

e-Learning: Supporting learners use of e-learning and technology

8.3 Support learner needs and requirements

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After working through this information sheet you will be able to:

- Develop learner confidence and competency in using technology for learning. 8.3.1
- Assist learners to use technology as part of their learning programme. 8.3.2
- Provide learners with adequate access to specialist facilities and support. 8.3.3
- Ensure learners have the necessary ICT skills to access learning. 8.3.4

Develop learner confidence and competency in using technology for learning.

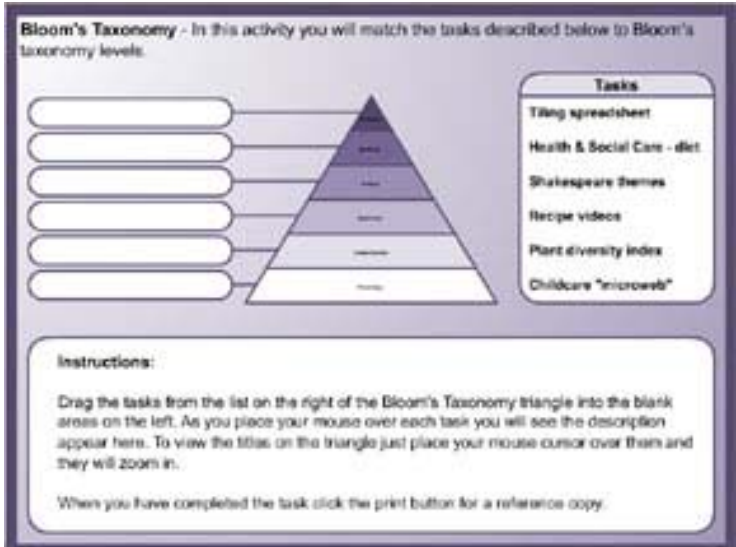
Practice makes perfect and the more learners use technology in their learning the more confident and competent they will become. However, this needs to be balanced against the fact that technology used for its own sake does not always provide the best learning experience. Good starting points for developing learner confidence include:

- Start with the learner's personal technology. Do they have digital cameras? Invite them to take and share relevant images. Do they have an MP3 player? Create a simple podcast using the free Audacity software (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>). Do they have Internet access at home? Create a simple [webquest](#) or Smartgroup for the learners to use.
- Focus on useful and simple. Revision notes available to download may do more to build your learner's appreciation of technology than a complex online simulation.
- Encourage the learners to engage together in active tasks rather than passive tasks –group work and active learning have high value added scores in terms of learning achieved; employ both to build learner confidence in using the technology.

Assist learners to use technology as part of their learning programme

For some learners the challenge is not so much using the technology but evidencing learning. After an hour's "research" on the Internet they have nothing to show for it. Worse still they may have a pile of web page printouts as "evidence of learning" when – in practice - no new connections have been made or new knowledge been acquired. Bloom's taxonomy can be useful here as a shorthand way to describe different levels of learning. By setting tasks at the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (that require learners to compare or contrast, evaluate, analyse, synthesise etc) they come to use technology as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. If Google is seen as a source of ingredients rather than a source of answers, some deep level learning has taken place.

Bloom's Taxonomy - In this activity you will match the tasks described below to Bloom's taxonomy levels.



Tasks

- Tiling spreadsheet
- Health & Social Care - diet
- Shakespeare themes
- Recipe videos
- Plant diversity index
- Childcare "microworlds"

Instructions:

Drag the tasks from the list on the right of the Bloom's Taxonomy triangle into the blank areas on the left. As you place your mouse over each task you will see the description appear here. To view the titles on the triangle just place your mouse cursor over them and they will zoom in.

When you have completed the task click the print button for a reference copy.

Click on the DLR above to match the tasks to Bloom's taxonomy

Aside from these pedagogical considerations, learners will use technology as part of their learning programme if the skills they develop in the process count towards assessment. There is no point in developing a technology rich learner centred programme of study if the assessment is as narrow and inclusive as it always was before. For learners to value their technology skills there must be ways of recognising and accrediting them.

Provide learners with adequate access to specialist facilities and support.

For a number of learners, access to the curriculum is difficult. E-learning often reduces barriers but it can also create them (for example if coordination problems mean you can't use a mouse). The JISC TechDis service recognises seven genres of assistive technology within a teaching context. These are

- Alternative interfaces – for example mouse, keyboard and screen alternatives for learners with a range of disabilities.
- Recording tools – helping learners make notes eg voice recorders, cameras, portable keyboards etc.
- Planning tools – helping learners plan written responses – eg mind mapping software, outlining tools etc.
- Visualisation tools – helping learners understand complex processes – eg animations, video clips, simulations.
- Read assist – helping learners with difficulty in reading print – eg text to speech software; outlining tools; magnification software; functions to change text size, font or colour.
- Write assist – helping learners who experience difficulty in writing – eg voice recognition, word prediction, word banks etc.
- Communication tools – helping learners with limited or no speech – eg symbol based software.

This thematic approach to meeting learner needs has some significant advantages. By focusing on services required rather than software it provides a range of alternative ways of meeting similar needs (some of which are free or low cost) and therefore can give the learners a certain degree of independence and flexibility in supporting themselves. More can be found on the TechDis assistive technology genres at http://www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=6_5_6_2_2.

Figure 1 - Mind map of the seven TechDis genres and their sub-genres.



Ensure learners have the necessary ICT skills to access learning.

It is often the case that younger learners have higher levels of ICT skill than their teachers but even among the “digital native” generation, some people have been exposed to relatively little and others simply don’t like it. It is good practice to ensure any activities involving e-learning and technology include clear instructions and, ideally, a guided run-through.

TASKS

1. On a print out of Figure 1:
 - tick the technologies and approaches with which you are familiar
 - find out how many are available in your organization
 - for those with which you are unfamiliar follow the TechDis link above to note the key features of the technology and the type of learner it will benefit

WEB LINKS

- Open University guide to making your teaching inclusive - <http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/>
- Teachability – Higher Education focus but good tips for all sectors - <http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/>

CROSS REFERENCES TO OTHER INFORMATION SHEETS

- Unit 8 – 8.1
- Unit 8 – 8.2
- Unit 3