

Best Practices in Digital Literacy: A Case Study



What Are Best Practices in Digital Literacy?

- **Begin with direct instruction for computer skills development but quickly move beyond it and require relevant use of instructed skills in support of other learning.** Traditional explanation, modeling, and controlled activities can help students understand and develop basic skills. If they do not have a chance to use the skills, they will likely not be able to transfer the skills to relevant contexts outside of the classroom.
- **Ensure that students know relevant vocabulary to support their computer use.** If students are to understand instructions, ask questions, and follow directions when using computers and other technologies, they need to know the vocabulary associated with computer components and software, their functions, and the tasks accomplished by their use.
- **Allow ample opportunity for self-directed work that enables students to make choices when applying their computer skills and dealing with challenges that arise.** Although direct instruction on discrete skills can be helpful, the teacher should quickly provide relevant application activities.
- **Meet students where they are, offering opportunities to learn new computer skills or work toward higher-level digital literacy competencies as they become ready.** Many adults do not access the internet in their daily lives due to perceived lack of relevance ([Pew Center for Research Survey, 2013](#)). Instruction in a group setting must be highly differentiated to overcome students' feeling that computer skills are not for them. You can get a sense of a student's skills by administering modules from the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment (which are available at no cost) or another similar assessment or by using a checklist of essential classroom computer skills. This will allow you to focus your work with students on the particular skills they need, and you can update the checklist as students demonstrate the skills on the initial list.

Implementing Best Practices at Southern Rolling Hills Adult Education, a Division of Queen Anne Community College

This case focuses on a workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) class offered by Southern Rolling Hills Adult Education. The teacher, Hannah Benson, has a few years of teaching experience, and the learners are warehouse employees of a factory in the area. The workplace is situated in an exurban region, meaning that learners must travel long distances to the ABE site when they are not working. The 30 students engaged in the 16-week blended learning course are English language learners from different South American countries, all of whom speak Spanish and have Spanish literacy proficiency. All students scored between 200

and 220 on the CASAS reading assessment, with two distinct subgroups of proficiency within that range. The information from this case study came from a recent pilot on establishing blended learning in this new workplace ESL program.

The classroom is organized to support blended learning through a station rotation format, a model of blended learning observed in educational research conducted by the [Clayton Christensen Institute](#). In the station rotation model, students rotate between stations offering different learning modalities and content. At least one of these stations involves online learning (<https://www.blendedlearning.org/models/#stat>). The different stations are used to help differentiate instruction and to offer opportunities for small-group peer-to-peer work, self-directed individual work, and teacher-led lessons simultaneously. Students have access to laptops and Wi-Fi in the classroom.

For some lessons, Hannah had two groups working at different stations focused on different skill areas, such as a language focus or a computer skills focus. With certain topics, students focused on one general skill or topic together, but Hannah also used the different stations to group students and assign relevant activities according to level.

The Best Practices in Action

A class such as Kelsey Myer's, integrating the best practices noted above and based on a station rotation blended format that offers multiple opportunities for differentiation, might provide a selection of the following station activities that support digital literacy development in different ways on any given day.

1. *Station 1. Direct instruction on high-priority English language and literacy competencies, computer skills, or other workplace skills.* Station rotation models generally provide time for teacher-led instruction and include a review or preview of new materials or an introduction to shared key vocabulary. These activities may precede a division of the entire class into groups located at different stations or can be used to support differentiation. In either case, the time is used to cover content prioritized by the instructor on the basis of demonstrated learners' needs, demands of an overarching curriculum, or needed workplace skills identified by the employer. In this case, the teacher based this time on workplace vocabulary recommended by the employer and included on descriptions of work tasks used for job evaluations. On another occasion, the teacher might use the time to demonstrate a required workplace technology (e.g., an app for tracking work tasks). Direct instruction in this case is supported by highly relevant context and an immediate need to use the skill on the job. This part of the lesson **provides some limited direct support for computer skill development and might support students' computer vocabulary knowledge.** This activity promotes **communication and adaptability and willingness to learn.**



2. *Station 2. ESL self-directed study.* Using a free online ESL curriculum in the classroom offers opportunities for learners with very limited computer skills to receive just-in-time support as they build confidence using a computer. One option is USA Learns, a free online curriculum designed to help adults learn English and prepare for U.S. citizenship. The USA Learns curriculum includes media-rich lessons covering speaking, reading, writing, listening, grammar, and vocabulary. USA Learns can be accessed via a mobile app so that learners can work by phone when not in the classroom. Note that higher level learners in this class used Khan Academy, an online learning portal, after they completed, or instead of using, USA Learns. Creating opportunities for self-directed content learning online allows students to creatively apply computer skills; doing so in class makes just-in-time support possible if students are struggling with the digital literacy skills required to engage in online learning. This part of the lesson creates ample opportunities for self-directed work that allows students to make choices on how they apply their computer skills and deal with challenges that arise, promoting **problem solving, self-awareness, and adaptability and willingness to learn.**
3. *Station 3. Computer skill building.* Using no-cost resources such as GCF Learn Free, students can work on basic computer skills. The teacher can periodically dedicate time to introducing vocabulary, demonstrating the skills, or checking on progress. This provides opportunities for direct instruction of focal computer skills. In this class, the teacher also sent learners to websites to find specific information that supported learning objectives for the day, thus creating opportunities for the application of those skills. This part of the lesson ensures that instructional content meets learners where they are and allows ample opportunities for self-directed work that lets students make choices on how they apply their computer skills and deal with challenges that arise. As in the previous station, these activities promote **problem solving, self-awareness, and adaptability and willingness to learn.**
4. *Station 4. Peer-to-peer learning.* Students can work on group projects that maximize opportunities to communicate in English. Projects can be based on learning content featured in other stations. Small-group learning can be strongly focused on technology as well, offering time for learners to collaborate in support of finding information online and then creating presentation slides or media-rich documents to communicate what they have learned. In this class, the teacher conducted a paired activity identifying technology used at work and then assigned a worksheet asking students to order usage instructions. For lower level learners, the time could be used to work on the language of digital literacy. For example, a teacher might provide computer vocabulary activities such as labeling the parts of a computer using a given set of words. This part of the lesson supports meeting the learners where they are and promotes **communication and interpersonal skills.**



Reflection Questions

1. How did this teacher address the learning needs of a diverse class of students?
2. How did the teacher integrate technology into the classroom?
3. How did the teacher scaffold self-directed use of technology outside of the classroom?
4. How did the teacher ensure the relevance of the computer skills taught?

