Expert guide: Embedding digital literacy to enhance employABILITY thinking

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Digital literacy is now considered to be a foundation skill like reading, writing and arithmetic. As educators, we make assumptions regarding the levels of digital literacy skills we think our students have. Our perceptions of students' digital literacy skills are often much higher than they really are, perhaps because students use their smart phones all the time with ease.

Maybe students appear more competent than we consider ourselves to be?

Perhaps not! There is a significant body of research that indicates common use of the digital tools and applications popular with young people does not necessarily translate into being digitally literate.

Graduates need skills related to using digital technologies creatively, effectively and independently in a digital world. Recent publications by the Australian Government and industry bodies including the Foundation for Young Australians and the Committee for Economic Development of Australia highlight the need for higher education to respond to the fast-changing employment environment. The National Innovation and Science Agenda emphasises the Government's priority of helping students embrace the digital age and prepare for the work of the future.

How does this relate to employability?

Having sound digital literacy skills and having the confidence to grow those skills in different contexts is becoming an essential professional skill for all graduates. If our aim is to help students improve their employability, we must include digital literacy in our curricula, not as a separate topic or course but as an integrated part of discipline learning.

We need to help students recognise the importance of digital literacy in the context of their lives, their learning and their employability, and to encourage them to build the confidence to transfer their skills to multiple contexts.

By embedding the development of digital literacy skills and capabilities across the curriculum and as part of employability, we are supporting our students to recognise the importance of maintaining and extending their digital literacy skills.

5 top tips for developing digital literacy

1. Encourage students and others to share their knowledge and skills with each other and with you. We use different devices and applications, so there is much to be learned by comparing notes.

2. Digital literacy development is best achieved in context. If students are practicing interview techniques, for example, this is a good time to introduce the various tools that may be used facilitate online interviews: for example, Skype or Zoom.

3. Provide opportunities for students to review their digital skills and capabilities, identifying strengths and gaps particularly in the context of their career aspirations. See, for example, the digital literacy component of 'How to form an effective group' (hyperlink), and page 13 of the students' personalised reports.

4. Digital skills become digital capabilities through practice. Provide those opportunities by creating digital options for student presentations, communication, learning and evidence-building.

5. There are extensive resources online to assist with gaining digital skills. Use them! Share them!

Things to avoid

- Don't approach digital literacy as a one-time learning opportunity. Technology is changing at a rapid rate; our digital skills and capabilities need to grow with our changing environment and circumstances.

- Don't assume that others have covered digital literacy in their teaching. If an opportunity exists to address digital literacy, use it.

Further reading and resources

- Decoding Digital Literacy: Jo Coldwell's Fellowship website provides information about digital literacy and resources produced through the fellowship work.

- All Aboard: digital skills in higher education: an Irish national project aimed at empowering "anyone who uses technology to support their work, their study, or other aspects of living in a digital age".

- [Developing Students Digital Literacy Skills](#) is a guide for educators developed by Jisc (UK) with resources to assist you to support students' digital literacy development.

- [Applied Digital Skills](#): a curriculum for practical problem solving with digital tools, created by Google.

- [European Computer Driving Licence](#): a formal certification program.

- Learn how to conduct effective Google (and other browser) searches by searching "how to conduct an effective Google search". This search identifies over 4.4 million videos and is possibly the best place to start as you can then limit future searches to identify the most relevant resources.

- A Google search for digital literacy videos (select 'videos' which usually appears near the search box) identifies over 1.2 million resources to explore. Similarly, a Google search for "how to use Microsoft Word" videos identifies over 1.4 million resources. In fact, a Google search for almost anything will identify resources to help you understand, build and share digital literacy skills and capabilities. Be sure to check the accuracy, validity and appropriateness of online resources before sharing them with students.

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