

Technology Solutions for Adult Foundational Education Challenges

The CrowdED Learning SkillBlox Solution

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Challenge

Adult education teachers often want to find, organize, or adapt high quality free or open education Resources (OER) content for their students.

Solution

There are a few free, online, proprietary adult education curricula such as USALearns, Khan Academy, Core Skills Mastery, and others, but these usually do not allow teachers to organize or adapt their content, and some are not based on any specific standards. There are open educational resources (OER), such as those found in the adult education/adult foundational education section of OER Commons, but these often are not based on adult education content standards, and their quality may be uneven. Now there is the beginning of a solution to this content challenge.

SkillBlox is an initiative of the EdTech Center at World Education where its creator, Jeff Goumas, now works. In this column, I will briefly describe SkillBlox, what you will find there now, and what is planned. A skill block, according to Goumas, is a skill-based collection of activities that teachers create by finding, organizing, and adding aligned free and open education resources that can be shared with their students and shared with and then adapted by other teachers for their students.

According to information on the SkillBlox webpage users can:

- “Explore over 10,000 activities by skill framework or open search;” (A skill framework is used to organize the content within SkillBlox. An example is the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education that were used for organizing mathematics activities.)
- “filter to find the perfect activities for your learners;”
- “select activities in multiple formats, from various publishers, across multiple subjects to create your SkillBlox;” and,
- “Rearrange and customize activities, integrate additional activities across subjects, and add your own activities;” and you can “Share your SkillBlox with individual students or classes via text or share code, or embed onto your website or LMS.” In other words, built into this CrowdED Learning application, teachers have a way to find and select the free, OER (or commercial) lesson activity content they are looking for to enable them to meet their students’ needs and put it into a skill block, a selected group of free, OER or other instructional activities or resources for their students. They can then organize those resources, add their own, and share it with, or assign it to, their students. Here’s a link to a short video in which Jeff Goumas demonstrates that process:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VzSGEtHgU&list=PLqyFMb8fmrFRnb8OfCnUi8U71cYFmI_3Q&index=4

Given that SkillBlox has over 10,000 activities, it can accurately be described as a free, online library of resources for adult educators, to which the EdTech Center appears to have plans to add more. For example, it is part of the *Digital Resilience in the American Workforce (DRAW) initiative* that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. With this project, adult foundational education teachers have been working together to curate digital skills activities from a variety of high-quality, widely used sources. The Digital Skills Library in which

these resources are housed is “an open repository of free learning resources designed to help all adult learners develop the digital skills needed to achieve their personal, civic, educational, and career goals.” As is typical of CrowdED Learning libraries, these resources are aligned to content standards, in this case to the Seattle Digital Equity Initiative Digital Skills Framework. While the Digital Skills Library provides a traditional, standalone option for exploring high-quality resources to develop digital literacy, all of these resources are also in the SkillBlox library, which allows teachers to create customized skill blocks that combine any variation of resources they wish to share with learners.

Explore by Domain



Communication



Creation



Device Ownership



Gateway Skills



Information Skills



Lifelong Learning



Mobile



Online Life



Privacy and Security



Workplace

The Digital Skills Library domains

The 10 domains (above) under which these skills are organized in the Digital Skills Library are: communication, creation, device ownership, gateway skills, information skills, lifelong learning, mobile, online life, privacy and security, and workplace.

Additional Offerings from CrowdED Learning

The CrowdED Learning website also offers a more general Skill Directory with continuously compiled annotated links to websites organized by academic competencies: reading, mathematics, language/writing, science,

and social studies. It also includes workplace competencies: communication, essential skills (content sites, vocabulary, professional development resources, and additional resources) and career pathways. Also included are lifelong learning competencies: digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and information literacy. It also offers tools for teachers: communication tools (video calls/meeting tools), chat/messaging tools, content resources, supplemental learning content, quiz/assessment tools, management, assignment and sharing tools, and additional resources to support teachers in edtech tool selection.

There is also a section devoted to the EdTech Maker Space. It offers descriptions of teacher workshops built upon current and recent projects in which adult foundational education teachers have collaborated in service learning-based professional development project crowdsource activities through resource curation, adaptation, and creation of OER. For example, CrowdED Learning recruited 40+ adult educators in Summer 2020 who were interested in learning the ins and outs of edtech tools such as Quizlet, Google Forms, and Wakelet, all the while applying their new skills as they built freely available resources.

Then, in the Summer 2021, adult educators from across the country came together for a series of “content jams” and “design slams” to create content and activity ideas to support digital skill instruction and integration. In the spring of 2021 and winter of 2022 an EdTech Maker Space event involved over 50 adult educators who worked collaboratively to help answer the question “Where should adult educators turn to find resources that support the skills learners want and need for personal, educational, civic, and career success?” The results of these maker spaces are to be found in SkillBlox.

Plans for SkillBlox in the Near Future

In correspondence with Jeff Goumas in June 2022, I learned of these plans:

- In 2022-2023:** As part of a Teaching Skills that Matter (TSTM)/SkillBlox U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences grant, they will be doing designed-based research feature updates by iterating and testing with TSTM teachers. As part of this, they plan to add many teacher-created and curated activities through six EdTech Maker Spaces offered between June 2022 and July 2023, as well as building in features that make it easier for sharing, customizing, and vetting content within SkillBlox. They also hope to add student accounts, making it possible for students to save and bookmark skill blocks that have been shared with them.
- Establishing Community:** The EdTech Center is working to make SkillBlox more than just a platform of content, but rather a community in which the platform gets better both through features added based on educator input as well as through the collective contribution of content by educators through their EdTech Maker Spaces. For example, in addition to adding all of the curated resources from the Digital Skills Library (generated by way of an EdTech Maker Space), they intend to add the teacher-created resources developed by these events, such as all of the story-level Quizlets and Google Forms that were generated for each of the Reading Skills for Today’s Adults stories and the vocabulary and language building activities that were generated for the Staying Healthy for Beginners and Staying Healthy ESOL Health Literacy curricula. In addition, whenever teachers add their own resource to a skill block that they have created, they can

indicate if they recommend it for addition to the public SkillBlox library.



As I understand it, the EdTech Center at World Education is working to establish its Crowded Learning initiative as an open content ecosystem for adult foundational education. SkillBlox is a teacher curriculum development application/tool that provides an organized library of curated and organized, teacher created OER products. Periodic EdTech Maker Space projects, supported by funders who wish to support development of innovative, free or OER curriculum resources for adult foundational education teachers and students, provide structured opportunities for adult educators to expand the available content within SkillBlox. SkillBlox is relatively new and, as a result, its collection is most developed in its Leveled Reading Library, Digital Literacy Skills Library, Staying Healthy service-learning professional development project in which mobile-friendly ESOL/ESL health literacy activities were

created, and its *Teaching Skills That Matter* project, TSTM/SkillBlox Instructional Support Pilot. I understand that a series of EdTech Maker Space projects in 2022-23 will expand the volume of resources aligned to the TSTM topic areas of civics, digital literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, and workplace readiness.

Reflection

I believe that SkillBlox is a first-of-its-kind in our field to provide sustained resources for standards-based content that is teacher-created using OER. It has several benefits to teachers and ultimately to learners. These include: new, free, OER lessons and learning activities that are grounded in teachers' understanding of students' needs; an opportunity for adult foundational education teachers, and federal, state and local administrators, to identify OER content aligned to state and national adult foundational education content standards or competencies; through the EdTech Maker Space, a deep and sustained professional development opportunity for teachers; and a way for professional adult foundational education content developers to see and, in some cases, emulate practitioner innovations in curriculum development. It is a great resource, too, for teachers who want to find, organize, or adapt high quality, free or OER content for their students.