Getting Online Project – Moving On!

Getting Online (GO): Distance Education Promising Practices for Canadian Literacy Practitioners Project is a two-year national project designed to research emerging trends, technologies, and promising practices in online learning in the adult literacy community in Canada and other fields of practice.

Research Report Now Available

The research phase of the project is now complete. We are pleased to announce that *A Research Report on Online Learning for Canadian Literacy Practitioners* is available on the *Getting Online* website as a downloadable PDF document at http://www.nald.ca/gettingonline/goreport/goreport.pdf. If you would like a hard copy of the report please contact Diana Twiss at dtwiss@capilanou.ca. Please note there are a limited number being printed so print copies will be available on a first come, first served basis.

This report 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

Sharing our Findings

GO team member Joanne Kaattari was pleased to present a training workshop called **Looking at Online Delivery** at the National Foundations in Family Literacy Leadership Forum held in Ottawa in October 2008.

Topics covered in this presentation included:

- Community Literacy of Ontario and Online Learning
- **Getting Online** Research Findings
- Tips for Online Facilitation
- Online Learning Technologies

This event brought together family literacy practitioners and other stakeholders from across Canada for two days to build capacity in the field of family literacy and to introduce the expanded and revised **Foundations in Family Literacy** framework and material and to explore options for delivering this training in a variety of formats including online.

Promising Practices Manual

The GO team is currently researching and writing a resource guide called **Bridging Distance: Promising Practices for Online Learning in the Canadian Literacy Community.**

This research guide will include the following chapters:

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

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

Online Training Modules

The GO team is also developing self-study, web-based training modules about promising practices in online learning. These modules will be also be available in late Spring 2009 and will include:

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

Each of the modules will include a number of links to other resources and questions for self-reflection. Content will be available for download from the GO website at www.nald.ca/gettingonline.

"There is no lasting value in e-learning unless there is strong content."

- A GO Survey respondent
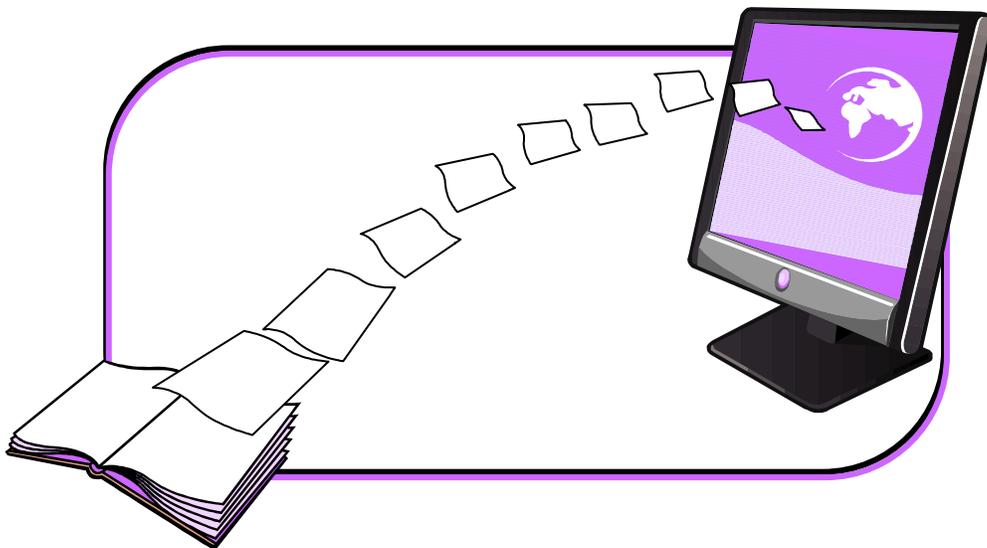
GO "Introduction to Online Learning" Course

Are you curious about online learning? Are you interested in developing skills with learning technologies? Do you want to experience online learning but are unsure where to start? The Getting Online (GO) Project team is excited to offer an **Introduction to Online Learning** course that has been specially designed for literacy practitioners in Canada.

The GO project is currently offering the first session of its **Introduction to Online Learning Course.**

Ten participants from across the country have registered for this course which finishes up at the end of November 2008.

This course introduces literacy practitioners to the use and value of distance learning opportunities and applications. Some of the topics covered include:

- The roles and responsibilities of online learners and facilitators
- Personal hopes and fears about online learning
- Transitioning from a face to face to an online learning environment
- Building online learning communities
- Online learning and the literacy field

Participants will be introduced to various learning technologies including Moodle, Elluminate, and teleconferencing. The course content includes a variety of online learning activities, selected readings, posting to discussion boards, partnering with other participants on assignments, researching using the internet, and using internet-based assessment tools.

The Getting Online Project team will be offering this course twice more in 2009. Registration for each course is limited to 15 participants.

There is no fee for the course, but participants will be required to purchase a textbook that cost approximately $45. For further information or to register, please contact Diana Twiss at dtwiss@capilanou.ca. Courses will be filled on a first come, first served basis.

Update on the GO Research into Online Learning in the Canadian Literacy Community and Beyond

During the first phase of the project, the GO team researched what was happening in online learning both within the Canadian literacy community and in other similar areas of practice, including not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions and government departments.

To reach as many organizations as possible, a survey was developed and distributed electronically to all regions of Canada via email and the GO website. Key informant interviews were also held, and web-based research was conducted. Online learning information was gathered about large and small organizations in all areas of the country and included input from organizations with a national, provincial, regional or local focus.

In the GO July 2008 newsletter, we shared an overview of the research findings for the Canadian literacy community. In this newsletter, we will share an overview of the research findings from similar areas of practice including not-for-profit organizations and the broader education sector.

The full research report is now available on the GO website at www.nald.ca/gettingonline, but we can provide a brief overview of the findings below.

> "Being online has allowed us to go places we never dreamed of. We're a small organization in a small town, but our site has been accessed by people from 160 different countries! We would never have been able to reach this many people with face-to-face training."
>
> *-A GO survey respondent*

Findings Related to Other Similar Areas of Practice

Over one hundred providers of online learning were identified during the initial research phase. From this group, 43 written surveys were received and 19 key informant interviews were held.

GO research revealed that there is a wide variety of technology being used for online learning across Canada. The two most widely-used methods by respondents to the survey and interview are

1. learning management systems (also called classroom management systems) such as Blackboard and Moodle, and
2. web-based self-study training modules

However, research into the complete list of online learning providers that were identified showed that the self-study modular approach was the most common method used.

> "It's not an option to not do online training today. People go to the web for information, they don't go to the library. If you want to participate in today's world, you need an online presence."
>
> *- A GO survey respondent*

This approach was used by both large and small organizations including education institutions, government agencies, not-for-profit groups, private enterprise and others.

Regardless of the approach used, the majority of online learning providers supplemented their educational and training opportunities through additional features such as discussion groups, email, conferencing systems and the use of what is known as Web 2.0 technologies including things such as podcasting, Facebook, blogging and YouTube.

The type of online learning that is being offered across Canada is as varied as the organizations that offer it. It appears that virtually any type of learning can be found in an online format, from music lessons to board governance to information for new Canadians to avalanche first response training.

Organizations that responded to the surveys or participated in key informant interviews reported that online learning can help reduce barriers often associated with training and education including issues of access, cost, travel and flexibility. Providers of online learning in Canada generally evaluate their training and education opportunities, either formally or informally. Overwhelmingly, survey respondents and key informants indicated that they had received positive evaluation results. Some of these positive results included high accessible learning opportunities, removal of geographic barriers, affordability and participant satisfaction.

The survey and key informant interviews also asked if results achieved through online learning were different than those achieved through face-to-face methods. Again, respondents reported overwhelmingly positive results including the time available for more in-depth and reflective participation, ease of access and ease of updating.

Many of the reasons cited for achieving positive results were based in personal preference and learning style, so while one group of participants embrace online learning, another group finds it doesn't necessarily meet their learning needs. Some respondents found it difficult to compare online with face-to-face learning because of the inherent differences between the two modalities.

The GO team asked Canadian providers of online learning how learning opportunities were introduced. Their responses cited the importance of providing both initial and ongoing support to participants as well as to instructors.

They also noted that technology should be user-friendly and that content is very important. Appropriate funding support for online learning was also identified as being important.

> "We have made a huge shift in our online training based on feedback and evaluations. We now offer shorter, more immediate courses. Our members wanted a clear return on their investment for the time they spend in training, and the shift to shorter, more practical courses has given them that."
>
> *- A GO survey respondent*

Our final question asked respondents to report on what they thought the future of online learning might look like. The majority saw a very bright future, and projected that new technologies would be introduced and that current online learning opportunities would expand. They also indicated that they expected the quality of online learning to increase and that there would be more access to both support and learning.

"We see a bright and growing future for e-learning! We think that best practices will become a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning models using technology and teaching methods that will meet the needs of both the students and the instructors."

- A GO survey respondent

ALL ABOUT GO

The GO Project is hosted by Athabasca University. It brings together various project partners including Community Literacy of Ontario, Writing Out Loud (Alberta), and Capilano College (British Columbia).

GO is funded by the National Office of Literacy and Learning (Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program of the Government of Canada).

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For more information on the GO project, please visit our website at:
www.nald.ca/gettingonline.