

Possibilities for adult informal learning with technology

These scenarios have been developed to illustrate just some of the multitude of ways in which technologies can support adults. They are aimed at newcomers to the subject, as well as policy makers, practitioners and those in industry who may be interested in further exploring the potential of digital technologies to support adult informal learning journeys. These scenarios provide a starting point for considering the potential benefits of using technologies to support adult informal learning, and the challenges that learners may face around this issue. Although these scenarios resemble the experiences of real people, they are based largely on the findings from an extensive desk research project and do not represent the learning journeys of specific individuals.

There are many ways in which adults learn informally both with and without technologies and these scenarios are not exhaustive and are not intended to endorse particular models of learning journeys. Instead, they point to the many diverse opportunities that technologies can provide to enhance and transform learning, as well as some of the issues and difficulties that need to be considered when we seek to use technology to support adult informal learning. Please see the General Educator's Report for the background research and discussion on which these scenarios are based.

To download scenarios online or for further information go to:
www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/adult-informal-learning.



1. Gaming: a Wii yoga experience prompts Sandra to learn more about her health

The story so far

Sandra is 72 and lives in a care home. Her balance has been affected by a recent stroke and she is a little shaky on her feet. Sandra wants to learn how to improve her health and become more mobile. Anita, the care home manager, suggests that using a Nintendo Wii Fit might help Sandra.

Challenges

"I didn't know where to start with the Wii Fit. I needed someone to show me what to do."

Challenges:

Lack of confidence; fear of technology; lack of knowledge about technology and how to use it.

Needs:

Someone who understands her needs; advice and support in learning how to use technology to address needs; access to a simple, fun and easy to use method to encourage gentle movement.



What she did

"The yoga was a revelation. I've been using the Wii Fit for five weeks now and I've learned how to gently stretch my muscles."

"A balance mat is linked to the computer, which gives instant feedback. You can quickly see how well you are doing and the muscles that you need to work."

"At first, I didn't want to do the exercises alone. So, my friend and I did them together, taking it in turns. We watched each other to make sure we were doing the exercises properly and to give support in case we began to wobble."

Further challenges

"With support from an instructor, I thought I might be able to learn how to keep improving my health." Anita suggested that they go to the library and use the internet to search for a local class.

Challenges:

Lack of information about local provision; not knowing how to find further information; not being able to use the internet.

Needs:

A good local yoga instructor; easy to access information about local provision; help accessing that provision; access to an internet connection.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Now that Sandra is more mobile, she is thinking about walking to the local college to take yoga and pilates classes.

Sandra has purchased a yoga DVD. Some of the other residents now join her in regular 'yoga sessions' using the common room TV.

Sandra now walks to the local library to attend a bite-size computer course and she uses the library's internet provision to take part in an online stroke survivors' support group.

2. Mobile technologies: Jim begins to learn Spanish – from his mobile phone

The story so far

Jim is 23 years old. He left school before he could take his GCSEs and went to work on a construction site. He later joined a Construction Apprenticeship Scheme and achieved his Level 2 NVQ. After several holiday visits to Spain, Jim hopes to live and work there – after he learns some Spanish.

Challenges

Jim wanted to learn conversational Spanish, but did not want to attend an evening class. "When I left school, I said I'd never enter a classroom again. It was more than enough for me to go to college." He rang the course tutor from his Apprenticeship programme to ask his advice.

Challenges:

Negative previous experience of formal education; lack of confidence; lack of time.

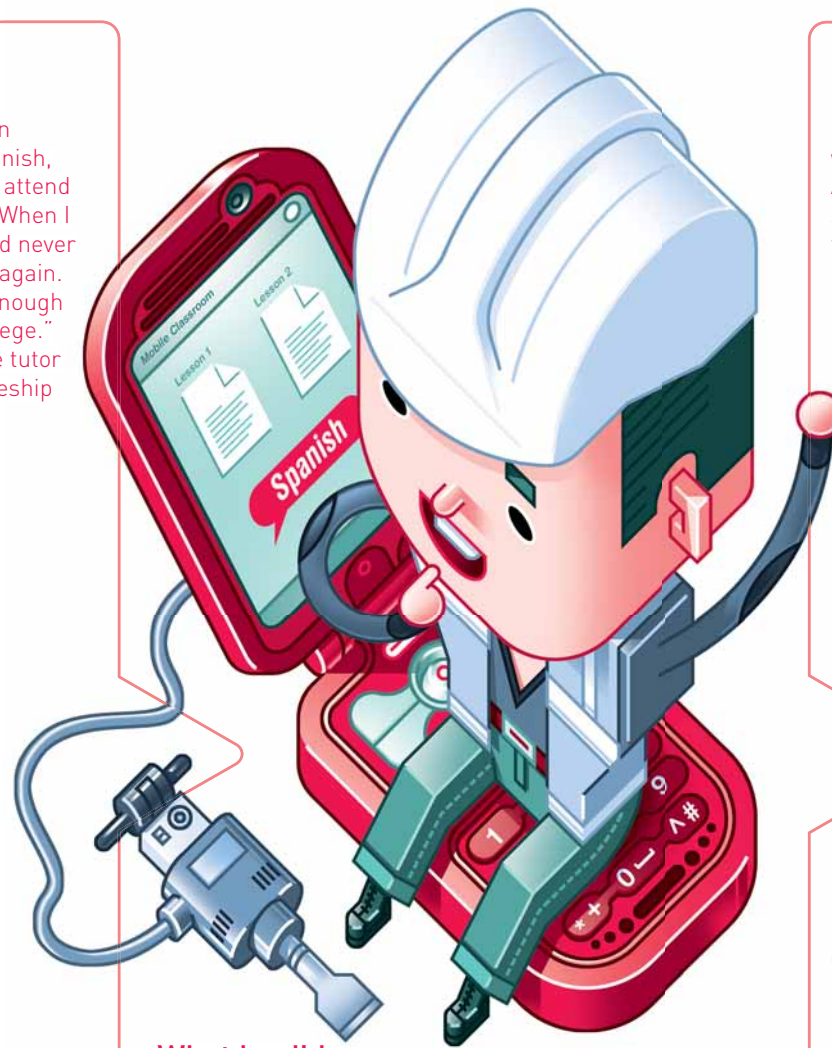
Needs:

Flexibility in timing and location of learning; someone to give tailored advice about what is available outside the formal system.

What he did

"My course tutor for my Apprenticeship suggested some language learning courses that I could do on my mobile phone." Jim was excited at this prospect because he could learn in his own time and at his own pace.

"I found a language service that sends ten phrases a day to your mobile phone. You hear the words pronounced by a native speaker and then you can listen to these as many times as you want. After that, you can repeat the word using your phone to record your pronunciation. Then you playback your recording and compare that with the native speaker."



Further challenges

"The library had helped me with information about my Apprenticeship programme, so it seemed a decent place to start."

Challenges:

Continued concern about entering formal educational settings; lack of information about provision and alternative learning opportunities.

Needs:

More advanced learning opportunities; flexible provision; a way of meeting Spanish speakers; easily accessible and personalised information about future opportunities and encouragement to take them.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Jim is considering signing up for an online Spanish course with the local college to expand his vocabulary and pronunciation.

Jim has now joined a Spanish-speaking chat room to develop his conversational skills and is flying to Spain in three weeks for job interviews. "One of the foremen seemed quite pleased that I had made the effort to learn some Spanish."

Jim plans to use the local library and the internet to learn more about Spain and Spanish culture.

3. The internet: using the internet to learn in new ways

The story so far

Elaine is 41, has always been interested in her family's Irish culture and wanted to learn more about Ireland. She is bedridden with severe MS and finds it hard to sit up for long periods. Her husband bought her a laptop to help her connect with the outside world.

Challenges

Elaine did not have full mobility in her hands. She searched online and found that she could order a big keyboard with a rollerball. "The keys are much bigger, so it is easier and quicker to use. The roller ball is simpler to use than the mouse as I don't have to hold it."

Challenges:

Lack of mobility; isolation caused by illness.

Needs:

Specially designed technology; online learning opportunities; ways to interact with people when unable to leave the house.



What she did

"Once I found a way of using my laptop easily, nothing held me back. I listened to music videos on sites such as YouTube and MySpace. I found discussion forums about Irish bands as well as Irish politics and I downloaded podcasts on Irish history. I also used information sites, such as Wikipedia and Culture Ireland."

"I had been spending a lot of time researching, but it didn't have any focus. My goal was to find someone who could help me identify the gaps in my knowledge and then offer me some direction. I wondered if an online course would work for me because I can't travel easily."

Further challenges

"I never know with my illness how I will feel on any particular day. My main worry was falling behind with the coursework."

Challenges:

Illness causes varying degrees of energy; continued limited mobility; lack of knowledge about how to take learning further.

Needs:

A tutor to help facilitate further learning; flexible, self-paced, online quality provision.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Elaine has been accepted onto an online course in Irish Studies.

Elaine is making contact with other family members via e-mail and Instant Messenger. "The hardest part of the MS for me has been watching my life shrink. I had begun to feel isolated."

Now she feels more comfortable with the subject, Elaine is writing a blog where she reflects on issues related to Irish politics.

4. Broadcasting: watching TV leads Grace to self-discovery

The story so far

Grace is 55 and has three A-levels. She has worked in the human resources department of a large company for ten years. Recently, she has been watching *Who Do You Think You Are?* on the BBC and felt inspired to learn more about her own West Indian heritage.

Challenges

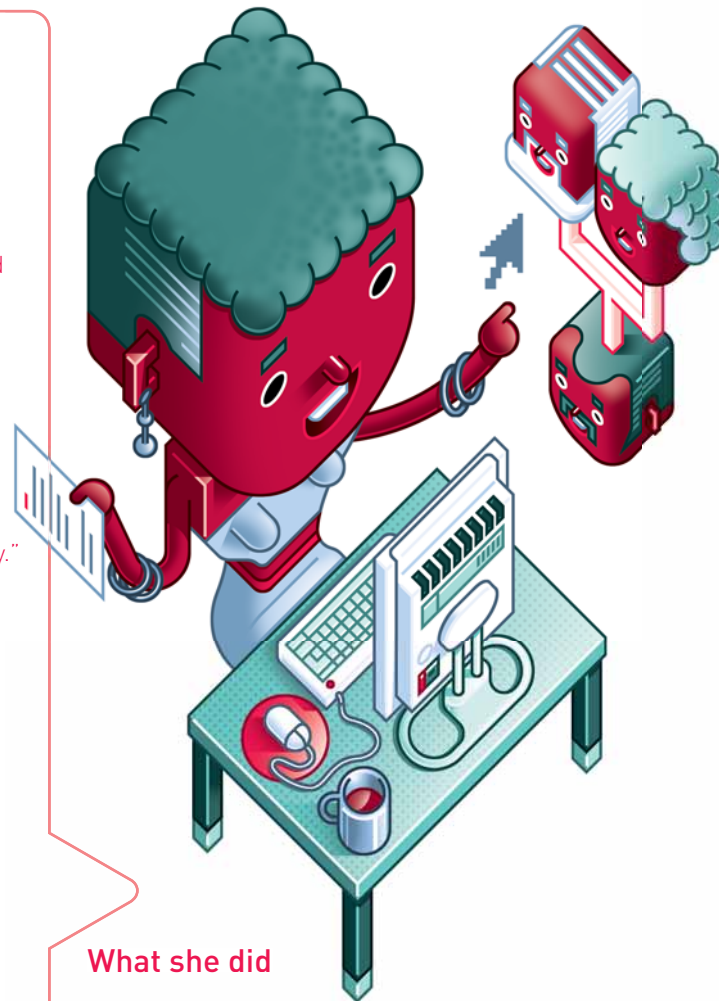
"I have always had a push-pull feeling about researching our family history. My mother died when I was young and somehow we never talked about when or how my parents came to live in England. I knew I would be starting out with very little information. Also, I was put off by the idea of writing to Jamaica for birth certificates and official documents, then waiting months for a reply."

Challenges:

Mixed emotional feelings; put off by bureaucracy; lack of knowledge about where to begin.

Needs:

Motivation and encouragement; information about how to research family background.



What she did

The *Who Do You Think You Are?* site has a beginner's guide to family history research, which Grace took step by step. Breaking the task down into small chunks kept her from feeling overwhelmed.

"I started by setting out what I already knew and then I began to interview my father, who is quite elderly. The BBC site linked with other helpful sites such as National Archives online and Ancestry.co.uk. These all helped me to discover that my father sailed into Plymouth in 1955 and my mother arrived two years later. I found documentation that showed that my maternal grandfather was a poet who lived in Kingston."

Grace plans to further investigate the family history on both parents' sides.

Further challenges

"I am now using the National Archive site to take my research to the next level. I have even listened to a number of podcasts that teach you about good research habits and the materials you need to explore."

Challenges:

Not knowing how to take research forward to the next level.

Needs:

Further information about research methods and learning opportunities.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Grace will be attending *Who Do You Think You Are? Live*. "I can't wait to meet experts from the National Archives who might help me continue to fill in the gaps of my family history."

Grace's visit to the Imperial War Museum sparked her interest in the role of West Indians in modern Britain. She has visited exhibitions, including the Cuming Museum, London and the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI).

Grace has joined a poetry evening class at her local further education college. "I have always loved writing poetry – now I know where I get it from."

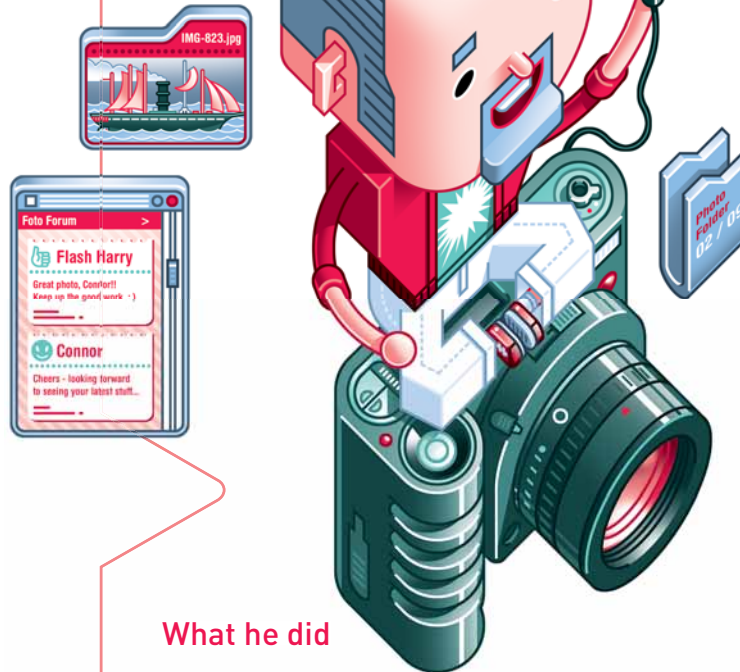
5. Social networking: sharing photography with people around the world helps Connor to focus on becoming a better photographer

The story so far

Connor is 38, has no qualifications, and works as a cleaner for the local council. His passion is photography. His wife bought him a digital camera for Christmas. He wants to improve his photography and isn't sure where to begin although he knows he will have to learn to use the computer. His aim is to learn to edit the images digitally and find a way to share ideas with others.

Challenges

"My son's school held an after-school computer club for parents. I went along and the kids showed us how to surf the internet."



Challenges:

No previous experience of using a digital camera; very little experience of using computers; not knowing other people with a common interest.

Needs:

Support to learn about computers and digital cameras; a way to share his photography with others and discuss it; a computer with an internet connection.

What he did

After I learned a bit more about how to use a computer, I joined an online photographic community and managed to upload some images. People from all over the world responded to my photos and their tips were really valuable."

"I learned where to crop pictures for more impact and how to improve the composition of an image." Connor also found that he improved his own work by studying other people's images and the comments they received.

A group of people with similar interests has emerged and they make sure they comment on each other's work. "You have to give feedback in order to get feedback," explains Connor. "The quality of my pictures has improved and I'm now focused on becoming an even better photographer."

Further challenges

Connor liked the idea of a course, but was put off by the requirement of submitting essays because he was slow on a keyboard. "I found a games site on the internet that helps you improve your typing skills. It was great fun and I can now find my way around a keyboard reasonably well."

Challenges:

Slow using a keyboard; lack of time; lack of knowledge about how to take his learning forward to the next level.

Needs:

A fun way to improve his typing skills; information about local provision.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Connor has now registered for the digital photography course at the local college.

Connor has joined the Royal Photographic Society. "There is an online forum that's really helpful. I'm hoping to submit my work for a distinction award." The work Connor does on the course will help him to develop his portfolio.

The library has invited Connor to enter some of his photographs into an exhibition of local photographers' work.

6. Community Radio: Padma becomes a broadcasting success

The story so far

Padma is 48. She has four GCSEs and a qualification in book-keeping. She works part-time, but her passion is Punjabi music and she wants to learn more about the musicians who make this music. Padma's local community radio station regularly asks people to volunteer to make programmes. With her children away at university, Padma is keen to get involved.

Challenges

Padma didn't feel confident in her abilities once she saw the equipment at the studio. "They told me that the station also plays over the internet and offers podcasts that visitors can download. I had no idea what a podcast was."

Challenges:

Lack of confidence; lack of knowledge about equipment.

Needs:

Initial on-the-job training leading to more in-depth learning opportunities.



What she did

"I'd never been in a radio station before," Padma explains. She met another volunteer who offered to show her around the studio. The station manager, Aisha, asked Padma to come back the following week to see how things worked in more detail.

"I saw that my local library had an afternoon session on using the internet, so I went along to that first. The people at the station kept talking about things like 'internet streaming' and I wanted to learn as much as I could before I went back."

"I went back to the station for the day, along with several other potential volunteers. Aisha showed us how to use the computers and the sound equipment. She got us working in pairs to create a programme - and we did it. After that, a few of us worked together, making broadcasts every week. Aisha offered help when we needed it."

Further challenges

Padma wanted to bring her programmes to life with interviews. "The challenge was how to do the interviews without having to travel - I certainly couldn't afford a trip to India."

Challenges:

Not able to travel; lack of finances; lack of information about advanced use of technology.

Needs:

More advanced education on broadcasting; more information about how to continue using digital technologies for research after broadcasting course has finished.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Padma regularly interviews a variety of Indian musicians from all over the world. She hosts a weekly show for her local community radio station, which features interviews with these musicians.

Padma's community radio station offers a 12-week course in broadcasting for women. She has been accepted onto this course, which will begin in the autumn.

Padma has designed her own website featuring different musicians. It has interviews with them covering their personal history, the types of instruments they play and information on tour dates. The site has many visitors who download the podcasts that Padma has made.

About Futurelab

Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

- incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom
- offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools
- communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT
- provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.



About Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. It is our ambition to utilise the benefits of technology to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities, enabling them to achieve their potential. We do this in many ways. We make sure the right technology is available, we influence the development of policy, and we set standards and provide tools that help establish and promote best practice. We know that technology has the potential to transform learning. We are committed to inspiring education providers to realise that potential, and equip learners for Britain's future success.

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About this programme of work

Futurelab is undertaking a programme of work - supported by Becta - to contribute to their 'Harnessing Technology: Next Generation Learning 2008-14' strategy which aims to bring about a step-change in the way technology is used across the education and skills system, enabling learners to take greater control of their learning.

As part of this programme of work, Futurelab is investigating the potential of digital technologies to support adult informal learning. We are carrying out research into adult learners' needs and aspirations and the role of digital technologies in widening access to and supporting adult informal learning.

This poster is one of the outcomes from this work but for further information, go to: www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/adult-informal-learning.

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What is adult informal learning?

A definition often used to describe informal learning is 'casual everyday learning'. Informal learning is self-directed, self-motivated and personally meaningful - it may be unstructured and spontaneous and it can occur anytime, anywhere and anyhow the learner so chooses. Informal learning is one part of a spectrum which also includes non-formal learning (non-formal learning can be understood as adult and community education such as evening classes). It is important to make connections between different forms of learning, and informal learning should therefore be viewed as one part of an adult learning journey which may consist of multiple episodes of formal, non-formal and informal learning.