

The Challenges of Teaching Financial Literacy

Overcoming Curriculum Constraints with Online Programming

No one questions the importance of teaching financial literacy. Money makes the world go round after all. It is immensely relevant to every single human being, yet education departments worldwide are strangely reluctant to mandate a specific space for it in their curriculums. Maybe they think teaching financial literacy is the responsibility of the parents.

It probably should be, however, many parents weren't taught financial literacy themselves, so they don't have the necessary knowledge or confidence to teach things that they had to learn through trial and error. Chances are, you can identify with this? So, it falls back on schools to teach it.

The first big challenge with financial literacy is: where do you fit it in to the teaching programme?

The default subject is usually maths. Most finance requires the use of algebra, so maths is a reasonable starting point. However, financial literacy is so much more than maths. It's financial literacy after all. It is the understanding of vocabulary and concepts relating to finance. It is comprehension, recall and application of words and ideas that relate to every day living.

For example, what is interest? What does a secured loan mean? What is an investment? Incidentally, MoneyTime's research in five Christchurch, New Zealand, schools found less than 50% of year 7 and 8 students understood what interest is and a frighteningly small percentage could explain what an investment is.

The other area where financial literacy applies is social studies. It is an opportunity for students to learn how their life compares to that of others so they can put their own situation in context. For example, how much money they earn for pocket money, what the family grocery shopping costs each week, or how much the average home costs in their area. By learning things like this, they learn that we all experience life differently and we need to have respect, tolerance and empathy for others. There is no right or wrong, but some ways create happier or easier outcome than others.

So, financial literacy is a topic that can be taught across all three subject areas and this is something that should be encouraged as life isn't experienced in a series of silos. This thinking also aligns with the current push to create effective cross-curricular teaching and learning programmes. The benefit of spreading financial literacy across Maths, English and Social Studies is that it relieves the pressure to fit financial literacy in whilst still completing your other subject requirements.

The next important question is: Do you personally have enough financial literacy to teach it? I alluded to this issue above. Many teachers don't have great financial literacy themselves which causes them to lack the confidence to educate others (through no fault of their own). This can be a problem if the resources you are using require you to do the teaching.

Fortunately, there are programmes available that do the teaching for you. The first type involves trained facilitators who come into your school and spend time teaching your students. They provide a stimulating live experience, with interaction and (sometimes) giveaways.






The weakness in these types of programmes is the high expense to pay facilitators. As a result, the programmes are of short duration and are “light touch.” Arguably, these programmes create only a superficial knowledge. Examples of these are ASB’s “GetWise,” in New Zealand and The Commonwealth Bank’s “Smart Start,” in Australia.

The other type of programme is online resources that offer Self Directed Learning (SDL). Students access lessons online and complete them in their own time. Their key advantage is that the programme does the teaching for you. You don’t have to know anything, although if your financial literacy isn’t great, you can do the programme alongside your students!

Other advantages include the scaffolding of content which builds deeper, longer-lasting knowledge, and the provision of quizzes and tests for assessment purposes. Examples of these

programmes include Everfi, Kahoot! (USA) and MoneyTime (NZ).

The online programmes also enable you to set lessons for a group of students whilst you take another learning group, prescribe lessons for study time, as an after-school activity or set lessons as homework. In other words, they help relieve the pressure of a full curriculum.

If you haven’t trialled an online programme yet, why not give it a go? The trials are invariably free, the sign-up process simple and the programmes remarkably easy to manage. The result will be your students gaining valuable financial knowledge and confidence, without you stressing about teaching it! 



Neil is the designer and author of MoneyTime, an online financial literacy programme for year 7/8 students. MoneyTime was launched in New Zealand in June 2018 and is already being used or trialled by 190 primary schools nationwide.

For more information, please visit www.moneytime.co.nz