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Community Literacy of Ontario

Focus on E-Learning

Computers have been used in literacy agencies for many years. Initially, computers were an administrative tool used to write letters, create flyers and do the bookkeeping. Over the years, however, many literacy practitioners began to experiment with and see how computers could be used as part of literacy instruction. With the introduction of the Internet and the growth of information and services available online, delving into e-learning became a natural extension of how computers are used in Ontario's literacy agencies.

Over the years, various organizations have been involved in creating online learning opportunities and in exploring many different and creative ways that e-learning can happen. There is so much going on, and more is happening every day. E-learning includes formal online courses that students register to take through a community college or other organization, but it also includes tutors and learners communicating via email and everything in between.

In this newsletter, Community Literacy of Ontario will share some of the exciting ways that Ontario's literacy agencies are using e-learning to help adult students at all levels gain the essential skills they need to meet their learning goals.

In the following pages, you will be able to read about Ontario's e-Channel providers and the services they offer. You will also discover how some literacy agencies are using software, websites and online learning tools to enhance literacy delivery.

However, there is much more happening across Ontario than we can possibly include here. Ask your colleagues what they are doing in terms of e-learning. Chances are they are doing something interesting!

CLO wants to know about your successes, challenges and forays into e-learning. Be sure to drop us a line at clo@bellnet.ca to share your experiences.

Focus on e-Channel

E-Channel is an initiative funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to make Literacy and Basic Skills services available online.

E-Channel services for LBS learning levels 1 to 5 are currently delivered by:

⇒ The LearningHUB: www.learninghub.ca (The Centres for Employment and Learning, Avon Maitland District School Board)
⇒ Good Learning Anywhere: www.siouxhudsonliteracy.com (Sioux Hudson Literacy Council)
⇒ CAF Ecole pour Adultes: www.cafplus.ca

Academic upgrading courses are provided via ACE Online: www.acedistancedelivery.ca

E-Channel can be used by any Ontario resident free of charge through any LBS delivery agency. Learners can choose which provider they want to register with regardless of where they live. Please note that CAF Ecole pour Adultes only offers courses in French, while both The LearningHUB and Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council provide courses in English. ACE Online offers courses in both English and French.

The LearningHUB

The LearningHUB is the e-Channel site managed by the Centres for Employment and Learning in Southwestern Ontario. You can find their site at www.learninghub.ca.

According to Heather Robinet, Manager of the Centres' Clinton site, The Learning HUB served over 1400 clients from April 2010 to September 2010! They are currently receiving up to 15 new registrations daily, and the portal that returning students use to register for new courses is extremely active. While the majority of students who register at The LearningHUB are female, they represent all age groups. In fact, 35% of registered users this year are between 40 and 59 years old. Online learning isn't just for youth! To learn more about e-Channel learners, be sure to check out some success stories at www.learninghub.ca/get_information/who_we_are/our_learners.aspx.

Learners who enrol for e-Channel courses at The LearningHUB have a number of options. They can participate in live classes, they can register for independent study, or they can blend the two approaches to best suit their learning needs. Robinet reports that interest in the independent study option has been strong and that The LearningHUB has been working hard to meet the need for this type of online learning.

Live classes begin and end on specific dates. Learners wishing to enrol in live classes must be able to attend class at the scheduled times. Live classes are led by an instructor and are a good option for learners who prefer group learning. Learners may register for up to five live classes at one time.

Independent study courses are available for those learners who are unable to commit to attending a live class or who prefer working on their own. Each learner is assigned to an online practitioner who will help him or her develop a learning plan. Learners can sign up for as many independent study courses as they like, although The LearningHUB suggests starting out with just one or two.

The LearningHUB also offers a series of short courses as part of the independent study option. These courses can last for up to five weeks. They do have a specific start and end date, but learners can log in to access the courses at any time that is convenient for them. Learners may register for only one short course at a time. Before new students can complete registration for either live classes or independent study, they will need to complete an online assessment to determine their learning level and which option best suits their needs.

There are also some brief tutorials that can help a new learner get started. For example, new learners can take tutorials on how to set up a gmail account or to learn about the type of learning platforms that are used. There is even a tutorial explaining how to use The LearningHUB registration form. Learners do not need to register or set up a user name and password to take the tutorials. Tutorials are offered in both video and print formats.

When it comes to choosing which courses to take, learners have a wide range to choose from. Main subject areas offered are math, reading and writing, GED preparation, and Essential Skills. Classes and courses are offered at all five LBS levels and include foundational math, algebra, life and job skills, business basics, dictionary basics, spelling and grammar rules, using email, discovering your learning style and many more. For a full list of available courses and classes, be sure to check out the e-Channel catalogue at www.learninghub.ca/FILES/PDF-files/HUBcoursecatalogue.pdf.

The LearningHUB uses a variety of platforms to deliver online LBS training. For example, live classes are offered using Centra which allows for two-way communication between the instructor and the students. Independent study courses are offered using either PLATO or LearnScape. Short courses are offered using Moodle. If you are interested in learning more about the various online learning platforms used by The LearningHUB, be sure to check out the "Practitioners" section of their website. The LearningHUB publishes an electronic newsletter. Contact Courtney McGee (courmcge@fc.amdsb.ca) or Heather Robinet (heatrobi@fc.amdsb.ca) to subscribe.

Good Learning Anywhere

E-Channel courses are also offered by the Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council in Northern Ontario through their Good Learning Anywhere program (www.siouxhudsonliteracy.com). This program focuses on providing upgrading and literacy training for First Nations learners, but courses are open to all Ontario residents.

Good Learning Anywhere offers a wide variety of online classes. Subjects include pre-GED preparation, health and literacy, English upgrading, Essential Skills, money management, introduction to technology and more. The full course catalogue can be found on the website at www.siouxhudsonliteracy.com/pdfs/gla_curriculum_list_rvf2010.pdf. New courses will be added early in 2011 so be sure to look for them. Students can register for individual modules, or they can sign up for a series of courses in a particular subject area. Good Learning Anywhere provides continuous intake so learners can sign up at any time.

The 10-module Self-Management/Self-Direction course is the most popular training offered by Good Learning Anywhere. Students can sign up to take all ten modules or just the ones that interest them the most. Courses related to technology are also very popular. For example, there is a two-part Introduction to Facebook course that teaches students about online safety and how to use this popular social media website. There is no charge to take any of the courses, and they are open to literacy learners, practitioners and the community at large. In fact, a number of practitioners have already taken the Facebook courses.

Synchronous, or live, training is the most popular option with 90% of courses and modules being offered via Centra. Asynchronous options are available through both PLATO and Moodle. Most of the courses offered by Good Learning Anywhere are offered via a series of modules. Learners can sign up for some or all of the modules except for subject areas such as science or social studies where they have to take the full course. Certificates are issues at the end of each course when learners have demonstrated that they have learned the skills that were covered.

Good Learning Anywhere has recently introduced a mentoring program to help learners achieve their goals. All registered students are assigned a mentor who can help them with any concerns they have about online learning, with choosing their next course or with questions they have about the course they are currently taking.

Good Learning Anywhere has proven to be a popular option with Ontario literacy learners. Between April and September 2010, almost 600 students have taken a course or workshop. Many enjoy it so much that they sign up for more courses, and if fact, between 75% and 80% of registered students have taken more than one course. As is the case with The LearningHUB, the majority of the students who register are female (63%) with most being in the age range between 27 and 59.

For more information about Good Learning Anywhere, visit their website at www.siouxhudsonliteracy.com or contact Sandra Turner at 807-737-8022. You can also learn more about Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council by friending them on Facebook or by visiting their blog at www.siouxhudsonliteracy.wordpress.com .

ACE Online

Ontario's community colleges offer e-learning opportunities to Ontario residents who wish to get their Grade 12 equivalency through ACE Online (www.acedistancedelivery.ca). This is a very popular option as there are over 1,500 students registered at any given time.

To begin the process, learners must successfully complete the 20-hour *Learn to Learn* course which is available in both French and English. This online intake and assessment module helps determine if learners have the right personal, computer and academic skills to succeed in ACE Online courses. New learners must complete the first assignment within five days of registering, and they have up to 30 days to complete the course. When finished, they will be provided with an individualized training plan. Intake for *Learn to Learn* is available daily, Students can enrol daily. For more information, English students should contact marlawhite775@gmail.com and French students should contact Clarence.potvin@collegeboreal.ca. *Learn to Learn* is delivered using Moodle. An average of 300-350 new students enrol for *Learn to Learn* each month.

If learners are not ready to proceed with ACE Online courses, they will be given information about other learning options, including being directed to their nearest Literacy Network office or other e-Channel program.

After successfully completing *Learn to Learn*, students can enrol in an ACE Online course. All ACE Online courses are available in both languages. Courses offered include English, French, Math (Core, Business, Apprenticeship and Technology), Self-Management and Self-Direction, Computers, Biology, Physics and Chemistry. Full course descriptions are available on the website at www.acedistancedelivery.ca/courses.php .

Registration for ACE online courses is open during the first week of each month but each college has its own procedures, so be sure to check with the college of your choice for specific instructions. Students can only register for one course during the first month, but if they are doing well, they may be able to add a second course in the next month. The maximum course load at any one time is two. Students have up to 22 weeks to complete each course. Courses range in length from 80 to 120 hours. Technical support is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day 365 days a year for both *Learn to Learn* and ACE Distance courses.

Who signs up for ACE Online? Once again, the majority of students are women (70%). A large number of students are employed. Many have completed their high school and some postsecondary programming. There are a number of home-schooled students who are finishing off their science courses before beginning their post-secondary education. ACE distance students include a group of soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Germany. Many ACE students are First Nations.

Students have high praise for ACE Online.

⇒ Kristen says: *"The thought of being able to take the courses that I need, and be able to work on them at my own pace and time, is the main reason why I decided to join the ACE program. ACE offers me a great opportunity to be able to complete the required courses I need to gain entrance into college as well as stay home with my six month old daughter until next September."*

⇒ Michelle likes the option to learn online because *"ACE Online seems to be the perfect fit for me because I do not have the time to travel to an actual college at the moment and I am able to study and learn at my own pace."*

Both *Learn to Learn* and ACE are currently being offered to students in the Sudbury Jail. This service has recently been expanded to include a youth facility in Sault Ste. Marie. Online learning can happen anywhere!

CAF School for Adults

Caf School for Adults (www.cafplus.ca) is available for those who wish to improve their French language skills or obtain their Grade 12 equivalency in French. Courses are offered in areas such as health and safety, technology, college preparation and English as a second language.

More information is available by contacting them at info@cafplus.ca

Contact North

Contact North (www.contactnorth.ca/) offers e-Channel online services to e-Channel deliverers, Literacy and Basic Skills agencies and networks. During an organization's e-Channel session, participants can:
⇒ speak and interact with each other online
⇒ see and share written information, photos, diagrams, graphs, etc. on their computer monitor
⇒ use a whiteboard; visit and explore websites
⇒ share word documents and excel documents

You can learn all about Contact North's e-Channel services for LBS agencies by visiting their website at: www.e-channel.ca/en/

Focus on Social Media

Participants at a roundtable meeting held at CLO's conference in October 2010 were asked what area of e-learning they would like to know more about. Using Facebook and other social media for educational purposes was high on the list.

A number of literacy agencies are already using Facebook and Twitter. For some, social media is a way to interact with their learners. For others, it is a promotional tool. Some use it for both purposes.

For some examples of how literacy agencies and networks are using Facebook, log on at www.facebook.com and look for Kingston Literacy and Skills, Prince Edward Learning Centre, People Words & Change, Parkdale Project Read, Laubach Literacy Ontario, the Ontario Literacy Coalition, Project Read Literacy Network, Literacy Link Niagara, and AlphaPlus Centre, to name just a few. For a fun and interesting way to use Facebook, be sure to look for Rita deBook, London's Literacy Advocate.

AlphaPlus Centre's website is a wonderful source to learn more about social media. See: www.alphaplus.ca/.

Another great resource is the *"Getting Online Project"* (www.nald.ca/gettingonline/). Look under "Technology" to find information on social media. In fact, this whole website has a variety of helpful information on e-learning in the Canadian literacy community.

Also, later in 2011, Joanne Kaattari, Co-Executive Director of CLO, will be offering her workshop called *"Cool Tools Rule: Using Social Media to Educate, Engage and Inspire"* online on Centra to CLO members.

E-learning Around the Province

Many Ontario literacy organizations create and use a variety of e-learning online opportunities within their own agencies. CLO is pleased to share a few examples of some of the exciting work that is being done.

Focus on AlphaPlus Centre

AlphaPlus Centre (http://alphaplus.ca) offers many online resources and learning opportunities for both practitioners and literacy students alike.

For example, be sure to visit their virtual classroom for adult learners at http://learners.alphaplus.ca/moodle1/. This site features both active and archived classrooms. The Virtual Classroom for Adult Learners Moodle site was launched in March 2010. It provides course delivery space for trainees taking the second level of AlphaPlus Moodle training: Build and Deliver a Short Moodle Course. The Virtual Classroom for Adult Learners, or VCAL for short, further supports the ongoing development and delivery of Moodle-based online courses and resources for graduates of Moodle training provided by AlphaPlus to Ontario adult educators.

AlphaPlus Centre is also a leader in providing helpful and practical information, training and resources on social media. You can visit their website to learn more: www.alphaplus.ca/

For more information on all that AlphaPlus has to offer and to find out about other interesting online learning sites and opportunities, be sure to read their blog at http://alphaplus.ca/en/alphaplus-blog.html and check their newsletter for new and up-to-date information and resources.

Focus on Timmins

The Timmins Native Friendship Centre is definitely a fan of online learning. Kirk Fournier, Literacy Coordinator, reports that he uses several online tools in the classroom.

⇒ For lower level math, Kirk recommends themathworksheet.com. It can generate random worksheets in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. You can also print the answers for easy marking. Best of all, it's free.
⇒ Kirk also suggests that new practitioners seeking to work with demonstrations should check out *Demonstrations for Ontario Literacy Practitioners* at http://demonstrations.alphaplus.ca/.
⇒ Kirk uses assistive technology software as a strong tool in his classroom. For math, he likes the *Solved!* program from Bagatrix Software (www.bagatrix.com). It covers basic math to algebra and trigonometry. A learner can input a question, have it answered and explained step by step. These instructions can be printed and used by the student to aid them at home.
⇒ For English, Kirk recently started using *Issues In English* from Protea (www.proteatextware.com.au). He recommends it because it lends to multiple learning styles, i.e., video plus text along with interactive assignments.
⇒ For students with employment goals, Kirk uses a variety of resume software, for example, *WinWay Resume* (www.winway.com) and *Resume Builder* (www.theresumebuilder.com). Both offer an array of resume templates as well as tutorials and wording suggestions.
⇒ To help with reading, Kirk uses Kurzweil 3000 (www.kurzweiledu.com) and TextHelp (www.texthelp.com). With this type of software, learners can have help reading Internet pages, and they can also scan in books or other documents to read.

Kirk is also using social media in his agency, particularly Facebook. He has recently begun using Facebook for follow-up and to track learner satisfaction. It has proven to be a great way to get in touch with lost contacts. He also uses Facebook to notify students of important events or assignment due dates and to share good news. All posts are monitored for content. To learn more, you can visit their website at www.tnfc.ca.
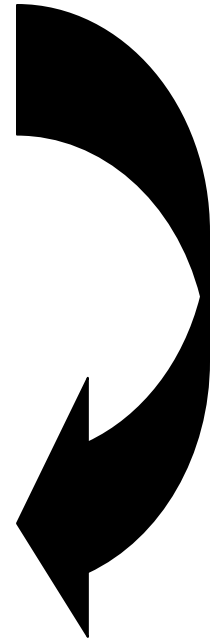
Focus on Kingston

Darren MacDonald, Senior Coordinator of Information Technology at Kingston Literacy & Skills, notes that they are using a number of online tools and websites. For example, they use Facebook to communicate with students and for informational purposes. Another social media tool they use is a staff wiki (through pbworks.com) to share documents and ideas.

Their learners find both the Job Bank website (www.jobbank.gc.ca/Intro-eng.aspx) and the Essential Skills website (www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/home.shtml) helpful for researching employment opportunities.

In the classroom, students like the following learning sites:

⇒ www.multiplication.com: This site has games, lessons, activities, resources, tips and strategies focused on the teaching of multiplication.
⇒ www.coolmath.com: This site has games, puzzles and lessons on a variety of math including fractions, decimals and percents. It also has more advanced activities, such as algebra and calculus.
⇒ www.math-drills.com:This site has a collection of over 6,000 math worksheets. Subjects include: arithmetic, integers, decimals, fractions, percents, graphing, geometry, algebra and measurement. The site offers large print for those with vision problems.
⇒ www.thewclc.ca/edge: This site has interactive learning activities, which emphasize workplace skills. It features newspaper-style stories with animated video, text and audio. It is designed for LBS learners and is easy to use and navigate.
⇒ www.settlement.org: This site is of use for ESL students.

Focus on Grey-Bruce-Georgian

The Adult Learning Centres of Grey-Bruce-Georgian (www.adultlearningcentres.ca) are leaders in program-based e-Learning in Ontario. Tim Nicholls-Harrison, Executive Director of the Centres, says it's important to put e-Learning in the context of 21st century learning skills. Nicholls-Harrison believes that learning to use the Internet and all of the technology tools be available should integral to all learning opportunities and not taught in isolation.

They are very involved with e-Learning in a number of ways, including using a variety of Google applications, YouTube, and Twitter. Among the many ways that the Centres incorporate social media and other Internet tools into their learning is through the development of a comprehensive list of online bookmarks using Delicious. Be sure to take a look at www.delicious.com/adult.learning to find links to information about SMART boards; demonstrations; subject areas such as measurement, speaking and listening, self-evaluation, essay writing and more; links organized by LBS level; and many social media tools including Twitter and Wordle.

The Centres held an excellent technology conference last June in Owen Sound. They have created online videos of many of the presentations that you can access here: www.youtube.com/user/AdultLearningCentre#p/a. They are planning to host another technology conference in June 2011 at the Kempenfelt Centre in Barrie.

As part of their ongoing efforts to incorporate useful technology tools into all aspects of their programming, the Centres are currently investigating the use of eReading devices such as the Kobo reader, Sony's eReader and Kindle. They are curious about possible applications these devices could have for literacy learners. The recent announcement about GoogleBooks (books.google.ca) making thousands of books freely available online has made this a very timely consideration.

The Centres have also begun using Prezi software (http://prezi.com/), a free, web-based tool, to design and share presentations with learners.

CLO's "Best Practices in Online Learning" Project

CLO has recently received funding from MTCU for a project called *"Best Practices in Online Learning for Adult Literacy Students Learning at the Lowest Levels of Literacy"*.

Ontario's Literacy and Basics Skills programs are leaders in providing online instruction to adult learners through e-Channel online learning, ACE Online, online learning tools developed in their own programs, and through various instructional resources available over the Internet.

Due to their very low reading levels, the learner group hardest to serve online is adults with the lowest levels of literacy. However, some Ontario literacy agencies have had success in delivering online instruction to this group of adult learners.

In our project, CLO will research how online learning for adult learners at the lowest literacy levels is being delivered in Ontario's community literacy agencies. We will also assess the benefits, barriers, strategies and best practices.

We will then develop a resource guide that summarizes the research and best practices. This guide will be available on our website and in print format. We are sure that many diverse stakeholders will be interested in this groundbreaking and innovative research!

We will also develop an annotated online listing of helpful online instructional resources as identified by literacy instructors during the research.

The three deliverables to be produced by this project are:

⟹ Researching best practices in online learning for adult literacy learners at the lowest LBS levels

⟹ Writing a resource guide that summarizes the research and includes best practices

⟹ Creating an annotated online listing of key online instructional resources

This project will begin in January 2011.

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO