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

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Program Design: Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program

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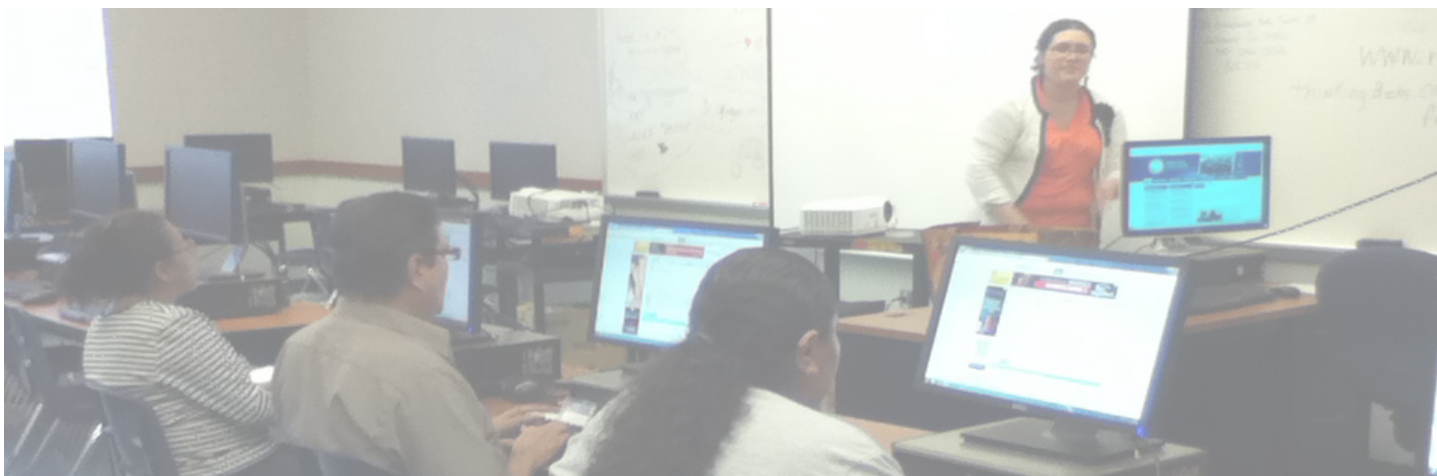
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Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program

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:



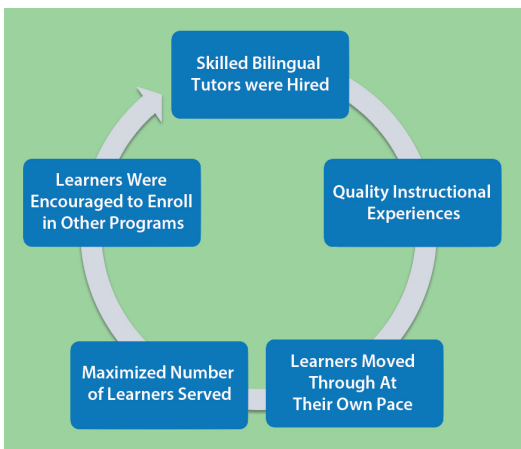
- *curriculum on the Learner Web, an online platform designed specifically for adult learners, which included digital literacy material in English and Spanish*
- *in-person tutor support*
- *the opportunity for learners to work at their own pace and identify their own goals*



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Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program

This brief examines an approach to providing digital literacy acquisition support to learners who entered a cohort group that met together on a regular schedule, but worked at their own pace through the available content over the course of a fixed time frame. The key discoveries that follow summarize one partner's time-limited program design; however, time-limited approaches were explored by other partners as well. In this example, the program director devised a time-limited design using highly skilled paid tutors as a means of serving a large number of learners without compromising learning support. Specifically, the program served primarily Spanish speaking learners who required bilingual tutors with specialized language skills who were also closely connected to the community. Enlisting less-skilled or monolingual volunteer tutors would not achieve program goals or meet learners' needs. As a result, resources were used to staff labs with paid bilingual tutors who guided the learning process and provided individualized support. Furthermore, the tutors followed the same group of learners through the duration of their learning time, which provided continuity for the learners. At the close of the allotted time, all learners received a certificate and were encouraged to take part in a graduation ceremony celebrating their accomplishments. Often, this success prompted continued participation in other classes.



As illustrated in the diagram, this program offered high-quality, self-paced, tutor-facilitated instruction, but limited the time learners could participate. Moving learners through the program within a defined time-frame made room for additional learners to participate. Time-limited programs must strike a balance between meeting the needs of learners and maximizing limited program resources.

On the Ground

"Some learners come with very specific goals in mind and they go through a couple of learning plans in digital literacy and say:

'This is it, this is all I needed.' It's not because of a lack of interest or the nature of the learning, or the instructional dynamic, it's just that they got all they needed and are able to move on to something else.

Our [time limited] program allows us to move them on to other learning opportunities more quickly, helping them see the relevance of these learning experiences to their life goals."

~ Tutor

Key Discoveries

- Self-paced, time-limited programs may encourage learners to locate materials that are of greatest relevance to them as they work within a bounded timeframe to accomplish their goals.
- Building familiarity with a common tutor and following a similar daily routine in the learning environment provides learners a level of comfort and stability in the learning process.
- Learners complete differing amounts of digital literacy content based on their incoming skills and the goals they select. Some learners come with very specific goals in mind and once those goals are met, appreciate the opportunity to move on.

Voices from the Field

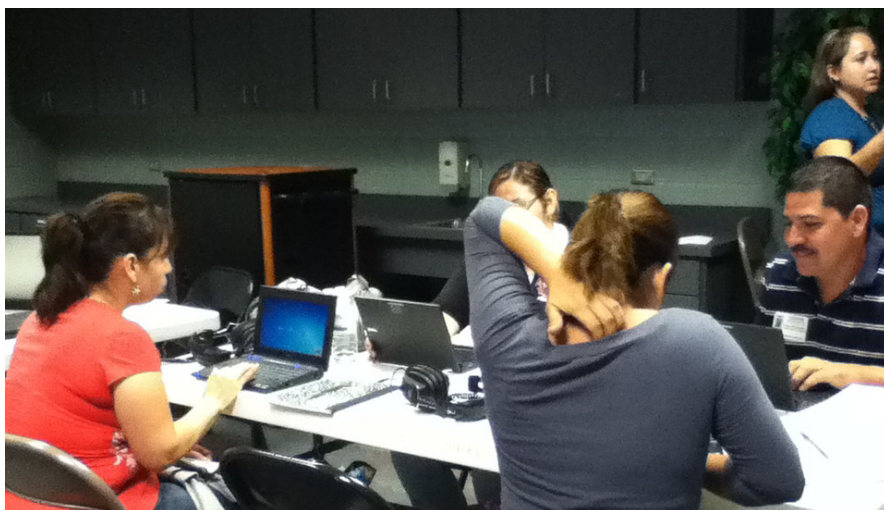
"We tell learners, you can continue with us. We tell them, come and join the digital literacy program, this is just the beginning of your pathway. As they're learning, we entice them and tell them they're not just offered one learning component in isolation, but it's all connected to bigger and better things. Continuing education is a learner's gateway to lifelong learning. Learners come back and continue bettering themselves. They better themselves, and the community is better overall, collectively." ~ Program Director

Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program

What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

“We went in with the goal of empowering our 1,750 participants with knowledge and skills, and we never lost sight of that. They wanted to learn skills that they didn’t have, and it’s amazing the large number of participants that came through the doors. None of them had any [digital literacy] skills before coming here. The volume of participants that we were able to serve made it worth it. We limited the program time, so that we could offer the opportunity to many [learners in our community].”

~ 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/

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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