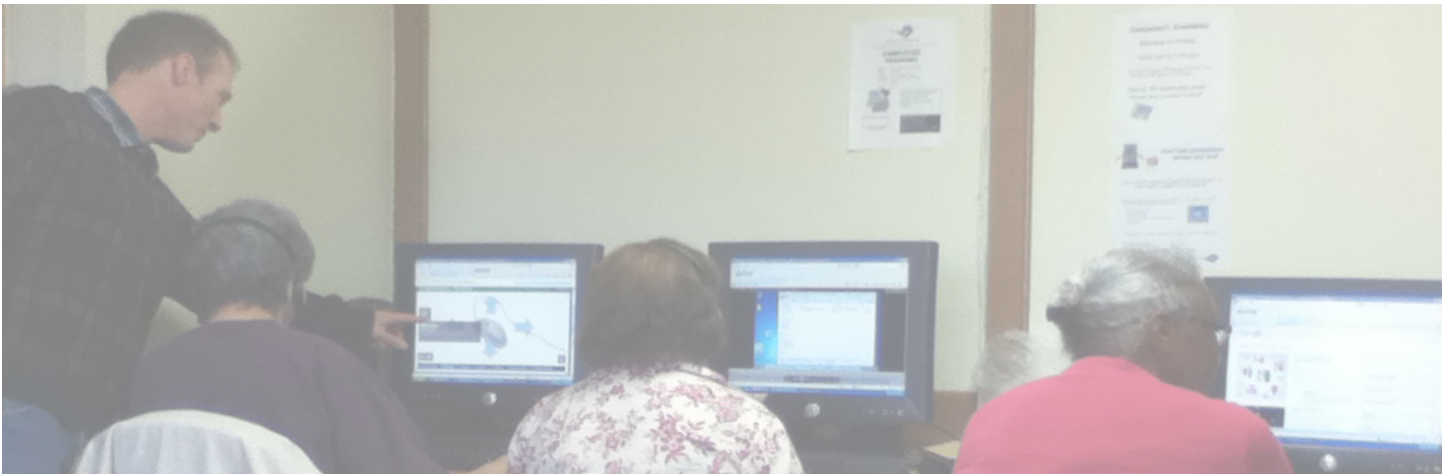
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## Tutors' Perspectives

### Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: *What Research Tells Us about Language 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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# Tutors' Perspectives

## Key Discoveries

Learners and communities are unique and have unique linguistic needs. Successful tutors figured out ways to help learners regardless of the languages the learner speaks, reads, and prefers to learn in.

- Tutors preferred that learners work in their first language because they believed it was too difficult for an individual to learn a language and computer skills at the same time. However, learners and tutors would work together to identify the language used for learning depending on the learners' comfort level with reading or listening to English or Spanish.
- Choosing the language in which to learn depended on the needs of the learner and the material being presented. For some learners, tutors would have the learner watch a video in English if they thought the resource was better, but then switch the learner back to Spanish when it came time to take a quiz. Some learners would go through the learning plans in English and work with the tutor in Spanish. The tutor would have the learner explain the content in Spanish to demonstrate understanding.
- Tutors pointed out that the Internet is dominated by English, especially in the area of technical vocabulary. They suggested that learners need to learn these words in English if they are to have the skills needed to navigate the Internet. Therefore, some tutors used English to reinforce English vocabulary. Tutors also explained vocabulary using both languages so that the learner would know the technical terms in both languages.

## Voices from the Field

A bilingual tutor working in a multilingual learning environment told us that working with language learners made her a better tutor:

*"I think because as a Latino woman I've only been around Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Mexicans for my whole entire life, and working with this program has really helped me work with a lot of people that I never thought were over here. I've worked with a lot of different backgrounds, not just Hispanic, and I like it because different people come in with different perspectives, different beliefs, and it just molds you to be a better tutor and to have different tactics in how to teach different backgrounds."*

## On the Ground

A tutor in a predominantly Spanish speaking community was flexible in how he approached the needs of English language learners. He encouraged learners to stick with one language within the program, but during his work with learners, he would use English at strategic moments so they would learn in both languages.

*"And I tell them right away, you gotta pick a language, either English or Spanish, that you're comfortable with learning. Because some of them have told me, yeah, let me have the program in English. I'm fluent in English. I'm explaining and they're a few steps in and they're like, you know what, can you change it back to Spanish? I'm like, yeah, that's not a problem. I'll switch it back over to Spanish for them, and we continue on. But I still try to explain to them in English some things, that way they're catching on in both English and Spanish... I just try to make it comfortable for them and explain as much as I can in both languages."*

~Tutor

# Tutors' Perspectives

## What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

Clearly, successful tutors will make individual judgements about when to use a resource in the learner's native language and when to use a resource in English to best advance learning goals. Finding tutors who will be willing to be flexible in this way and also providing training to reinforce this type of approach will be key to making a program succeed.

~ Program Administrator



## 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/](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