AlphaPlus

Annual Report 2013-14

AlphaPlus
www.alphaplus.ca

2013–2014 Annual Report

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

AlphaPlus strives to increase adult literacy skills through the use of digital technologies by supporting educators and stakeholders with research, tools, and training.

Vision

We envision a Canada where all people have the literacy and digital skills to enable them to participate actively in the social, political, cultural, and economic life of our country.

Values

- Literacy is a life-enhancing set of skills, which enable people to fully participate in their communities and see life as full of possibility.

- Using digital technologies is an essential component of literacy. These technologies are critical to almost every activity in our economy and society.

- Adult learners should have fair and equitable access to basic education through a variety of options to meet their unique needs, culture, and circumstances.

- Learners, educators, and AlphaPlus work together in a constantly changing learning environment.

- AlphaPlus uses digital technology tools to model behaviour to the field and to enhance our own learning.

History

In 1998, AlphaPlus was created through the merging of "AlphaCom," an electronic discussion forum for literacy educators and learners, and "Alpha Ontario," a Toronto Public Library project (which began in 1991) for adult literacy and immigrant language educators. Continuing in the tradition of Alpha Ontario, AlphaPlus' mandate became to provide information, resources, and support services to adult literacy and language training programs via educators working in Deaf, Native, Francophone, and Anglophone communities in Ontario.

In 1999, AlphaPlus began its transition into Web-based training with the use of innovative online learning environments and content management systems such as AlphaRoute, Centra, and Moodle. These programs informed the literacy community on the demand for online learning and paved the way for our current Web-based, digital technology focus.

Our current mandate is to research, evaluate, train, and assist with the integration of digital technology into practice to meet the needs and enhance the digital literacy skills of educators and learners.

A Message from the Chair - Judith Robinson

Alphaplus continues to serve the literacy and basic skills and adult education communities with innovative and effective strategies. We focus on supporting both instruction in the use of technology, and the use of technology in instruction, and we achieve these goals in practical ways that save time and money for resource-challenged training providers.

Our IT planning process offers support in using existing digital equipment efficiently and in selecting further tools that are relevant and necessary to individual agencies in delivering their programs. Webinars, Moodle courses, and Tech Tuesdays present new and easier ways for instructors to design and deliver lessons with the latest open source applications and software. Alphaplus curriculum-based resources provide easily adapted lesson materials in the essential digital skills. Our newsletters and web site encourage and facilitate dialogue and partnership building.

This year, the Alphaplus Board has reduced its numbers to reflect the size of our organization and focused on reinforcing the commitment to the concerns of literacy and adult education provision in its members. We ensure a firm foundational knowledge of the field through our compulsory Moodle orientation course, and provide professional development at a full day meeting yearly. And we search out members who can provide perspectives and connection to the various literacy streams and sectors in the province.

We look forward to 2014, supporting the goals of literacy and adult education established by MTCU and helping the many dedicated organizations throughout Ontario to implement the vision.

A Message from the Executive Director – Greg Gulas

AlphaPlus continues to engage in familiar activities, while also exploring some bold new directions. We continued to provide quality resources for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) educators through a variety of professional development opportunities, through our webpage and in association with other LBS support organizations. We also developed a new series of services around the core concept of IT Planning and Mentoring.

The digital world changes constantly and therefore, AlphaPlus strives to stay current on new tools and technology, and then spreads knowledge through professional development opportunities. In the past year we continued to offer training in Moodle, an open source online learning environment, in both English and French. The popular Tech Tuesday series of webinars continued to introduce the LBS field to new and interesting digital tools. And AlphaPlus offered several training sessions on locally relevant technology topics across the province.

AlphaPlus continued its partnership with the Quill Learning Network in providing the Sample Tasks Portal. This website has many sample tasks that educators can adapt for their classrooms, classified by which skills in the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework they help to teach. Users of the Portal can also post sample tasks they have created, so it serves as both a repository and disseminator of knowledge to LBS practitioners.

AlphaPlus also used this past year to study how effective IT Planning could benefit LBS agencies, what the best practices in IT planning are, and how to measure the impact of good planning practice. By gathering data from Canada, The US and Europe, we've been able to synthesize methods we can use with agencies to make sure that their technology is appropriate for their educational goals and being properly integrated into agency practice. Because there are so many possibilities when it comes to emerging technology, having a good idea of what you want to accomplish is essential.

As we enter a new fiscal year, AlphaPlus will be concentrating many of its resources to IT Planning with agencies. And we will continue to offer the professional development opportunities that the field has come to associate with our agency. Through these efforts we hope to continue to keep Ontario LBS agencies and their students on the leading edge of digital literacy.

Resources

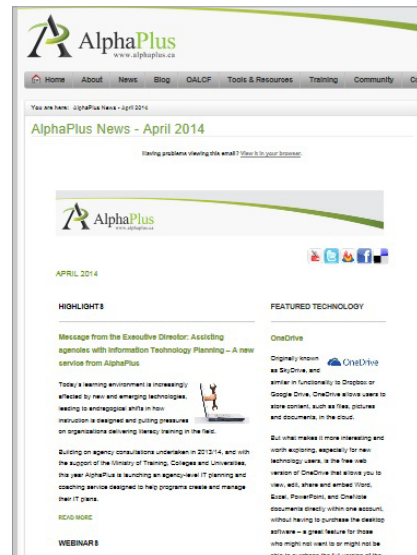### AlphaPlus News – Electronic Newsletter

AlphaPlus' E-News is a newsletter emailed to our subscribers at the end of each month to summarize all the content, information and resources we have published and/or shared online during that month. It reaches almost 2,000 subscribers and provides them with a quick update on our latest activities.

If you don't have time to visit our website on an ongoing basis, consider subscribing to our newsletter and have the updates delivered directly to your inbox. To subscribe to our newsletter or to view our past issues, visit http://alphaplus. ca/en/news/news.html.

Website

The AlphaPlus website (www.alphaplus.ca) is a one-stop-shop for all kinds of information about the organization, our projects and initiatives, resources, training and what's happening in the field. It is our goal to use the AlphaPlus website as an access point to the latest news, updates and facts that support literacy practitioners and organizations in integrating digital technologies into their practice. Last year we have had over 22,444 unique visitors to the site and 3,242 visits to our French website.

In the Featured Technology section of the AlphaPlus French website (http://fr.alphaplus.ca/), we highlighted Google forms, tablets and Dropbox. We also published an article on digital storytelling.

Feedback from site visitors:

"I am really excited about trying Evernote. It sounds like it could be a useful tool. I also liked the way Alpha Plus presented the material. Thank you."

"I like the way it is organized- it is very easy to find things.I especially enjoy the blog section, tools and resources, and training. I find that the descriptions are accurate and informative and the links work.

Social Networking Channels

AlphaPlus also stays connected with followers via social media channels. We are active on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/pages/AlphaPlus-Centre/76833863036), Twitter, (http://twitter.com/alphapluscentre), YouTube (http://youtube.com/alphaplusvideo) and Linkedin (http://www.linkedin.com/company/alphaplus-centre). Recently, we also set up an account on Pinterest (http://www.pinterest.com/alphapluspins/) where we plan to pin interesting information and resources related to digital technologies, for example Apps that can support the OALCF goal paths.

Adult Literacy Network Group on LinkedIn

LinkedIn Groups allow users to connect and share information about a topic that is of interest to them. For a few years now, we have been managing the Adult Literacy Network group on LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Adult-Literacy-Network-2930825), which recently grew to 3,458 members who connect to share information about conferences, exchange information and re-sources, and provide feedback and opinions.

Blog

We posted 40 blog posts this year and received over 3,310 page views. We are happy that the blog continues to be an important source of information for adult literacy, technology, and recent research findings in the literacy field and beyond. To view our blog, visit http://www.alphaplus.ca/en/alphaplus-blog.html.

Pathfinders

Two new pathfinders have been developed in French and English. This year, the pathfinders were built using the "Stack" feature of the social bookmarking tool Delicious. Both of the pathfinders address the use of technology in adult literacy. One is focused on resources supporting the tasks in the OALCF's (Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework) "Use Digital Technology" competency. The second one aims to support literacy practitioners as they develop their skills around the integration of digital technology. The pathfinders can be found at http://alphaplus.ca/en/web-tools/online-tools/pathfinders.html.

AlphaPlus Web Index

The AlphaPlus Web Index is a collection of over a 1000 web-based resources on the various aspects of adult basic education with a focus on digital technology. Its goal is to point practitioners as well as researchers to relevant and recent sources of information. It is available in both English and French.

We added 50 additional resources to our Web Index this year. We have enabled the synchronizing of our collection to two social bookmarking tools: Diigo (https://www.diigo.com/user/Alphaplusindex) and Delicious (http://www.delicious.com/alphapluswebindex).

To access our Web Index, visit http://www.delicious.com/alphapluswebindex and for the Web Index in French visit http://delicious.com/indexweb.

Moodle course hosting

AlphaPlus hosts the Literacy Networks of Ontario *Clear Writing* course on our Virtual Classroom for Adult Educators Moodle site (http://educators/alphaplus.ca). A number of open courses are also available on the Virtual Clasroom for Adult Educators site designed to teach educators about online learning.

Moodle site hosting

AlphaPlus hosts a small number of Moodle sites for Employment Ontario funded literacy agencies. Our hosting site can be found at http://alphaplus.ca/en/training/moodle/moodle-hosting.html.

Information Sessions

This year, AlphaPlus staff presented:

- In conjunction with Debera Flynn from the QUILL Learning Network on the *Task-Based Activities Portal* at the Literacy Northeast AGM on September 30, 2013.

- A workshop titled "*Integrating digital tasks and activities into programming*" at the Ontario Native Literacy Network's AGM on November 29, 2013.

- A workshop about the development of a Digital Technology Competency with application to curriculum framework development and the Essential Skills' *Computer Use.*

- In a panel discussion on digital literacy and PS-TRE (Problem-Solving in Technology-Rich Environments).

AlphaPlus staff attended the following events this year:

- The Literacy and Basic Skills Performance Management System (LBS PMS) Training at the MTCU Office on February 28, 2013.

- The Symposium ontarien de l'éducation et la formation des adultes francophones (Ontario Education and Adult Training Symposium) at the Glendon Campus, York University on March 26-27, 2013.

- The CNIE Conference (Annual event of the Canadian Network for Innovation In Education) from May 1-3, 2013.

- The COFA Forum Annuel (AGM of the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes) in Sudbury on May 28-29, 2013.

- The Summer Institute: Learning from IALS, Preparing for PIAAC at the Centre for Literacy in Montreal on June 26-28, 2013.

- The Moodle MOOC 4-week *Teaching with Moodle: An Introduction Course* in September, 2013.

- The Fall Institute: *Interpreting PIAAC Results: Understanding Competencies of the Future* at the Centre for Literacy in Montreal on October 27-29, 2013.

- The Tech Soup.org workshop on *Digital Storytelling* in December, 2013.

- "*ESKARGO Anyone?,*" an OALCF Implementation Strategy Resource & ESKARGO Training Workshop hosted by the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy on Tuesday, February 11, 2014.

- Laubach Ontario's Literacy Bridges: *Adapting Tutor Training & Resources* based on the *Bridges Out of Poverty* Principles in February, 2014.

- The LINCS discussion on *Digital Badges* in Decrmber, 2013.

- MTML's workshop entitled *Formalizing Transitions between Employment Services and LBS* at Metro Hall on March 17, 2014.

- The Remote Learner Webinar, *Strategies for Using Moodle to Increase Learner Engagement,* in March, 2014.

The Target Professional Development Toronto District School Board – Essential Skills Upgrading Program

For this project, AlphaPlus re-developed learning activities from the *Task-Based Activities for LBS Portal* (http://taskbasedactivitiesforlbs.ca/). These were then presented at two professional development workshops attended by 57 participants in November, 2013. The presentation, *Teaching and Learning with Digital Technology – Why and How,* focused on the practical application of digital technology in Toronto District School Board Essential Skills classrooms, finding *ap*propriate digital materials, information literacy and working with the re-developed learning activities. In terms of impact, the results were positive with the majority of participants reporting high or medium impact and increased confidence in using the redeveloped learning activities and in undertaking redevelopment themselves. The results from a post- workshop survey indicateed that this type of targeted professional development has the potential to have a meaningful impact on the classroom practices of instructors in relation to the use of digital technologies.

George Brown College Consultation

AlphaPlus participated in a consultatation and provided informational support to staff at the Academic Upgrading Program at George Brown College, in support of the development of a revised computer skills curriculum.

OLES/EDSC – Essential Skill Computer Use and a National Digital Strategy

AlphaPlus participated in consultations in the Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) community about the possible re-developments of the Essential Skill *Computer Use* and a national Digital Strategy at the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) and at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). This participation was as a result of our contributions to the development of the *Use Digital Technology Competency* of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) as well as the professional development training sessions and resources developed to support Literacy and Basic Skills' service providers in implementing the OALCF.

PIAAC - Voices Speak to the Data: Feedback from Participants in the PIAAC On-line Field Trial

The report, *Voices Speak to the Data: Feedback from Participants* in the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) On-line Field Trial, was released to contribute to the discussion about PIAAC On-line. The report summarizes the results of two independent surveys that provide some quantitative, but foremost, qualitative data that speaks to the data collected through the Field Trial. For more information, visit http://alphaplus.ca/en/web-tools/online-publications-a-reportsgroup1/voices-speak-to-the-data.html.

OALCF Evidence Based Improvement/Evaluation Feedback

In early 2013, AlphaPlus gathered feedback from Employment Ontario service providers about their use of three key documents of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framekwork (OALCF), which include the Curriculum Framework, the Goal Path Descriptions, and the Service Coordination Paper). A large scale survey and in-person interviews with Literacy and Basic Skills practitioners informed a comprehensive report provided to MTCU, including best practices and recommendations of supports needed for further implementation of the OALCF.

Task-Based Activities for LBS Portal

Once again, AlphaPlus was invited by QUILL Adult Literacy Network to become a partner in developing and managing the *Task-Based Activities for LBS Portal* (http://taskbasedactivitiesforlbs.ca/), a collection of activities aligned with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) and organized by stream, goal path and level. AlphaPlus has been providing training, technical and web development support toward the development of the portal.

Preparing Digital Educators

This year, AlphaPlus delivered the *Preparing Digital Educators* project, a series of six face-to-face workshops designed to help educators and Employment Ontario service delivery agencies incorporate digital technology skills and tasks into the literacy classroom.

The project allowed us to collaborate with a group of amazing partners who helped us plan for and deliver the training to 169 practitioners and administrators across Ontario. The partners included:

- Centre Moi, J'apprends (March 7, 2014)

- Deaf Learn Now (February 18, 2014)

- Literacy Link South Central (January 29, 2014)

- Literacy Northwest (November 14, 2013)

- Literacy Ontario Central South (February 6, 2014)

- Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (January 9, 2014).

While connecting with workshop participants, we had a chance to learn more about the technology and tools educators and literacy staff use in their practice, and a few literacy practitioners also shared their insights with a bigger audience through video interviews which are posted on the AlphaPlus YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/user/AlphaPlusVideo/feed) in the Technology use in the literacy field playlist (http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvQVTPoOXMtWjtdpM4zizIOcvgO0Dt2VW).

We also submitted a proposal, called *Digital Essential Skills in Action*, in order to continue developing and delivering digital skills workshops in the new fiscal year. If approved, we will be partnering with six new organizations who expressed an interest in partnering with AlphaPlus to deliver the workshops.

Using Digital Technology Sample Tasks

A second package of the *Using Digital Technology Sample Tasks* was adapted for LBS service providers in the Francophone Stream in consultation with la Coalition Ontarienne de formation des adultes (COFA). The package provides sample tasks and suggestions for learning activities in the areas of *Manage Health Using Digital Technology, Manage Learning Using Digital Technology,* and *Share and Collaborate Using Digital Technologies* (*Utiliser la technologie numérique pour gérer la santé, Utiliser la technologie numérique pour gérer l'apprentissage, et Utiliser la technologie numérique pour partager et collaborer*). For more information, visit http://utiliserlatechnologienumerique.alphaplus.ca.

Instructional Resources - Use Digital Technology Sample Tasks and Activities adapted for the Francophone community

In support of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework's (OALCF) *Use Digital Technology* competency, we adapted the second package of the instructional resources we published last year, *Use Digital Technology Sample Tasks and Activities.* (http://alphaplus.ca/en/oalcf/use-digital-technology-instructional-resources.html) into French. The tasks, *Ressources d'apprentissage en ligne pour gérer la santé, gérer l'argent et partager et collaborer,* (http://utiliserlatechnologienumerique.alphaplus.ca) are intended to support practitioners working with Francophone adult learners who use digital technology in Literacy and Basic Skills and are made to be adapted and expanded upon. They also offer varied approaches to designing learning materials in relation to the OALCF's *Use Digital Technology* competency.

Training

Tech Tuesdays

Our Tech Tuesdays webinars (http://alphaplus.ca/en/training/webinarsgroup1/tech-tuesdays.html) share information and resources about new and promising technologies and on how to integrate these tools into adult literacy education practice. Together, participants explore new tools and learn how they can use them in their classroom to enhance students' experiences and strengthen their digital technology skills. This year, we had 130 participants registered for the webinars. The topics included:

• Evernote (March 2014)

• Apps (February 2014)

• Google Hangouts (November 2013)

• Dropbox (October 2013)

• Creative Commons (May 2013)

• SMART Boards (April 2013)

Slides and webinar recordings from past sessions are available on the AlphaPlus website under Archived webinars (http://alphaplus.ca/en/training/webinarsgroup1/archived-webinars.html).

Moodle Training – Moodle Mondays, Badge Training

During the first two quarters of the fiscal year, AlphaPlus delivered the final 3 webinars in our *Moodle Mondays* series of 10 webinars and one English 8-week *Introduction to Moodle* training. A number of our Moodle graduates engaged in a 4-week Moodle MOOC delivered by Moodle.org where they could earn course badges to share on social networking sites. AlphaPlus upgraded our Moodle sites to the 2.6+ platform which offers the digital badging option to course developers.

In addition, AlphaPlus delivered a webinar on *Using Open Badges* to educators with a complementary *Badges Trial* course accessible on the Virtual Classroom for Adult Educators Moodle site (http://educators.alphaplus.ca). A 4-week Introduction to Moodle training course was also offered in French in the Fall to staff at the Coalition Ontarienne de formation des adultes.

Learn Moodle completer 2013

Issuer Details	
Name —	Learn.Moodle.net
URL —	http://learn.moodle.net
Badge Details	
Name —	Learn Moodle completer 2013
Description —	This badge is awarded to people who have completed all activities in the course Teaching with Moodle: An Introduction.
Criteria —	http://learn.moodle.net/badges/badge.php?hash=8832aa5b59ea8118dc2d0e8ce273e642d388ea77
Evidence —	http://learn.moodle.net/badges/badge.php?hash=8832aa5b59ea8118dc2d0e8ce273e642d388ea77
Issued —	2013-09-24

Technology Planning

The mission at AlphaPlus is to help delivery agencies provide digital literacy instruction to their students. In 2014-15, AlphaPlus is beginning a new initiative which we hope will tie these activities together, by stepping back and looking at how all the different aspects of technology use in a program fit together. To this end, we are now assisting randomly selected agencies with Information Technology Planning. The goal of this service is to evaluate the educational goals of a program and create a plan to achieve those goals.

Computers and other technology are used in all aspects of Literacy and Basic SKills (LBS) delivery. Agencies use computers for record keeping, Employment Ontario Information System - Case Management System (EOIS/CaMS) data entry and other administrative functions. Many programs also use computers as part of their classes, either to teach specific digital literacy skills, or as an engaging means of presenting literacy skills. But in all these cases, there was a decision making process that put a machine to a specific use and some degree of staff training was required to start using the new systems. Often times, these decisions were made as part of a reactive process. With an IT Plan, agencies will be able to think about what they have and what they want, and then determine the best means of achieving those goals. Providing the right technology for the job, along with appropriate training, when done properly, is a deliberate and thought through process. Technology is a useful tool, given that the right one is used for the job at hand.

Agencies that are working with AlphaPlus to create a technology plan will be assessed for both their available infrastructure, and how it is being used. They will then be asked to identify the top three things they wish to achieve, which can be fixing an existing problem, or adding a new service. Once these goals are articulated, a plan can be created to make these changes. In some cases, existing equipment will suffice, and the changes will be primarily that of staff training. In other cases, a needs analysis will be performed, and the program will have the specifications for the needed equipment articulated. Some programs may be more interested in how to better integrate technology into instruction, so their plan would emphasize professional development offerings to staff. While the plans for each agency will be quite unique, all the agencies that undergo this exercise will end the process with a clear idea of what changes they would like to see in their programs, and an action plan on how to achieve these. AlphaPlus has also created a methodology for tracking the progress and impact of changes made.

In addition, as we work with agencies, common issues are likely to emerge. These issues, and the solutions developed, will be collected in a database, and best practices will be made available to the LBS field. As large trends are uncovered, AlphaPlus will also be able to add to our data regarding what and how programs are using technology to teach digital skills. This data will eventually be presented to the Ministry of Training and Universities, as a snapshot of field conditions, which may help guide the resources that are made available.

A primer on the IT Planning process can be found at http://alphaplus.ca/en/oalcf/technology-planning-roadmap.html.

Assessment Use and Reporting: Investigating Data Integrity Issues

This project aims to investigate why Literacy and Basic Skills **(LBS)** service providers choose to use certain OALCF milestones and the subsequent impacts on data integrity and Performance Management measures. Findings will be used to identify good assessment practices, focusing on Digital Technology Milestones. Common understandings and consistent assessment practices will strengthen the reliability of data in the Employment Ontario Information System - Case Management System (EOIS/CaMS).

CAMERA Online Training: Accessible Professional Development for Educators and Assessors Enhance Best Practices

This project, operating within Employment Ontario, is undertaken in partnership with PTP Adult Learning and Employment Programs. The project was undertaken by the CAMERA (Communication and Math Employment Readiness Assessment) training modules, designed for assessor training and certification for online delivery of Literacy and Basic Skills programs in both English and French.

Développement d'un outil d'évaluation du progrès des personnes apprenantes en contexte de travail et d'apprentissage franco-ontarien

This project, *Development of an evaluation tool of learner gains in a work and learning context in the Francophone community in Ontario*, evaluates the adaptation of an established Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) assessment and placement tool for LBS and Employment Ontario service providers in the Ontario Francophone community to improve learner gains and increase client referrals.

Board Members

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