

Educational Technology Users Group
AEST Digital Learning Strategy Overview
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Presenters: Ben Ferrel and Tess Syrowik

BEN FERREL:

Yeah, So my name is Ben Ferrel. I'm the Executive Director responsible for Post-Secondary Digital Policy and Programs within the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training. Thanks so much as I said for having us and there's a couple of us here from the team, Tess Syrowik, who is going to be co-presenting with me today and is driving our slides. And really one of the main contributors and wizards behind what we hope is a very useful tool in the Digital Literacy Framework that we're going to be talking a bit about today. Keleigh now I believe is also with us today. She is the Director of Policy and Engagement within our team. So really helping to steer the ship and move us forward with our Digital Learning Strategy. And also before we jump in, I just, I would also like to acknowledge that I am coming to you today from the traditional territory of the Lekwungen speaking people on Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, I'm down in the southern part of Victoria at St. Ann's Academy. And certainly I am reminded every day of how fortunate we are to get to live and work on these lands. And that it's incumbent upon us, particularly those of us that are working within the provincial government to really prioritize actionable reconciliation and supporting our Indigenous and First Nations communities around the province. And that's certainly something that's at the heart of the work we've been doing around this Strategy to support broader access to post-secondary education through what digital technology can make available. So that's a big priority and something we always try to centre our discussions and our consultation on this work.

So yeah, for the presentation today, we'll be starting with a bit of an overview of our Digital Learning Advisory Committee so just a subtle nuance difference there. We're not an advocacy committee for digital literacy per se. This is a group that was brought together to look at digital learning more generally. So I'll walk through some of the key aspects of what that group has been up to, how we move that work forward and then hand that over to Tess to really dive into the Digital Literacy Framework. How that came together, and some of the opportunities for input and also hopefully for application with that Framework in the post-secondary system, Great, Tess, you can jump ahead.

So the Digital Learning Advisory Committee was initiated by the Ministry in the summer of 2021. So we've been working with this group now for about a year-and-a-half. It was initiated after essentially, I think all of our hopes and dreams of the pandemic being relatively short lived were dashed. And therefore, the transition to emergency remote learning that occurred in March of 2020 timeframe turned into a much more sustained change in how post-secondary was being delivered. Now, understanding at this point, campuses have returned to in-person teaching and learning. That having been definitely anticipated even as we got this work going, what we realized is that there had been an incredible experiment that had been implemented through that adoption of remote learning and then all of the innovation that had to happen to

make that succeed. And so we were really looking at grasping that opportunity to learn some lessons from people's experience, both from the institution side as well as from the student side. To look at how that could be incorporated into the existing knowledge and sort of literature and scholarship around Digital Learning and education technology. Then to envision how, what success would look like for B.C.'s post-secondary system in moving into kind of a five- to ten-year horizon. As we really sort of dealt with what is, I think, fundamentally different landscape coming out of. Or I guess, as we continue to work through the impact of COVID-19. Can go, Tess.

So the Digital Learning Advisory Committee was co-chaired by Dr. Maureen Wideman Associate Vice President of Teaching and Learning at UFV, as well as Nicole Lemma, who's the Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for Post-Secondary Policy and Programs. The committee was built up of members spanning across the different sectors of our post-secondary system and included some of the key organizations that are very active in this space, such as BCNET and BCcampus and then organizations like BCCAT that I think had a real interest in looking at how, say the transfer system might be impacted by having more variation and the mode of delivery of learning. We reached out to the BCFS to have student voice represented across the work. And we actually pulled in some out of province partners or advisors from Athabasca University to kind of broaden that perspective. And then had a number of representatives from certain subject areas and the Ministry. So it was a very representative group filled with expertise and enthusiasm in this space. And my team had the distinct pleasure of providing the support to advance that work. And so in order to actually roll up our sleeves and produce this strategic kind of frame for this, for a provincial response to the shifting role of digital technology and post-secondary, the Advisory Committee struck three Working Groups. We're in domains that had come up as priority and some of our early discussions. So quality enhancement, digital literacy, which is of course the focus of today, and then also technology, finance, and administration. These groups were chaired by representatives from the post-secondary system. So the Quality Enhancement was chaired by Dr. Rajiv Jhangianu from KPU. Digital Literacy Group was chaired by Dr. Chad Thompson from College of New Caledonia. And the Technology, Finance and Administration Group is chaired by Dr. Tanis Morgan from VCC. So really strong leadership. And under that structure, each of the groups really did. It started with your typical research practice of an environmental scan and sort of literature review to understand what other jurisdictions were doing, what the state of scholarship policy regulations were in these different domains. And then from there, really dove into the B.C. context. Thinking about some of the specific challenges or opportunities within the province and within our post-secondary system. And work through a collaborative process to develop what is now the draft Digital Learning Strategy. And that Strategy was tabled as a first draft in late May of this year. We spent an incredible amount of time this summer meeting with folks from around the system, from vice presidents, academic, finance, students, HR directors, chief information officers, registrars. And then with students with Indigenous organizations, really did a pretty significant roadshow and often had many opportunities to engage in discussion with those different audiences. And that I think proved extremely valuable. One in validating that this was important work to be done at a provincial level at this point in time. There was broad recognition that there was substantial change and associated with that, substantial pressure

being placed on institutions as they looked at how to continue to meet student expectations, which had evolved fairly significantly as a result of the shift onto digital platforms during the early days of the pandemic, both within post-secondary, but I think just generally as means of interacting with society. And also the consultation helped identify, I think a few areas that we needed to, to nuance a little bit. And we also, we received some really positive feedback in particular about this Digital Literacy Framework. And it had the opportunity to reach the broader sector of librarians in different groups that are quite interested, I think in many of the underlying principles. And so we're very optimistic that the results of this work following that consultation in through some of the updates that we're making will be really strong and useful product for our system to benefit from.

So just at a very high level, the Digital Learning Strategy that we've developed includes three strategic priorities. First on needing to look at policy and process, both within the provincial government but also some areas within institutional domain. And to contemplate how those may need to evolve. Now that we can step back a little bit and look at this state of affairs as we get back into a state of, perhaps, a new normal with regards to how post-secondary is being delivered. We produced a set of guidelines for technology enhanced learning, as well as the draft Digital Literacy Framework with both, which both sits within that strategic priority around policy and process. And so are intended to really create these mechanisms for our post-secondary system to grab onto and help to work on implementation, I think with some of the findings and some of what came out of this Digital Strategy work. The Strategy also includes a priority looking at system collaboration and coordination as a means of enabling some cost reduction opportunities with procurement of technology. Trying to facilitate, I think, access to software that, you know, where there's existing expertise and existing examples of it having been implemented successfully across the systems, so trying to really create a community where I think much like ETUG and Open ETC, and other things that exist already. Just sort of broadening the awareness and trying to provide support to those types of initiatives to really foster that community of practice so that not everybody feels that they need to reinvent the wheel. And then finally, with regards to digital equity was the third priority. And some of the ways that I think I'm us as the province or the provincial government can really support capacity building in addressing some of the barriers that many people and communities experienced when it comes to making use of digital technologies. I'll say that access to broadband was an absolute universal issue raised as we worked through this. So certainly where we can, we're working with our partners at the Ministry, Citizen Services, and elsewhere to ensure that we're looking at creative ways of not only making it something that the post-secondary system is using to offer broader access to post-secondary education. But also that the individuals on the receiving end of that have access to a network, access to equipment. And then of course, critical to the digital literacy conversation is access to some of the supports, the knowledge, the skills that are fundamental to being successful in doing something as complex as pursuing a post-secondary education mediated through digital technology. So just before you head off, Tess. I guess one thing I do want to say is from our perspective in the provincial government this work is really out there to support the post-secondary system in terms of the different conversations and the different challenges that I think institutions are having to grapple with. So these are tools and I think also a mechanism of bringing provincial level kind of work and

coordination to addressing some of those challenges. This Strategy is not intended to be a mandated sort of set of requirements that institutions have to meet. There's a balance there. We've heard from many people that they think without putting clear accountabilities into the Strategy that need to be met on time-specific basis, it may not see as much traction and implementation. We feel that there's a lot of work that needs to go into preparing everyone at the institutions and their different local contexts. Their different states of readiness and digital maturity, before any sort of expectations of that nature can really be made. And I will also say that we're not have a position here that online learning is in any way the be-all, end-all solution to providing access into remote communities, or even as a fundamental tenet of the post-secondary system, that it is in any way better or in any way a silver bullet type of solution. We really, there was a lot of focus on online in this conversation, but we were really thinking about just technology more generally as it's applied in the learning environments, it's applied across the institution. Regardless of whether somebody is in the class and there's an LMS in the background and a lot of almost like flipped classroom opportunities or that person is studying entirely remotely. There's a significant amount of experience that's occurring through digital technology. And so much of our work is focused on fundamentally pedagogical and policy outcomes that we were identifying and hoping to really support and looking at therefore what the role of technology is in that space. So it's just an open, an important consideration that this is a document that's necessarily driving towards more online. I think there is a role certainly. And it's an important one in creating access, but it's multifaceted and there's a lot else that we're considering. So yeah, that's the framing of all of this. We'll be hopefully more formally communicating and publishing this Strategy in the coming months. We've been working with the Digital Learning Advisory Committee to get their endorsement of the revisions that we've made following that summer consultation. We're going through a final stage of that with the Digital Literacy Framework. And so all of this will be, we hope very much publicly available for you and for you to be able to share with your colleagues very easily and point people back to a location on the Internet in the not-so-distant future. But I believe that I just saw the report. Latest version of it's been shared with this group and I'm pleased for that. So we certainly would still be interested in hearing feedback and, yeah, that's all from me. So I'm going to hand it over to Tess and I'll stick around in case there are any questions. But just appreciate the opportunity and Tess, looking forward to diving into the Digital Literacy Framework.

TESS SYROWIK:

Thanks so much, Ben. It's always helpful to have it fully set up for the next steps here. Alright. So as Ben mentioned, the Digital Learning Strategy included different strategic priorities and recommended actions. One of these recommended actions within the policy and process area was related directly to digital literacy. The strategic party 1b here is up on the screen. Institutions are encouraged to use the B.C. Post-Secondary Digital Literacy Framework to enhance and promote equitable digital literacy across post-secondary populations by developing localized digital literacy policies in collaboration with other institutions when appropriate. Integrating digital literacy, open education resources into courses and programs for learners when appropriate. And of course connecting institutions, educators, and staff with available resources for training and professional development. This is a three-pronged approach with policy, resources, and professional development. And it's intended to provide a

holistic approach for enhancing digital literacy across the post-secondary system. So not just one group, but all groups and supporting everybody as they work through that. And as part of B.C.'s Post-Secondary Digital Learning Strategy, this will be connected with other initiatives developed to support digital learning and digital capacities across the system over time.

So as I believe Andy mentioned, the definition for digital literacy provided in this framework is a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities for using digital tools ethically, effectively, and within a variety of contexts in order to access, interpret, and evaluate information, as well as to create, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others. And so there were a number of resources that informs the Digital Literacy Framework overall. But there were a couple that are just on this slide there that specifically informs this definition, including the K to 12 Digital Literacy Framework. And so we figured, you know, if people are learning, if students are learning a number of a number of digital literacy competencies in their K to 12 education, it is absolutely vital to connect back to what they're coming into the post-secondary system with, or what they might be coming with. Now that we've established the context for the Digital Literacy Framework overall, I'm going to take us a step back to provide background information on the history of this framework.

So as Ben mentioned, the Digital Learning Advisory Committee had a Digital Literacy Working Group. This Working Group involved, included expertise from across the post-secondary system, including organizations such as BCcampus, including colleges, research universities, teaching universities, everything else in-between. And I did see a few members. I was happy to see a few members of that Working Group who are actually in here today. So thank you to those of you who are here and to everyone else who wasn't able to make it. So the Working Group reviewed and discussed the B.C.'s K to 12 Digital Literacy Framework. And I will pop a link in the chat after this, I can't actually find the chat now that I'm presenting on, but I will definitely share that so that you're able to see it, if you're not familiar with it already. Then the research composition and updates were conducted by the secretariat and I was honoured to be part of that secretariat, that it was really a pleasure to dive into this work. And overall, the Working Group provided iterative feedback, guidance, and suggestions for different areas that would be really relevant to look at in developing this framework overall. Here's an overall timeline, the timeframe of the Working Group, of the Working Group and the Framework. So in fall 2021, just over a year ago now, the digital literacy working group was initiated. And then between December and then January of this year, the initial research and development took place for the Framework. And so our team researched multiple sources on digital literacy and developed the beginnings of the Framework. And then, so overall, this Framework was based off of the expertise within the Working group and then expertise across the system in addition to 17 key text resources that really informed the Framework. Between February and May, we collected feedback on the draft Framework and we continue to iterate over time, just sending out a little bit of an update to see, okay, what else? What next, what do we need to do next to keep improving this? In addition to the Working Group, we also spoke with Dr. Rob McMann, who is a specialist in digital literacy in Indigenous communities across Canada. He's researched in, basically from coast to coast to coast. So all the three coasts there. We also worked with the Indigenous Policy and Engagement Branch within our division in the Ministry. We shared the

Framework with BCTLC, BCampus, the Council of Post-Secondary Library Directors of BC, and members of the Digital Learning Advisory Committee and other working groups to open up the opportunity to provide feedback on the drafts that we had within that timeframe of February to May. And then in June, we were able to incorporate the draft of this Framework into the Digital Learning Strategy. And then over the summer, there were consultations across the post-secondary system. Just to share what we've been working on and gather feedback across the system. And we gathered significant feedback for the entire Digital Learning Strategy. It was really fascinating to be part of those conversations. And then in October we worked on integrating that feedback into the, into the Digital Literacy Framework. This fall coming up. I guess it's still fall though it feels a bit like winter you right now. But this fall, we anticipate finalizing the first version of the Framework. We'll be validating this with the Digital Literacy Working Group and also the Digital Learning Advisory Committee. And we look forward to hopefully sharing this more broadly and more publicly soon.

The Digital Literacy Framework includes the knowledge, skills, and abilities for different segments of the population. This is intended to be provided an intersectional opportunity of approach. So if somebody identifies as a digital citizen and incoming learner, a program graduate, or an educator, hopefully people feel comfortable identifying with more than one of those groups if the skills and knowledge and abilities are actually relevant to them. Kind of an intersectional lens there. So if you're, if you're an educator, you aren't having to say, oh, no, not the thing for digital citizenship for me. It's really supposed to be a holistic one there. And of course, not all skills will be relevant to all programs. Not all skills will be relevant to all people. It's meant to be localized as Ben was saying, it's not about so much providing rules or anything that's mandated. It's about providing conversations and the things to be discussed and considered. As I discussed earlier, some prospective uses for the Framework include, of course, the digital literacy policy, educational resources, and professional development. But it really is intended to be localized across different contexts. So we don't anticipate that the digital literacy policies for North Island College will be the same as UBC because those are very different contexts. And so it's just making sure that things do fit the place where they are for the population that they're serving, like any policy should.

Now there are eight thematic competencies within the Digital Literacy Framework. And those were provided by the Digital Literacy Working Groups, specifically from Dr. Debbie Schachter and also Bridie O'Brien, though, if you are here, thank you so much. Those are the legal and ethical considerations, technology, information literacy, digital scholarship, communication and collaboration, creation and curation, digital well-being and community-based learning. Now, I know that everybody has hopefully access to this at this point. And so I'm not going to go into specific details of what is under each of those, but if you've had the chance to look at that, and if you had a chance to consider that, hopefully those are things that resonate with everybody here within the group today.

So I have a few discussion questions just on this slide here that I just wanted to say, thank you so much for your time and attention and I'm going to open up the floor for your questions. But if you do have feedback on, if the Framework resonates with education technology

professionals, or if you have recommendations on how to support and encourage adoption of learning resources related to the Framework, we'd be very happy to hear perspectives. of that across, of course everybody here. And you can always reach out to us and I will put our email address in the chat as well. If you do have questions following up or after you take this away, sit with it for a couple of days and then have time to consider. You are more than welcome to reach out to us. We are excited to see where this conversation leads. Right. Thank you.

FACILITATOR:

So I'll just pop in to say that the next session is starting at 09:40. So if you need to run for a coffee or something, go ahead. But also pop in with some questions here. Just grab the mic or throw them into the chat.

BEN:

Yeah. Thanks for that. So there is a question from Julian in the chat with regards to does information literacy include media literacy? And I think maybe I'll venture into that and I think that you'll see when you look through Framework that the concept of media literacy, I'd say, shows up under several of the domains. I think from an information literacy standpoint, the main aspect that's relevant there would be understanding some of the bias that emerges in the different information depending on where the source is, and a classic example being algorithms underpinning social media and search engine results, etc. But then also understanding that there, from an editorial standpoint, there can be voiced. Trying to say this in a diplomatic way. Media that's intending to get responses through provocative statements as opposed to factual statements and those types of things certainly show up. But other domains include the production of media, understanding appropriate tools, intellectual property and licensing considerations, et cetera. So media, I would say it's something that is a lens through which we look at this digital literacy domain in several of those different competency areas.

There's another question about is there data on digital literacy on different students in post sec. I'm not aware of studies that have really or necessarily quantitative assessment frameworks. Actually, that'd be something very interesting to hear if anybody out there has engaged with assessment frameworks for digital literacy. Because I come from an essential skills and literacy background where we worked with the OECD's Framework under PIAAC, which was something that took decades to develop in terms of useful ways of assessing things like document literacy, numeracy, prose literacy. And so I'm not sure of the state of assessment of digital literacy, but my sense is that it's still pretty nascent. So I would suspect that the data is in a similar state where it's something we're going to have to be working towards getting a better sense of the distribution of digital literacy and fluency across the province. You want to add to either of those.

TESS:

No, But I think you did a great job covering that. Thanks.

BEN:

Again. I'm not seeing any other questions popping up. And if anybody is interested in following up, please do reach out. You can find us. Well, I think our emails are in the Framework itself, but also you can, by virtue of being in the public service, you can just find us because our contact information is available publicly. But yeah, I would encourage anybody who's interested to reach out to Tess or I or Keleigh. We would certainly value conversation around how this resonates, what your suggestions, feedback. I guess, a final point on our next steps, I see we're running low on time. Brian, I don't want to ignore your question or comment in the chat there. But we are working on also security, some additional funding to really support many of the actions that sit within the Digital Learning Strategy and so hope that there'll be some good news coming forward on that. But we are partnering with BCcampus to work with them on producing open educational resources to support the Framework and support institutions in being able to incorporate it into their course curriculum. And as everybody here knows that that group is phenomenal at what they're doing. Some of the early glimpses I've had are very, very exciting. I think there's more of that coming to you this afternoon. Yeah. There you go. Just right on time, Clint. So stick around for that session at 1:00. I think that'll be really great. Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks, Keith. Thanks, Andy for organizing. Thanks, Tess and everybody. I hope you really enjoy this day of exciting conversation.

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