

Overview of e-Channel Strategy for Literacy

Overview of Flexible Learning

Communication technology is significantly changing skills development training. The result is that training can now be accessed in a variety of ways, anytime and anywhere. Many terms have been developed to describe these newly emerging learning environments. Some of the terms you may have heard are: e-learning, blended learning, distributed learning, flexible learning and distance education.

Flexible learning refers to the range of learning environments made available to the learner regardless of time or place. It represents both an educational approach and how the learning is delivered.

Flexible delivery approaches are about creating options for learning. These options provide access to knowledge using an approach that blends a variety of technologies and learning methods. This emerging approach to learning is made possible not just by Web-based instruction or distance learning. It is also made possible through a range of learning technologies, which may include everything from your basic computer program, to online courses, to video conferencing. The approach recognizes that direct, personal interaction in the learning process plays a vital role.

Flexible learning allows for a learner-centred approach where a student can meet their own training requirements in ways that meet their learning needs. The delivery agency may provide choices to students in terms of manner of access, time, location, pace of study and learning style.

Why Flexible Learning?

A flexible learning approach to delivery must provide increased access to LBS services while maintaining excellent program quality. Physical disabilities, geographic barriers, resources and time are some of the reasons why individuals cannot access learning opportunities. Flexible learning models have the potential to address these barriers to ensure that learning can be accessed in an adaptable, learner-centred approach. With this approach, LBS services can be delivered in new ways, on-site at LBS agencies, but also to learners in areas not served by LBS agencies.

Literacy and Basic Skills

LBS agencies in Ontario equip adults with the skills they need to meet their goals and enhanced participation in their communities. LBS agencies are incorporating computers into their learning process, responding to the growing interest of adult learners, as well as the growing technological knowledge needed for the workplace.

The LBS program uses instruction in basic computer skills within a literacy-learning process. Adults learn to handle the literacy demands of computers as they learn basic computer skills.

Background on the e-Channel program: 2000-2006

Since the spring of 2000, MTCU has embraced the concept of “distance and flexible” delivery of LBS training. Its goal is to assist Ontarians who face barriers due to rural and remote locations, transportation, conflicts with work schedules or family and dependant care commitments. At the same time, the value of computers and the internet as teaching tools began to emerge in Canada.

MTCU initially funded work that resulted in the development of literacy-specific software, entitled AlphaRoute. AlphaRoute was used in combination with traditional face-to-face literacy training. Research confirmed that adult literacy training could be effectively delivered using online technology. Pilot programs were developed to test the viability and potential of different delivery mechanisms for Ontario. The results of this research helped to shape the development of the e-channel Strategy for Literacy.

2006-2008

In 2006-2007, the first steps of the e-Channel Strategy for Literacy were undertaken.

Lead agencies were selected for e-Channel curriculum development and course delivery:

- Sioux Hudson Literacy Council - Aboriginal
- Centre d'apprentissage et de formation PLUS (CAF Plus) - Francophones
- Avon Maitland District School Board - Anglophone

EXAMPLE:

The Avon Maitland District School Board branded its e-Channel program as the "LearningHub".

The website (www.learninghub.ca) allows learners to investigate the program and courses available and if interested, fill out and submit an online registration form stating their needs and goals.

A literacy practitioner responds to the learner within three business days to complete a one-to-one intake assessment, to determine their appropriateness for the distance learning format

Once assessed as appropriate, the learner is assigned an online practitioner who creates a learning plan, and assigns curriculum and programming as per the learner's goal and skill levels.

This online practitioner mentors the learner through the learning process, and for the duration of their time with the LearningHub.

Learners are assessed again at exit, and at regular intervals throughout their training.

Future: 2009 onwards

The 2009 Ontario Budget delivered on March 26, 2009 included the announcement of " \$90 million over two years to expand literacy training, helping up to 13,000 more Ontarians each year". \$5 million of this investment was ear-marked for expansion e-Channel services which included the establishment of an e-Channel Deaf literacy Stream.