OSLT Online Guiding Design Principles

From 2018 to 2021, Colleges Ontario participated in a Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) project funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The goal was to examine how to leverage online learning and supports when helping newcomers to Ontario transition to employment or entrepreneurship through Occupation-specific Language Training (OSLT) and Formation linguistique axée sur les professions (FLAP).

As part of that initiative, Colleges Ontario created ten design principles to guide the development of online language curriculum. These design principles are listed below, including

- how it was incorporated (i.e., how it was applied to develop the OSLT online curriculum).

- points to consider (i.e., ideas for curriculum developers to consider when developing and planning the delivery of online language courses).

To request a copy of the full OSLT/FLAP SDI project summary report, please contact Sharon Low at low@collegesontario.org.

OSLT Online Design Principle 1: Ground content in real-world, workplace-based activities.	
How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	**Points to Consider**
- Ensured content of activities clearly related to workplace communication practices. - Modelled activities on workplace practices. - Used scenarios that occur in the workplace. - Provided examples of actual workplace-based communication using videos, audio dialogues, transcripts, etc.	- Undertake upfront, detailed research about the workplace to ensure content is relevant. - Introduce and use technology tools that are commonly found in the workplace for delivering course content. - Conduct ongoing curriculum reviews to integrate evolving workplace practices.

OSLT Online Design Principle 2:

Choose technology tools that serve a clear pedagogical purpose and/or learners are likely to use in the workplace.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider

Pedagogical-related Tools
 	
• Used the teaching tool VoiceThread to develop listening, speaking and presentation skills.
 	
• Used the learning-management system Moodle to organize and manage the course content.
 	
Workplace-related Tools
 	
• Used common workplace technology tools to practise reading and writing skills (for example, Google Docs, email and Microsoft Word).
 	
• Used the Zoom meeting application for weekly synchronous sessions.
	• Connect the technology tool with the skill being taught, for example,
	
	   o VoiceThread for practising speaking situations such as introductions or presentations.
	
	   o Google Docs for writing and editing.
	
	   o Zoom for simulating workplace meetings.
	
	• Ensure learners can clearly see the link between each language task and the tool used.

OSLT Online Design Principle 3:
Scaffold the introduction and integration of technology tools.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider
- Introduced new tools one at a time. - Introduced simple tools before introducing more complicated tools. - Introduced new or high-stakes content separately from introducing new tools. - Ensured technology tools did not overwhelm the course activities and were not more complicated than the task.	- Scaffold the introduction of technology tools to build learner confidence in using technology and to avoid overwhelming learners by requiring them to learn a new tool while interacting with new content. - Introduce a new tool using content learners already know (for example, "Introduce yourself to your classmates"). - Apply a new tool initially to a low-stakes task (i.e., one that is not evaluated). - Use an incremental approach when introducing a more complicated tool. For example, VoiceThread learning could start by - asking learners to comment on a VoiceThread recording. - progressing to using VoiceThread to create a recording. - culminating in using Voice Thread to record a presentation. - Consider the length of the course or module. - Short-duration modules offer limited time for scaffolding, which limits the number and complexity of tools that can be introduced.

OSLT Online Design Principle 4:

Promote activities to build the digital skills required to help learners succeed in online learning.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider

• Screened learners for basic digital literacy prior to course start and redirected those who did not possess the skills necessary to succeed.
• Articulated with learners the criteria for being a successful online learner, including organization and time management.
  o Created a questionnaire in the "Getting Started" materials that helped learners identify what is important for effective learning online.
  o Discussed successful online learning during the first synchronous virtual meeting.
• Encouraged faculty to assign due dates for individual activities throughout the week to help learners spread the work over several days.
• Ensured faculty connected with learners one-on-one before the first synchronous meeting using the technology chosen for the virtual meetings.
	• Set higher CLB-level entry requirements (for example, CLB 6+) for online language training courses than for the same course delivered in a face-to-face format.
	• Establish an applicant-screening process and checklist that identifies an applicant's digital literacy level, access to technology tools and attributes of success (being organized, motivated and able to self-regulate).
	• Communicate to learners before course registration that digital competency/literacy helps them to fully engage with the content and is essential for their success.
	• Ensure learners understand, before course registration, the time commitment expected.
	• Provide examples of what they will be introduced to in the course.
	• Schedule virtual sessions with faculty and learners, either one-on-one or with small groups, before the first synchronous meeting, if feasible. This will
	  o help learners become acquainted with the faculty member and the technology.
	  o identify technological concerns.
	  o clarify expectations.
	  o allow the first synchronous session to focus on the course itself.
	  o help launch the process of building community and creating engagement.
	• Ensure learners have access to appropriate technology and equipment since reliable access to a computer is a key requirement.
	  o Build capacity and establish a process for lending equipment, if feasible.
	  o Advise learners on community-provided access to equipment and internet access.
	• Encourage faculty to actively facilitate learner success. For example,
	  o to help learners organize their time.
	  o to remind learners about assignments and upcoming events.
	  o to provide regular feedback and guidance.

OSLT Online Design Principle 5:	
Facilitate community-building through learner-learner and faculty-to-learner interactions.	
How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	**Points to Consider**
- Included a variety of synchronous and asynchronous interactions among learners and with faculty. - Held weekly, 1- to 1.5-hour, synchronous video conferences with the entire class. - Provided non-focused communication opportunities for learners to engage in conversations not directly related to the course learning outcomes. - Included activities using a range of social and collaborative interactions: pair work (messaging), small-group work (forums and VoiceThreads) and asynchronous, independent work (wikis and forums). - Included an "Open Forum" for learners and faculty to discuss topics of interest. - Organized opportunities for learners to work together in pairs or small groups in synchronous communication. - Emphasized in faculty instruction notes the importance of their ongoing presence, interaction and feedback. - Outlined potential ways faculty could interact with learners in addition to the weekly synchronous virtual meeting.	- Keep in mind that the duration and context of the course affects how much synchronous interaction is feasible. For example, - shorter-duration courses might include fewer synchronous learner-to-learner activities than longer duration courses. - learners who work full-time might find organizing synchronous activities difficult. - Conduct a weekly synchronous session with the whole class to provide opportunities for learners to build relationships with one another through whole-class activities and pair and small-group activities. - Provide multiple opportunities for learners to apply their extensive life experience, international experience and professional experience. - Remind faculty (through instruction notes or faculty training) about the learning-management system tools that facilitate interaction with learners. - Use the features of platforms and applications such as Zoom or Teams to simulate a classroom or meeting space, and use virtual break-out rooms to facilitate team-building, group interactions and pair work. - Train faculty and support them in being responsive to learners outside the synchronous video-conference sessions. - Establish course enrollment numbers that align with expectations for faculty interaction with and feedback to learners, and opportunities for learners to interact with one another.

OSLT Online Design Principle 6:

Present materials in a variety of ways to create and maintain engagement and to ensure practice in all skill areas.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider

• Introduced new material using a variety of formats such as video, audio recordings, PDFs and linked articles.
 	
• Included videos, audio recordings and PDFs developed specifically for the course as well as those sourced from elsewhere.
 	
   o Provided ways for learners to interact with the material and one another using questionnaires, quizzes, wikis, forums, VoiceThreads and synchronous video conferences.
	• Conduct a weekly synchronous session with the whole class to provide opportunities for learners to communicate with multiple people at the same time and to develop the ability to listen, synthesize and speak spontaneously.
	
	• Design weekly activities that include a variety of ways to access and work with the content, without requiring an overwhelming number of different technology tools.
	
	• Select a variety of technology tools that include ways to learn and practise all language-skill areas.
	
	   o Tools that help develop reading and writing skills include forums, wikis and PDFs.
	
	   o Tools that help develop listening and speaking skills include videos, audio, voicemail and VoiceThread.
	
	• Recognize that certain topics may dictate the technology tool that should be used, even if that means repeating the use of that tool.
	
	   o For example, if a discussion is the best way to work with the content in two contiguous activities, then the same tool should be used for both, rather than introducing another tool for the sake of variety.
	
	• Consider the course length when determining the variety and number of technology tools that can be introduced without overwhelming learners.

OSLT Online Design Principle 7:

Use a combination of self-directed, interactive and facilitated learning to build communication skills.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider
• Included required, weekly, individually completed activities (questionnaires and reading/listening quizzes), faculty-facilitated activities (forums, Google Docs, VoiceThreads and virtual conferences) and interactive activities with other learners (wikis, forums and VoiceThreads). • Included a weekly mandatory, 1- to 1.5-hour synchronous video conference with the whole class. • Provided learners with access to optional, self-directed-learning activities to supplement the curriculum.	• Structure the course to maximize engagement and learning by allowing learners to move ahead on their own as well as providing faculty feedback where appropriate. • Design the course to include opportunities for learners to interact with one another both asynchronously and synchronously. • Include a mandatory synchronous virtual video conference for the whole class.

OSLT Online Design Principle 8:

Provide opportunities to practise accuracy and fluency in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider

• Created fluency-targeted reading and writing opportunities using forums, wikis and questionnaires, where the focus was on communicating ideas rather than on the accuracy of the writing.
 	
• Used email, Google Docs, Microsoft Word and quizzes to provide opportunities to focus on the accuracy of writing and reading comprehension.
 	
• Used asynchronous activities (using VoiceThread, videos and audio recordings) and synchronous activities (through Zoom) to develop accuracy and fluency in speaking and listening.
	• Encourage faculty to clearly identify the focus of each activity or task as either accuracy or fluency.
	   o Fluency activities require faculty to consciously focus on assessing whether learners communicated their ideas, rather than whether they did so accurately (for example, grammatically), even if a written format is used.
	   o Explicitly address and reinforce this approach in an online-learning environment because much of the content is in written format. It is tempting for faculty to correct text and for learners to expect this correction, even when the activity is meant to mimic a free-flowing conversation to practise fluency.
	
	• Ensure the curriculum clearly outlines the focus of a task as targeting accuracy or fluency.
	
	• Coach learners so they understand the difference between feedback on accuracy and feedback on fluency. This will help them manage their expectations around faculty feedback.

OSLT Online Design Principle 9:
Ensure learner evaluation reflects the content and goals of the course.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider
Outcomes • Geared course topics and practice activities directly toward achieving course outcomes. • Related course outcomes to workplace-based communication tasks. • Outlined outcomes to learners at the beginning of the course, and referred to them during the teaching and practice activities. • Used target descriptors with a four-point rating scale to determine achievement of course outcomes. **Learner Evaluation** • Evaluated task performance against a performance standard (target descriptors). • Trained faculty to apply each target descriptor's rating scale and calibration. • Discussed target descriptors with learners at the beginning of the course. • Ensured performance-based evaluation tasks reflected the language skills taught. • Used formative and summative evaluation tasks. **Feedback** • Provided formative and summative feedback using target descriptors. • Based the type and amount of formative feedback on the length of the course.	• Ensure outcomes are achievable within the duration of the course. • Align the amount of testing with course duration. o In short-duration online courses, it is inefficient to be continually testing learners. • In courses of shorter duration without time for formal, interim tasks for learner evaluation, it is useful to find another way to provide outcomes-targeted formative feedback during practice activities. • If learner evaluation tasks are performance-based, faculty need calibration training sessions to ensure consistent evaluation across multiple deliveries.

OSLT Online Design Principle 10:

Recognize the key role faculty play in ensuring that learners succeed in achieving course outcomes.

How the Design Principle Was Incorporated	Points to Consider

• Included instruction notes in the curriculum to explain key aspects of the curriculum and to guide, rather than direct, faculty.
 	
• Trained faculty on teaching online courses using the same online format as the course delivery, which provided opportunities to simulate the learners' experience and model effective approaches.
 	
• Equipped faculty with an Assessment Manual, setting out the principles and standards for OSLT evaluation along with target descriptors and rubrics for meeting outcomes.
 	
• Provided faculty with exemplars of successful achievement of outcomes.
 	
• Supported faculty by providing annual calibration sessions.
	• Recognize that faculty play an active role in learner engagement. For example,
	
	   o serving as a guiding hand.
	
	   o building community.
	
	   o providing feedback and timely responses.
	
	   o helping keep learners organized with assignment schedules.
	
	• Alert faculty to the time investments required for synchronous and asynchronous activities.
	
	   o In addition to preparing and being part of synchronous activities, faculty need to set aside time to provide feedback to learners' emails, postings and assignments.
	
	• Calculate ahead of time the resources needed for faculty training.
	
	   o Training is fundamental to successful teaching and delivery of online courses and provides an opportunity for faculty to simulate the experience of the learners.
	
	• Provide faculty with opportunities to share best practices and build their networks outside of training and orientation sessions.
	
	   o For example, set up an online faculty space in the learning-management system where faculty can ask questions and share ideas and resources.