Instruction Strategies for Distance Learning
ABE Summer Institute
August 20, 2015
Presenters

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Agenda

• Overview of PD supporting ABE DL in Minnesota
• Look at case studies of instructional challenges
• Discuss instructional strategies to meet those challenges
• Review study group proposals
• Present pilot results
• Q & A
• How to get involved in DL PD this year
DL PD Opportunities

Professional Development

HOW CAN YOU GET UP TO SPEED WITH DISTANCE LEARNING?

Take a course with MN ABE Distance Learning and build a better Distance Learning program! The following courses are available:

DL Basics (online)

DL Basics is now available online here. This course is highly recommended for all ABE staff delivering DL. Beginning May 2015, completion will be required for all ABE managers, teachers, and support staff delivering DL.

The course provides foundational information about DL delivery. Included are seven online modules: 1) Introduction – What is Distance Learning?; 2) Curricula, Platforms, and Records; 3) Recruitment, Screening, and Orientation; Instruction; Assessment; 4) Communication and Data Collection; 5) Basic Components of Successful DL Management; 6) Statewide Resources; and 7) Final Course Assignment/Evaluation.

http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/professional-development
Each year, three cohorts are held:
- DL 101 – Year long course for teachers and managers
- DL 102 – Focus on instructional challenges brought by participants
- DL 102: Managers – Focus on strategic planning and capacity building for managers
DL 101

- An online course for agencies to use to develop a plan for distance education
- Covers Recruitment, Screening/Orientation, Teaching and Assessment
- Online Engagement
  - Assignments ask agency staff to read, discuss, meet and develop plans
  - Online discussions with colleagues from around the state (monthly support/discussion webinars as well as phone conferences)
- Final product: A clear written plan of action for each participating consortium/program
DL 102 Focus on Instruction

- Provides an opportunity for experienced DL teachers to consider how to support DL learners

- Study groups form around a common DL instructional issue

- Each participant develops a case study of a self-selected instructional challenge (such as use of specific DL platform, GED math instruction, using email to check-in with learners, etc.)
Focuses on one case study per week

Participants discuss the case study online and share strategies and resources that address the challenge

Each participant tries a strategy and resource they learned from their study group and reports back results in a summary presentation webinar
“Neither Skills Tutor nor USA Learns has a built-in individual communication tool, so we have to rely on email (a requirement for participation in DL at Hubbs) and one-on-one check-ins.”

Challenge:
We have a lot of learners doing DL that complete some unit or lesson every month, but not the minimum requirement for participation in DL, which is four hours a week. Because we have so many learners completing something each month, but not the minimum, we spend a lot of staff time tracking them (using Filemaker Pro), emailing them, possibly turning their logins off, trying to get them to check in with us in order for them to do more. We don't want to scare them or turn them away, because they're doing something and earning proxy hours, but at the same time, we want to enforce our minimum requirement for participation in DL.

Question:
How can I motivate these learners to be more consistent and more frequent in their DL use and communication? Should we be putting more energy at the beginning, during orientation and screening; in the middle, more frequent emails, calls or notes to their teacher; or the end, turning off their logins more quickly? Other ideas?
“The reading level of the directions on Skills Tutor don’t seem to coincide with the level of the activity.”

Challenge
The main instructional challenge has been finding an appropriate platform for deaf students, especially those in lower educational levels. Most platforms for the foundational levels require a lot of listening, which our students are unable to do. Our students are often able to answer many of the questions on Skills Tutor but often need someone to explain the directions or the lesson itself, which makes working independently impossible.

Question
The best option seems to be to create our own platform for distance learning, but this would be a HUGE project. How else can we overcome these communication barriers? This semester we’re going to try using interns and volunteers to help students, but will constant assistance just enable the students?
“Many of our students don’t earn proxy hours because they aren’t able to capture the information needed to redo a lesson correctly.”

Challenge:
Many, if not most, of our students have not mastered study skills needed to be successful distance learners. I would like to design a tool that would be a resource to help them become successful.

Question:
How could I create a mini-learner web style site? I have used Weebly and a blog in the past. I would like to explore how a tool like this could be used to create links to more tools and sites that would be helpful to our students.

Would it create more a more successful student, both in test results, level gains, and proxy hours?
“One student in particular has expressed a desire for another contact method. She really wants face-to-face but has no transportation and childcare is an issue. I’m wondering if ‘meeting’ with me weekly via FaceTime or Skype would help her feel less alone in this process.”

Challenge:
Our instructional challenge specifically with students on a strict DL learning plan, is a combination of retention and adequate student progress. Some students do well working independently, but don’t progress as expected. Others get stuck somewhere along the line and because feedback isn’t immediate or is ‘remote’, frustration sets in.

Question:
Is using FaceTime or Skype a viable option to help DL students feel supported by getting that face-to-face time with a teacher? Will this real-time format help with student retention and success? What kind of problems may occur using this type of communication system? Should I have time limits and specific goal or purpose statements set up before the online meeting takes place?
“One of our students has struggled to improve her test scores over the last year and a half... She also does not use email effectively to communicate with her teachers and is unable to find websites on her own at home. After months of practice, she is able to navigate Skills Tutor fairly effectively, but does not know how to find her own email account, to find classroom links online, or to look up the answer to a question she may have online”

**Challenge:**
Our program has struggled to engage lower to mid-level ELL students in digital literacy and is seeking to improve both the quality of instruction and the quantity of time students spend studying and communicating with teachers online.

**Question:**
What are the unique DL instructional challenges for lower and mid-level ELL students and how do we encourage them to better use available resources and to communicate with their teachers at a distance?
“Neither Skills Tutor nor USA Learns has a built-in individual communication tool, so we have to rely on email (a requirement for participation in DL at Hubbs) and one-on-one check-ins.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion:

- Look for a volunteer interested in communicating with students - creating a Distance Learning Communicator (DLC).
- Try emailing inactive students more frequently.
- Consider charging a fee or a refundable fee for better buy-in.
- Consider creating a DL student survey about what their challenges are.

No pilot for Hubbs
“The reading level of the directions on Skills Tutor don’t seem to coincide with the level of the activity.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion:

• Need to provide supplemental materials to make instructions in SkillsTutor accessible for Deaf ESL students.

• Videos would be the best way to make SkillsTutor more accessible, possibly using iFrames to administer these.

• Our program should consider applying for a grant to help fund this endeavor.

• There are two types of lessons on SkillsTutor. We should consider focusing on the one that is more suitable for our students.

• Consider contacting those at SkillsTutor for possible resources.
Pilot Results:

- Used MLC preliteracy curriculum
- Used Avenue as a way to scaffold the MLC curriculum ([https://avenue.emcl.com/info/](https://avenue.emcl.com/info/))
  - Limited utility but interactive and could support their DL program
  - Good: for multimedia presentation to support text-based items/stories/assessment
  - Good: requires students to review their signing
  - Might be difficult to actually collect hours from this kind of platform
  - Requires a webcam
  - [https://avenue.emcl.com/manage/login.php](https://avenue.emcl.com/manage/login.php)
Rob Whinnery, HV ABE-Red Wing

“Many of our students don’t earn proxy hours because they aren’t able to capture the information needed to redo a lesson correctly.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (1):

- Will create a website to provide structure for student support and a venue for organizing resources
- Will use ideas from other programs’ resource sites to inform and inspire our page.
  - [https://sites.google.com/a/isd192.org/northfield-ged/](https://sites.google.com/a/isd192.org/northfield-ged/)
“Many of our students don’t earn proxy hours because they aren’t able to capture the information needed to redo a lesson correctly.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (2):

• Will incorporate skills from the TIF (Transition Integration Framework) categories Learning Strategies and Self-Management into the website

• GPS Website - link to study info there - [http://www.gpslifeplan.org/education/](http://www.gpslifeplan.org/education/)

• Links to all our learning platforms

• Will make use of director’s skills and appointment as webmaster will support the project

• Will use current district website layout and navigation standards
Pilot Results:

- Developed a DL homebase - a website where all DL tools and supporting/complementary materials are linked. Can also access GPS Lifeplan through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities link.
  - [http://www.hvae.org/](http://www.hvae.org/)
- Requires weekly email check-in (per Christine’s case study learning). Trigger them on a weekly basis to support continuation of learning activities.
- District online inquiry database using google forms…linked to from the website.
Pilot Results:

HVABE Intake Form

Please answer the following questions and one of our intake specialists will contact you with more information.

Name

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Address
Christine Wytaske, Southwest Metro Educational Cooperative

“One student in particular has expressed a desire for another contact method. She really wants face-to-face but has no transportation and childcare is an issue. I’m wondering if ‘meeting’ with me weekly via FaceTime or Skype would help her feel less alone in this process.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (1):

• Use synchronous communication to support students at a distance - Skype/Hangout/FaceTime.

• Particularly important to test with students in math (in order to provide multiple modes for description/instruction - eg: visual and verbal; make use of affective indicators of comprehension or frustration from student)
“One student in particular has expressed a desire for another contact method. She really wants face-to-face but has no transportation and childcare is an issue. I’m wondering if ‘meeting’ with me weekly via FaceTime or Skype would help her feel less alone in this process.”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (2):

- Start with a small group of 2-3 students for the pilot.
- Create a separate attendance log for tracking these hours.
  - “Live” supportive instruction through phones, Skype, webinars, etc. can be counted as contact hours.
- Start off with a once-per-week requirement and adjust as needed.
- Be mindful of how this grows...too many students becomes unreasonable to manage.
Pilot Results:

- Used Skype with DL learners

- Limited piloting time only allowed for a few Skype calls. No data yet on persistence or level gain, but students’ affective response was positive. It seemed motivating for the learners to have a face-to-face conversation while receiving support.

- Helped keep momentum going

- There were some technical barriers that arose -
  - make sure they have a camera and a personal Skype account
  - need to practice and even help set up learners with Skype before you can support them with instructional issues
Clarice Grabau, Dakota Prairie
Adult Basic Education

“One of our students has struggled to improve her test scores over the last year and a half... She also does not use email effectively to communicate with her teachers and is unable to find websites on her own at home. After months of practice, she is able to navigate Skills Tutor fairly effectively, but does not know how to find her own email account, to find classroom links online, or to look up the answer to a question she may have online”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (1):

• Improve communication and support for ELL students working with distance learning platforms such as Rosetta Stone in order to build persistence and extend learning.

• Consider the Northstar Digital Literacy certificate as a prerequisite for DL.
Clarice Grabau, Dakota Prairie  
Adult Basic Education

“One of our students has struggled to improve her test scores over the last year and a half... She also does not use email effectively to communicate with her teachers and is unable to find websites on her own at home. After months of practice, she is able to navigate Skills Tutor fairly effectively, but does not know how to find her own email account, to find classroom links online, or to look up the answer to a question she may have online”

Proposed Solutions from Online Discussion (2):

• Set weekly DL goals with students.
• Consider having an open lab time.
• Ask students to email before activating their DL account.
• Give students some ownership in the setting of DL goals.
• Incorporate digital literacy instruction into regular ELL classrooms.
Pilot Results (1):

- Used Rosetta Stone and Northstar as new DL tools and offered a new Open Lab
  - We purchased 5 Rosetta Stone spots which filled quickly.
  - There were some tech issues around audio/microphones, but we were able to remedy them fairly quickly.
  - We required weekly use of RS or it was deactivated. All but one student continued to use RS. The one student who did not fulfill the requirement had her slot given to another student, as we have a waiting list for RS.
  - Students are required to email in order to reactivate their RS accounts.
  - A link to RS has been put on my website.
Pilot Results (2):

- Several students have passed the Northstar assessments. They seem to enjoy the challenge.

- A Collaboration with Northfield Works for open lab was attempted, as per their request. However, it was only well attended for about a month and then had to be dropped.
  - We may try again next year, with more clear communication with students and teachers about what the lab is for.
Q & A and Discussion
Learn more and get involved!

http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/
Who to Contact

Questions about DL SS Grant Project
Renada Rutmanis: renada.rutmanis@spps.org

Questions about Virtual Taskforce and Communication
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Questions about Professional Development and Learner Web
Jen Vanek: jenvanek@moreliteracy.com

Questions about Skills Tutor and iPathways
Susan Wetenkamp-Brandt: swbrandt@mnliteracy.org

Questions about DL instructional practices and the DL101 and 102 experience
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