

Our Voice

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E-Channel: Alternative Literacy Training Right at Your Fingertips

By Heather Robinet, Avon Maitland District School Board

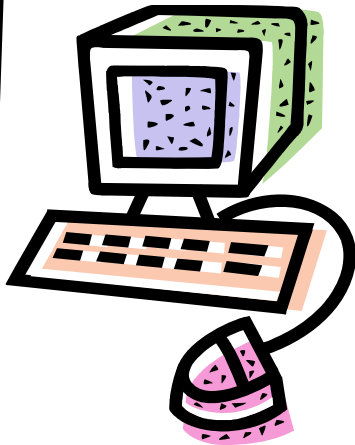
Adults seeking more opportunities to maintain and upgrade their skills to ensure their personal, social and economic well-being in today's knowledge-based economy have another option. It is called e-Channel, and it is the online alternative or supplement to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) upgrading programs.

Currently, in-person literacy training is provided at almost 300 sites across the province, for adults with goals which may include personal independence, further training and education, or improved employment opportunities. However, many adults are unable to access that training due to distance, transportation, work schedules, childcare, personal preference or other barriers. E-Channel has been designed to address these barriers, and to increase access to learning opportunities for adults in Ontario.

The concept of e-Channel (or e-literacy) began in 2003 with a pilot project that involved four LBS agencies in Ontario – Centre de formation pour adultes J'aime apprendre inc., Community Learning Centre Napanee, Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council and Confederation College. These agencies explored possibilities for distance and flexible delivery of the LBS Program in Ontario. Today, three lead agencies have been selected by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to act as e-Channel hosts and champion e-Channel delivery of literacy services for Native, Francophone and Anglophone Stream learners. Development of e-Channel services for the Deaf stream will begin this fall. Current e-leads include: Sioux Hudson Literacy Council, Centre d'Apprentissage et de Formation Plus (CAF +), and Avon Maitland District School Board.

While e-Channel is considered one entity, each of the e-leads functions independently, offering both specialized programming unique to its stream and generalized programming as well. E-Channel literacy is especially effective with self-directed, motivated, independent individuals with higher level LBS skills and academic and workplace upgrading goals. However, at present it is also achieving success with lower level learners through supported learning opportunities.

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MORE ON E-CHANNEL



In order to facilitate delivery of e-Channel MTCU has provided e-leads with access to two learning platforms. The Saba CENTRA version 7.5 tool is a “synchronous” platform which allows for groups to meet online as a formal class for practitioner discussion and training, or in smaller sessions with a mentor. Centra also allows for classes to be recorded and revisited should a learner need to go back to listen to the class again or listen to a playback of a class they missed. PLATO Essential Skills Online software is an “asynchronous” platform with learner pathways and over 5,000 hours of curriculum in the areas of reading, writing, math, science, social studies and essential skills.

Although e-Channel was intended first and foremost to assist those who cannot access existing community programs, research shows that blending face-to-face delivery with online training can enhance the effectiveness of the instruction and sharing the online resources with community programs makes it better for everyone. The main attraction of e-Channel is that learners can participate regardless of where they reside or travel. The only requirement is access to a computer and an internet connection. This increased access to services and training helps adult learners to meet their goals.

NATIVE STREAM



Part of the initial pilot project and the Native stream e-lead, Sioux Hudson Literacy Council has been developing and delivering e-Channel learning for five years to adults in Northwestern Ontario who were previously unable to receive LBS services due to the barrier of distance. Following a mandate to reach isolated adult literacy learners, particularly those in remote First Nation communities, this community agency believes that synchronous components are essential elements for e-Channel learning. They have found that high rates of learner retention are directly related to the commitment learners have to showing up to class to ask their instructor questions and/or interact with their peers. Sioux Hudson uses the CENTRA 7.5 platform to deliver a “real time” classroom environment. CENTRA is user friendly and fun to use. Called “Good Learning Anywhere” Sioux Hudson’s e-Channel program offers any Native learner in Ontario literacy and employability skills through its English Primer, Empowerment Through Learning, and Essential Skills Online courses. Most recently, Good Learning Anywhere added an Essential Skills for Heavy Equipment Operators course to their offerings. Please see the article on page four of this newsletter for more information. To register or find out more information, go to: www.sioxhudsonliteracy.com.

FRANCOPHONE STREAM



Centre d’Apprentissage et de Formation Plus (CAF +) is e-lead for the Francophone stream. As such CAF + is increasing its efforts to respond to learning demands with programs that help individuals gain their Grade 12 or equivalency and assist those who wish to access better employment opportunities. It also offers upgrading in the French language, including general improvement, grammatical help or business writing. At present, CAF + programming is delivered primarily in an asynchronous manner, through a course management system called Claroline. Claroline allows learners to interact with their instructor on a regular basis, and gives them the luxury of posting any time of the day or night. This works well for students who juggle their learning around other things in their lives. To assist them, CAF + assigns a mentor to each learner to support them through their studies. It also employs tools such as LOGMEINRESCUE to further assist those distance learners who may experience technological as well as academic problems. CAF + is based out of Cornwall. To register or find out more information, go to www.cafplus.ca.

ANGLOPHONE STREAM



The Learning Hub is the e-Channel learning initiative offered by the Avon Maitland District School Board to all English speaking adults in Ontario. Despite having less than a year under its belt in terms of online delivery of literacy services, AMDSB has a long history of online, distance delivery of other educational services, primarily due to its location in rural Huron County. In its position as e-lead for the Anglophone sector, it offers the Learning Hub, through which a wide range of online literacy programming is delivered. Individualized, self-directed “asynchronous” online training in reading, writing, math, essential skills and pre-GED subject areas is offered primarily through the PLATO Learning Platform, although an online GED assessment tool and software program called Learnscope and the Moodle Course Management System are used as well. Online “synchronous” classes are also scheduled and delivered monthly on CENTRA. These classes address a variety of topics, including: reading, writing, spelling and grammar, math, learning styles, essential skills and computer use. One of the mandates of the Learning Hub is to respond to the needs of its learners in a timely manner, and as a result, it is constantly creating new curriculum topics for CENTRA. Each learner registered through the Learning Hub is assigned an online practitioner to assist them through the learning process. A learning plan, which sets out their goals, creates a learning path, and at exit identifies next steps, is created for each learner. Practitioners also keep open lines of communication with those agencies using the Learning Hub to provide flexible learning opportunities for their learners, in order to create a complementary system of delivery. To register or find out more information go to www.learninghub.ca.

E—CHANNEL SUCCESS STORIES



Perhaps the strongest evidence of “success stories” at **The Learning Hub** is the marked enhanced levels of self-esteem and self-confidence demonstrated by many learners during the past seven months. In particular are the synchronous (CENTRA) students who have participated in the online, interactive classes. They had limited experience on the computer and no previous experience with online classes. After the first class, they were noticeably eager to contribute to conversations and use the whiteboard and they demonstrated proficiency in using icons to express feelings and answer questions. Their enthusiastic assessment of the past classes and their eagerness to enroll in upcoming classes has increased steadily. Many students feel strengthened by their ability to upgrade their skills and their ability to prove to themselves that they can achieve success working towards their goals.

Francine just obtained her Grade 12 diploma through the distance education program at **CAF + Centre d’Apprentissage et de formation Plus** in Cornwall. She didn’t want to have to travel to an adult school because her husband, very sick, needed her at home. She wanted to get ready to join in the workforce if ever required. She planned on finishing her high school diploma and when she heard about the online program, she joined. CAF+ lent her a laptop and she started her courses in April 2007. She worked around her husband’s hospital schedule and never hesitated to ask for help when necessary. She committed herself and enforced discipline. She wrote her final exam in April 2008.

One project **Sioux Hudson** developed was a collaboration with Confederation College called Teacher Assistant Career Training (TACT), an eight-month job readiness program that provided literacy and employability skills upgrading to First Nations residents while they worked in their community school system. The TACT program provided a series of eight courses including Child Development, Communication Skills, etc. One success story is that of a young mother of four, who completed the TACT program and then decided her true calling was to be an educator. She applied to a university, then packed up her family and moved to a large city centre so she could attend a Native Teaching Program. The TACT program gave her the start she needed to follow her dream to work with children.

Good Learning Anywhere Distance Essential Skills Project

By Linda Wright, Sioux Hudson Literacy Council

Sioux Hudson Literacy Council (SHLC) and the Good Learning Anywhere program have been successfully delivering literacy upgrading to the remote areas of Northern Ontario since January 2004 via the online synchronous platform CENTRA. In the Spring of 2007, the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) and SHLC put in a proposal "... to develop and deliver an Essential Skills work module series that can be combined with existing LBS distance modules and those that will continue to be created, forming a core of distance learning materials deliverable to literacy organizations anywhere."

With the input from the diverse and knowledgeable advisory group, a variety of curriculum was reviewed as a possible basis for the group. At the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition conference, a survey was given to practitioners asking for their input on types of occupations that they felt their learners would be able to access, with training, in their communities. This research led to the decision to run a course based on HRSDC's Essential Skills profile for the Heavy Equipment Operator, while websites and online activities were integrated to create a combination of a Moodle (asynchronous) and Centra (synchronous) course.

Our first online Essential Skills course finished on April 2, 2008. This pilot group of eight adult learners participated in a 6 week **Heavy Equipment Operator's** course which focused on developing Essential Skills using authentic workplace material. Areas covered in the course were:

- ⇒ Communication on the Job
- ⇒ Workplace Law
- ⇒ Math for the worksite
- ⇒ Critical Reading at Work
- ⇒ Pictures, Diagrams, Graphs and Blueprints



We had an 87% retention rate in the class. For 71% of the participants, this was their first online course! Participants came from **Kenora, Dryden** and even **Ottawa!** It was interesting in one of the ice breakers where participants were to partner up and find three things that they had in common with each other and one learner came back and said "Wow! We live hundreds of miles away but we like the same stuff!"

Feedback we got from this pilot group on the evaluation was very positive. They suggested running it more than one time per week and 43% felt the most useful part of the course was the live Centra session, while 29% said having the recording of the Centra session to listen to was the most important! Starting in May 2008, three of the participants are enrolled in the Heavy Equipment Operators Course offered by Confederation College.

The suggestions given to us from the learners in the evaluation will be taken into consideration and changes made for another delivery of this program. For further information on this or other courses, contact us at 1- 866-550-0697. You can also visit our website at www.siouxhudsonliteracy.com.

Getting Online Project: On the Move

Getting Online: Distance Education Promising Practices for Canadian Literacy Practitioners (GO) 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.

The research phase of the project is now complete. GO team members have completed the analysis and writing of the research report. This ground-breaking report overviews the research results into trends and issues in online learning in Canada, and 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
- ⇒ Perceptions of the future of online learning



The GO research report now enters the editing and production phase and will be ready for circulation in fall 2008. When complete, this research report will be posted on the GO website. GO team members are very pleased to be presenting project research results at the *Distance Education Technology Symposium* being held by Athabasca University in June 2008.

The GO team is also currently running a successful online pilot course with six literacy practitioners from various Canadian provinces. This course has been designed to introduce literacy practitioners to the use and value of distance learning opportunities and applications. Pilot results will be considered and additional online courses will be offered starting in fall 2008. Some of the topics covered include:

- ⇒ The roles and responsibilities of online learners and facilitators
- ⇒ The differences between online and face-to-face learning
- ⇒ Building online communities

Other GO deliverables in addition to the online training and research mentioned above include:

- ⇒ Researching and writing a "Promising Practices" in online learning manual
- ⇒ Developing self-directed, web-based training modules about promising practices in online learning
- ⇒ Writing articles for academic journals and literacy publications (please note the excellent article about GO in the spring 2008 edition of *"Literacies"*)
- ⇒ Presenting GO research results at several conferences

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).

The pan Canadian GO Project team is made up of: Lynn Best (Newfoundland), Pat Fahy (Alberta), Joanne Kaattari (Ontario), Deborah Morgan (Alberta), Vicki Trottier (Ontario), and Diana Twiss (British Columbia). For more information, please visit: www.nald.ca/gettingonline.

Contact North/ *Contact Nord*...

A New Partner in Literacy Accessibility Across Ontario

By Lois Tobin and Michelle Eady



What is Contact North/*Contact Nord*?

Since 1986 Contact North/*Contact Nord*, Canada's largest distance education and training network, has provided educational and training opportunities for residents of Northern Ontario communities. In partnership with Northern Ontario's colleges, universities and school boards, credit and non-credit courses are provided via the network's e-learning, videoconferencing and audioconferencing platforms.

Contact North/*Contact Nord*'s e-learning platform is now available to Ontario's literacy agencies, networks and provincial organizations to assist literacy learners across Ontario reach their personal literacy goals and gain employability skills.

In August 2007, Contact North/*Contact Nord*, under an agreement with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Literacy and Basic Skills Branch, extended its services to all Ontario literacy agencies to connect, at a distance, with learners, practitioners and other staff and volunteers. Whether it is in a classroom setting, practitioner training session, professional development workshop, or meetings with other agencies or your own staff, Contact North/*Contact Nord*'s e-Channel (Centra 7.5) services are now available to you, your colleagues and learners across the province.

What Services are Provided?

Contact North/*Contact Nord*'s e-Channel platform provides individuals access to Internet-based learning within a classroom/meeting setting. An e-Channel session joins meeting participants together, or students and an instructor together, in an online setting at scheduled dates and times. The network's e-Channel platform provides session participants, via the Internet, the opportunity to speak with each other, work jointly on a common whiteboard, share software applications and use webcam technology during the online class or meeting. A technical help desk is available to all participants accessing e-Channel sessions.

The network is working closely with the LBS lead agencies, Avon Maitland District School Board (Anglophone), Caf+ (Francophone) and Sioux Hudson Literacy Council (Native) to develop and implement e-Channel learner services for the respective LBS Units.

What's Needed to Facilitate a Session?

Have you received Centra software training in the past? Contact North/*Contact Nord*'s e-Channel 7.5 version of the Centra platform features many additional tools and functionalities that the version previously available to Ontario agencies, networks and organizations did not offer. Additional training is available and necessary for leaders and instructors accessing the Contact North/*Contact Nord* e-Channel platform.

Prior to leading an e-Channel session, instructors/leaders participate in the online e-Channel Instructor Training Program. The program includes three Level 1 sessions:

- ⇒ *Part A*, a 90-minute introduction to the 7.5 Centra platform
- ⇒ *Part B*, a two-hour session to acquire additional skills to lead an e-Channel 7.5 Centra session
- ⇒ One-hour *e-Essentials* session which provides details of the e-Channel 7.5 sharing tools.

Level 2 training is available for instructors/leaders interested in the advanced *Agenda Builder* content uploading tool.

It is highly recommended that literacy practitioners and volunteers who may be helping learners to access the e-Channel courses participate in the Level 1 e-Channel instructor training sessions to better prepare themselves to assist e-Channel learners enjoy a successful e-Channel Literacy experience.

What's In the Future?

Contact North/*Contact Nord* eagerly anticipates a collaborative journey of new and innovative literacy practices with literacy leaders and learners across Ontario. A beta release of components of the Contact North/*Contact Nord* e-Channel website is expected over the next several weeks. The website will provide easy e-Channel access and support for learners and practitioners across Ontario. Join us and help make the e-Channel services work for you, your staff and most of all, your learners!

Where Is More Information Available?

If you are interested in participating in the no-cost online training sessions, or if you want to know more about e-Channel services, please contact Michelle Eady, e-Learning Specialist at michelle@contactnorth.ca or Lois Tobin, Director of Learning Technologies at lois@contactnorth.ca. You can also visit the Contact North website at: www.contactnorth.ca.

COMPENDIUM OF WEBSITES

Laubach Literacy Ontario has prepared a compendium of helpful websites that provide students, tutors, and all who are interested with a relevant and organized listing of websites. These websites were reviewed and validated by community-based literacy practitioners. Each site is listed according to the Essential Skills provided.

This excellent resource includes websites about reading, writing, math, computers, workplace, essential skills, fun and games, computers, world news, research, tutor and trainers, and life and lifestyle.

Check out this wonderful resource at:
www.laubach-on.ca/Trainingpost/compendium/index.html



Integrating Technology into Your Literacy Practice with Moodle

By Nancy Friday, AlphaPlus Centre

Moodle is an open-source online learning resource used for creating online courses, meetings and discussions and it is increasingly moving into the mainstream education environment in Canada. AlphaPlus has been using Moodle for the past two years to host a number of learning opportunities for practitioners and learners. We have trained practitioners how to use Moodle to create their own courses and we have also used it to develop a number of new AlphaRoute courses for learners.



To date AlphaPlus has trained 40 practitioners in the basics of Moodle and contracted 18 practitioners to develop and deliver 26 Moodle courses for AlphaRoute learners. The practitioners who attended our eight-week self-managed Moodle training received a lot of support and had the chance to try things out while they were learning. AlphaPlus subscribes to the notion of having hands-on practice by assigning everyone a “sandbox” to play in and get their hands dirty. We also took advantage of Centra through live and recorded sessions for parts of the courses.

Practitioners who were contracted to develop Moodle courses for AlphaRoute continued their training in very practical ways as they moved into the role of AlphaRoute course developers. Their courses were reviewed by peer practitioners. When their courses went live in AlphaRoute, they gained practical experience with Moodle’s learning management features. Every course ended with an evaluation that learners completed, providing course developers with valuable feedback and providing AlphaPlus with direction and recommendations for future courses. Practitioners successfully finished this training with practical, relevant training and corresponding experience.

Here is what practitioners had to say in their evaluation of the training:

- ⇒ *Being able to determine when I did the training was great since I was able to fit it into my schedule.*
- ⇒ *It was great to have the flexibility to access the training when we had time and to have the live Centra training sessions as additional support.*
- ⇒ *Realistic timelines - and these were - really helped keep me on schedule (or close to it).*
- ⇒ *This was the best training I've received in my eight years as a literacy instructor. I feel it helped me as an instructor - I can do more for my students - and it helped me add to my own skill set. I was quite confident around computers at the outset, but got a BIG boost from doing this training.*
- ⇒ *There was a really good mix of hands-on practice, sharing ideas, and resources we can refer to later.*

During June/July and October/November the eight-week Moodle training course will be offered to 50 practitioners. If you are interested, contact Nancy Friday at 1-800-788-1120 x.305. Training spaces are limited.

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