



**GETTING ONLINE**



**Newsletter 4- April 2009**

## On the Home Stretch: the Getting Online Project

"Getting Online: Distance Education Promising Practices for Canadian Literacy Practitioners" (or the GO Project for short) is an innovative national project designed to research trends, technologies and promising practices in online learning in Canada. You can learn more via the GO website at: [www.nald.ca/gettingonline](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline).

The GO project is in the "final stretch" of its research, review and analysis of online learning in our country and will be complete as of June 2009. During the two years this national project was in operation, many key deliverables were accomplished, including:

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- Conducting research into online learning in Canada and writing a research report
- Researching and writing a resource guide on promising practices in online learning
- Researching and writing web-based, self-directed training modules on promising practices in online learning
- Developing and delivering courses on online learning
- Conducting presentations and attending conferences on behalf of the GO project
- Writing articles on the GO project

In this newsletter, we will update you on the status of each of these deliverables.



## Research into Online Learning in Canada

### *Research: The Canadian Literacy Community*

- The GO project conducted research into promising practices, trends, technologies, and key issues in online learning in the Canadian literacy community
- 102 surveys were received from literacy practitioners across Canada
- Key informant interviews were held with 24 literacy practitioners
- Two focus groups were held (one face-to-face in Newfoundland and one online in Ontario)
- Technology surveys were conducted with nine lead organizations
- A literature review was conducted

### *Research: External Organizations*

- The GO project conducted research into promising practices, trends, technologies, and key issues in online learning in diverse sectors external to the literacy community, including universities, colleges, school boards and not-for-profit organizations.
- The GO team researched the websites of 100 relevant organizations from all provinces and territories
- 40 surveys were received from external organizations
- Key informant interviews were held with 17 organizations

From this extensive research, the GO project produced a groundbreaking report called "A *Research Report on Online Learning for Canadian Literacy Practitioners*". This report was released in October 2008 and overviews the trends and issues identified through national research into online learning in Canada. It includes:

- Research methodologies and initial findings
- Current methods of delivering online learning
- Successes and innovative approaches to online learning
- Online learning technologies
- Effective techniques for introducing online learning
- Differences between face-to-face and online learning
- Evaluation methods and results for online learning
- Perceptions of the future of online learning

In addition to circulating a printed version of the GO research report to key stakeholders, our report was also posted online at the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) ([www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)). NALD tracks resources downloaded from its website and prepares a "Top 20 Downloads from the NALD Collection" each month. The GO research report has made NALD's "Top 20s" list each month since it was posted online.



Here are the very impressive statistics from NALD relating to the GO research report:

- November 2008 = 8,074 downloads
- December 2008 = 9,402 downloads
- January 2009 = 3,958 downloads
- February 2009 = 2,048 downloads

The GO research report can be accessed as a PDF document at

[www.nald.ca/gettingonline/goreport/goreport.pdf](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline/goreport/goreport.pdf).

**This means that the GO research report was freely downloaded a total of 23,482 times between November 2008 and February 2009. Now that is effective knowledge transfer!**

### Web-based Training Modules

The GO team is also developing self-study, web-based training modules about promising practices in online learning. These modules will cover the following topics:

- Overview of Online Learning
- Online Facilitation
- Tips for Online Learners
- Developing Online Content
- Technology
- Trends in Online Learning

**These web-based training modules will be available on the GO website in June 2009 at [www.nald.ca/gettingonline](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline).**

Content readers are currently reviewing these modules. Some of their feedback includes:

- "This is a job well done!"
- "A fantastic and timely effort"
- "I would certainly recommend this resource"
- "I especially liked the real-life stories that showed how the technology is being used"
- "Very comprehensive and practical"
- "Although the information is aimed towards literacy practitioners, it is useful for anyone who would like to make use of these tools for their organization"
- "Well-written, upbeat and encouraging"



## Online Courses

The GO Project team offered an "Introduction to Online Learning" course for literacy practitioners in Canada.

This 8 week online course explored a variety of topics such as:

- Exploring attitudes about online learning
- Building online learning communities
- Online learning and the literacy field

Participants are also introduced to various learning technologies including Moodle and Elluminate.

In order to test the curriculum, timelines and technologies and adapt for subsequent courses, the GO *"Introduction to Online Learning"* was first offered as a 6-

week pilot course from April to May 2008. Based on the pilot results, the course was further tailored to meet participant needs. Since then, the GO course has been offered twice to literacy practitioners across Canada: October 6 to November 28, 2008 and January 12 to March 6, 2009. It is now being offered a third and final time from March 23 to May 15, 2009. One of the GO online course facilitators, Lynn Best, shares her perspective on these courses: "One of the things I enjoy most about facilitating the Getting Online course is the collaborative learning environment that is created by participants and facilitators. In this program, we all learn from and with each other. Bringing literacy experts from around the country together using learning technology provides a platform for rich discussion and shared experiences. I continue to be amazed and inspired by the possibilities for the literacy community through learning technologies."

## Conferences

GO team members attended the following **conferences** on behalf of the GO Project:

- One team member attended the strategy development session of the Canadian Consortium of Technology Support Providers for Adult Basic Education Strategy (Toronto, February 2008)
- Four team members attended the Distance Education Technology Symposium held by Athabasca University (Edmonton, June 2008)
- GO team members had GO flyers and project information at the booth of Community Literacy of Ontario during the Pan-Canadian Literacy Symposium (Ontario site) of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (Toronto, April 2008)
- Two team members participated in MESH – Canada's Web Conference (Toronto, April 2009)



## Presentations

GO team members made the following presentations on behalf of the GO Project:

- Four team members presented at the Distance Education Technology Symposium held by Athabasca University (Edmonton, June 2008). Our presentation is available online at: [http://cde.athabascau.ca/DET/2008/presentations/go/go\\_files/frame.htm](http://cde.athabascau.ca/DET/2008/presentations/go/go_files/frame.htm).
- Diana Twiss presented to the Centre for Family Literacy (Vancouver, April 2008).
- Joanne Kaattari presented at the Foundations in Family Literacy Leadership Forum (Ottawa, October 2008).
- Joanne Kaattari and Vicki Trottier will be presenting to staff from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Online, April 2009).

## Articles

Deborah Morgan wrote an article about the GO project in the "Literacies" Journal (Spring 2009).

You can read this article online at: [www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/8-2008/readers\\_s08.htm](http://www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/8-2008/readers_s08.htm).

- Dr. Pat Fahy and Diana Twiss submitted an article on the GO research results to the Journal of Applied Research in Learning. We are awaiting publication information.
- Articles were included in the newsletters of various literacy organizations, for example: Movement for Canadian Literacy; Literacy BC; Ontario Literacy Coalition and Community Literacy of Ontario.
- GO information was also posted on various websites and blogs.

## Promising Practices for Online Learning Resource Guide

The GO team is currently researching and writing a resource guide called Bridging Distance: Promising Practices for Online Learning.

This valuable resource guide will include the following chapters:

- Online Facilitation
- Being an Online Learner
- Online Content
- Technology

Bridging Distance will be available as a PDF document in June 2009 on the GO website.



## The GO Project and Exploring Online Learning Technology

In the last two newsletters, we profiled various research results of the Getting Online Project. In newsletter #4, we are pleased to profile the GO project and online learning technology.

During the research phase of the GO project, researchers asked key informants and survey respondents about the type of technology they were using to deliver online training. We discovered that there is a wide variety of software and technology approaches being used, from a self-study web-based modular approach to learning management systems. Online training is delivered both synchronously (live) and asynchronously (participants and facilitators log in as needed). For more information about the online learning technology, be sure to review the section on technology choices in the GO Research Report (available as a PDF document at [www.nald.ca/gettingonline/goreport/goreport.pdf](http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline/goreport/goreport.pdf).)

GO researchers also discovered that organizations both big and small are increasingly making use of Web 2.0 technology in their online training. But just what is Web 2.0? It is not a particular brand or type of software, rather it is a catch-all phrase that includes a wide variety of emerging technologies that are user-friendly, social in nature and highly engaging to users. Examples of Web 2.0 technologies include Facebook, blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, YouTube and photosharing sites. Generally, Web 2.0 technology is not used on its own to deliver training; instead, it is used to enhance online training and to provide an increased level of interaction. One of the great benefits of incorporating Web 2.0 technology into online learning is that it is often available at no cost to the user, and the general public is increasingly making use of it on a daily basis and are therefore already familiar with it. For example, Facebook boasts over 175 million users worldwide. Web 2.0 technologies are proving popular with online training developers because they can add both interest and interactivity to a classroom or a training site. For example, embedding video through YouTube (or another video sharing site such as TeacherTube) can provide alternatives to traditional text-based information for demonstrating skills, describing content or even submitting assignments. Similarly, audio files added to an online training site or classroom can easily be downloaded onto an iPod or a cell phone, allowing online learners to review information or listen to



lectures wherever they are (commuting to work, walking the dog or even grocery shopping).

Social networking and social messaging through tools such as Facebook and Twitter can encourage online learners to interact with each other as well as with the course facilitator, thus fostering a sense of online community. This type of communication tool can be used to plan meeting times for group work or study sessions, or it can simply be used to keep in touch.

Wikis (interactive websites) can be set up to be available to a particular group of online learning participants. Wikis can promote collaboration and are particularly useful for group work. For example, if a group of students is working on an assignment, they can all work with the same document through the wiki and make updates and changes in one space rather than each person working separately. This also reduces the need for multiple versions of a document being sent via email and reduces the risk

of the wrong version of a document being used. Wikis aren't just for working with text documents, however. PDF documents, PowerPoint presentations, photos, audio clips, video clips and more can all be uploaded to a wiki.

Virtual worlds are another interesting and increasingly popular Web 2.0 tool. In these 3-D online worlds, users create their own virtual character, called an avatar, who interacts with other characters in the virtual environment. Although this might sound like something that belongs in the realm of gaming, virtual worlds are being used in both educational and business settings.

## Web 2.0, Learning Technologies and GO Project Resources

Because of the great interest in Web 2.0 technologies (and in online learning technologies in general), Getting Online researchers have researched and written an overview of some common technology choices. Included with each overview are descriptions about the technology and how it could be used for adult education. Additional resources and sources of information as well as links to examples of online training using each technology are also included.

These technology overviews will be included in both the *Bridging Distance* resource guide and in the web-based modules currently being developed. Both of these resources will be available in June 2009 via the Getting Online website.



## Research Team

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GO PROJECT KINDLY CONTACT ONE OF OUR RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS.

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