

Digital Families Project: A case study from Sheffield Family Learning

Digital Families

Introduction

Sheffield Family Learning forms part of Sheffield City Council's Lifelong Learning Skills and Communities Service.(LLSC). The service offers both FEML and WFL programmes to schools, children centre's and community organisations city-wide. We specifically target families in areas of high social and economic deprivation and those with specific needs especially around poverty and English as an additional language. Both WFL and FEML programmes offer a wide range of courses, each with a specific and different focus that includes: speaking and listening, reading, writing, maths, ICT, science, or health. Course length varies between 2 hour introductory workshops, 12 hour and 30 hour courses, many have the children taking part and some are co delivered by a teacher from the setting.

We have recently taken part in a successful NIACE project focusing on blended learning and are actively developing our digital offer. A major part of our current development is around producing a set of websites, one for each of our courses, where learners can access course materials at home and also be directed to other learning tasks and opportunities.

Approach

Two tutors, Jane Mountney and Julie Brearley jointly designed and delivered the course, Jane took responsibility for the digital element and Julie the English. The course took place at Watercliffe Meadows, parents were recruited by the school extended services worker, five parents attended.

The course was focused around a visit to Western Park Museum,with learners encouraged to use digital skills to research, contact staff, risk assess and plan an educational visit for their child.

The main aim for the course was: To ascertain the ways in which family learning can develop basic digital skills to enhance employability. And objectives were:

All learners will:

- develop research skills to help plan an event

- make a digital resource to use with their children
- be aware of purpose and audience when preparing digital content

Some learners may also:

- use google classroom to complete specific tasks

Tutors introduced a wide range of digital resources including:

- Padlet:
- Socrative: <http://www.socrative.com>
- Blogger: see example on attached screen print
- Email
- Google Classroom, see attached screen print
- on-line forms
- Pic Collage: <http://pic-collage.com>
- a dictionary app

We have a website in the first stages of development. We plan to continue adding content for future courses, at the moment it shows some input from learners via Padlet on the “Share With Us’ page:

<https://sites.google.com/a/lifelonglearningandskills.org/digital-families/home>

The Literacy skills taught on the course were mainly writing skills and included:

- formal (email) and informal (Blogger) forms of writing
- audience and purpose
- planning drafting and proof reading
- recounts
- emails
- form filling
- spellchecking

More planning detail can be found on the attached documents

All learners were invited to a follow on course “Discover Coding” at the same venue, this course helps parents to understand the basics of programming using beets,

Raspberry Pi, Scratch and Python. The group was also informed of other learning opportunities available in their area.

Outcomes and impact

The group had been introduced to many skills that were new to them. Emails were the only tool they were previously familiar with, but only in a very informal way, they recognised the value of using emails in a more formal way, especially for communicating in a more professional manner, with a view to gaining employment. Blogger gave the group an experience of diary writing they hadn't had before, together with planning drafting and proofreading this gave the group essential transferable skills. Using websites for research was very new to the group, it encouraged them to plan and think ahead, previously they would have just turned up, not really knowing about opening hours etc. It also opened up the possibilities of searching for work on-line.

The group felt in a better position to support their children with both digital and English skills. Informed parental support will of course contribute to their children's attainment

Both tutors thoroughly enjoyed delivering the course, they were happy with the content included, they felt longer sessions would have been useful, and would make some simple changes in a second run to improve content and enhance the learner's experience.

Our service has fairly recently started to use Google Apps for Education, the course gave the tutors a chance to continue exploring some of the tools available to us. The tutor's experiences have been shared with our team of tutors. We have a regular technology slot planned into our network meetings, we aim to share good practice as well as provide support and training.

Lessons learned

It was particularly successful having two tutors co deliver, each tutor had their own strengths; this gave many opportunities for supporting each other, exploring new resources, learning together and from each other.

The tutors were very open about the course being a pilot, learners were appreciative, and they responded well, contributed their opinions and felt valued.

There are some things that would be changed or developed in a second run.

- Google Classroom was set up, the learners were introduced to it, and they accessed it to a degree, tutors felt the group would really have benefitted from more practice time to increase confidence before using it on their own at home.

Although learners didn't respond to Classroom as much as was hoped, the tutors gain valuable experience setting up classroom and would be in a better positions to prepare future learners

- Tutors would consider using "What's App as an easy method for the group to keep in touch outside of the sessions
- Learners were expected to take their children on a visit in their own time, not all did so. In future the tutors would plan this more carefully with the group and perhaps suggest they visit as a group rather than individual families.

Sustainability and transferability

We will be offering the course to all our settings in the future, we feel it will be an exciting addition to our suite of courses, and will offer much needed support for parents who are struggling in the "digital world." As part of our continual review of our curriculum offer we will identify other courses in which we will embed core digital skills. Our tutor network meetings will take forward any training and development needs of staff in readiness for a new year of delivery in September 2016.

The project has facilitated and promoted learning for our wider Family Learning team and for our deliverers. We intend to share this learning journey with colleagues in the Community Learning Team who are in the process of redesigning and modernising the ICT curriculum.

Dissemination to other Family Learning providers has begun and will continue. We are stressing the vital need for digital skills to be included in courses to enable our families to participate fully and function in today's society. We are encouraging managers to undertake a similar journey to ours: to identify a course in which to embed core digital skills, to identify the digital tools to enhance the learning experience, to identify the staff (2 in our case) to deliver and..... to run the course.

We are encouraging all involved to be brave and to have a go – being prepared to learn as they go along, to learn from things that don't go well and to celebrate success. The only failure after all is to not have a go, to not open ourselves up to learning opportunities.

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