

Transforming School Libraries in Canada: Leading Learning from The Learning Commons

Saskatchewan School Library Association

THE MEDIUM – WINTER 2014

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"The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities."

David Lankes Expect More

The forthcoming publication of the new standards for school libraries in Canada is a remarkable testimony to the dynamics of collaborative knowledge creation. It is indeed the fruition work of many dedicated individuals and groups passionate about the future of school libraries from almost every corner of Canada. The story of this extraordinary journey is worth sharing with you because it is a perfect example of the possibilities of learning today in our networked world. Just imagine what learning tomorrow will be like? How can the Standards for School Library Learning Commons help us prepare for new adventures in learning?

The Journey So Far

Four years ago the very first Treasure Mountain Canada symposium was held in Edmonton with a focus on Transforming Canadian School Libraries to Meet the Needs of 21st Century Learners. One of the many excellent projects suggested in 2010 was the renewal of our National Standards for School Library Programs in Canada, Achieving Information Literacy. The work began behind the scenes over the next two years by individuals and groups to explore the possibilities. In 2012 TMC2 participants met for another meeting of the minds in Ottawa charged to explore Learning for the Future and possible frameworks to guide the writing of new standards. The work and synergy from these early collaborations was carried over to the National Project and a new partnership forged with CLA, the CLA School Libraries Advisory Committee and the Voices for School Libraries Network. We invite you to follow the work and resources on the project web site. Together we have been working for another two years now to produce a common set of standards for all schools in Canada. The final product will help library personnel and school leaders to acquire skills and develop strategies and action plans needed to implement a vibrant and sustainable school library learning commons model. In the near future plans are bubbling to create a website with more examples and support to compliment this first stage of the project. The e-book will be

launched at the 2014 CLA National Conference and Trade Show in Victoria in conjunction with the third Treasure Mountain Canada school library symposium. We invite you all to join with us at this next working conference to develop strategies for marketing and implementation.

Starting with the belief that every student in Canada deserves and needs the benefits of excellent school library programs and facilities, we began the writing. It was obvious from the onset that we desired input from all provinces and territories in Canada and we wanted the end result to be a national vision and plan that would call for serious reinvestment in school libraries to lead learning now and in the future.

In keeping with CLA focus on partnerships and liaisons within and beyond the school, regional committees were set up by the following organizations in coordinating this national initiative:

- British Columbia Teacher-Librarian Association (BCTLA)
- Alberta School Library Association (ASLC)
- Saskatchewan School Library Association (SSLA)
- Manitoba School Library Association (MSLA)
- Ontario School Library Association (OSLA)
- Quebec Association pour la promotion des services documentaires scolaires (APSDS)
- Nova Scotia (Regional Libraries and School Boards)
- New Brunswick (Regional Libraries and School Boards)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (Schools)
- Yukon – Teacher-Librarians’ Sub-Association
- Prince Edward Island Teacher Librarian Association (PEITLA)
- Northwest Territories (Schools)
- Nunavut (Schools)

Every step of the way has been transparent and collaborative and truly exciting for us as facilitators of this project. The results are rich and reflective of our combined vision for leading learning with futures-oriented learning environments and building literacies and dispositions to empower all learners in Canada. Together we have developed a continuum of indicators for five basic standards of an effective school library learning commons.

The steering committee and focus group decided right from the beginning that this work would try to reach every school in Canada, knowing the realities and disparities from school to school, district to district. In our work with regional committees we discovered just how grim the situation is in some schools ranging from no physical facility to book

rooms managed by volunteers. We also discovered fabulous programs and facilities that will provide a rich base for these standards to build on. This reality led to the establishment of the four levels of implementation and a continuum of growth indicators plus an added pre-standards recognition for schools starting with very little. Our goal is to provide the best learning opportunities for all students in Canada regardless of the challenges.

Developing Indicator Levels for Implementation Illustrations



Source: “Growth Indicators” figure, from *Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada (Draft)*, Canadian Library Association (CLA). Copyright © 2014 CLA. All rights reserved.

Exploring - Although research and practice make it clear that every child deserves the expert support of a teacher-librarian, we must provide a point of entry for every school to begin the stages towards building a learning commons. With this in mind, we acknowledge a pre-standards level, “Exploring” because we have many schools libraries, if they exist at all, managed by personnel with no library or educational training. At this pre-standards level the school community will be utilizing the standards and resources in the eBook to begin the review of their school library and to help them develop goals and action plans for moving forward.

The growth continuum charts begin with schools already in the first phase of learning commons transitions but will also be a great help to exploring schools establishing points of entry.

Emerging - At this first level schools have embraced the School Library Learning Commons concepts and they have established a Learning Commons Leadership Team to begin the work of preparing the library facility, collections, technologies and teaching and support staff for renewed focus on learning in changing environments. In terms of staffing the school has professional staff (teacher-librarian, learning commons teacher or library technician). We urge principals to ensure that if they have professional non-teaching staff they also assign a keen and capable teacher from the classroom to take the lead in the LC with regard to program. We can still begin utilizing the potential of the Learning Commons resources for teaching if we have a teacher designate to shape program around each provincial/territorial curriculum. Once teachers and admin begin to realize that this learning environment offers many new opportunities they will invest and move forward along the continuum.

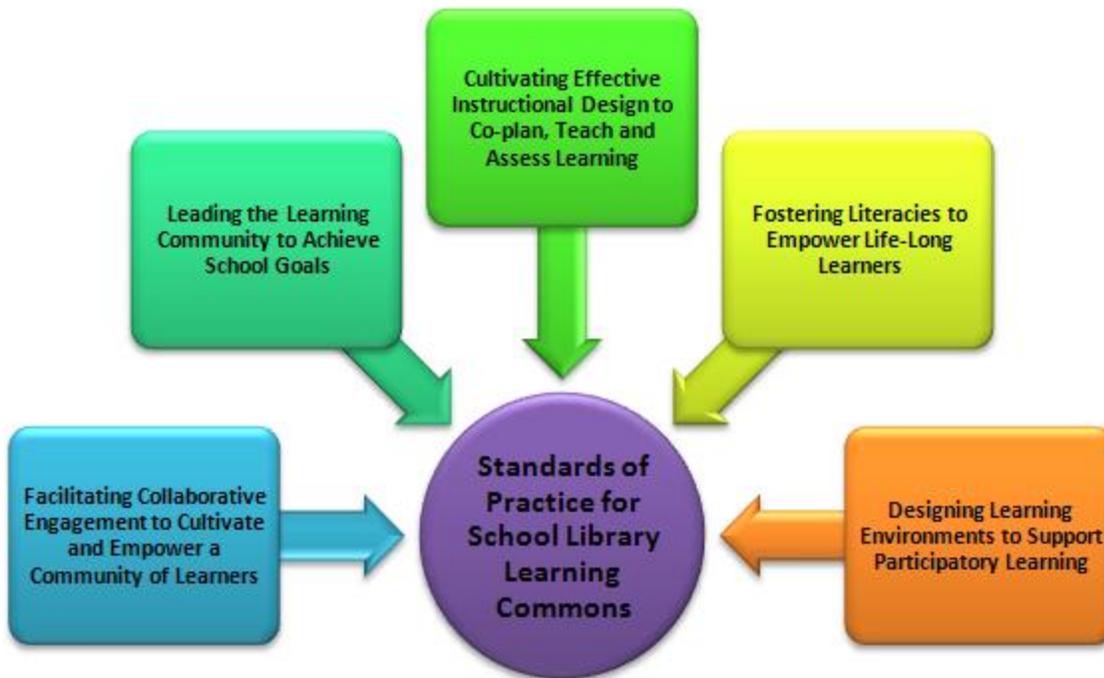
Evolving - The second level is a budding SLLC program but realistically there are probably still staffing and scheduling issues; yet progress in teaching and learning is evident. The Learning Commons Leadership Team is building a collaborative school culture with teachers and students with a focus on inquiry learning that utilizes the teaching expertise, resources, technologies and spaces of the School Library Learning Commons.

Established - The third level is where we would like all schools to be at, with teacher-librarians in place facilitating excellent programs, perhaps only part time, but the culture of collaboration and participatory learning is established and the SLLC program is advancing school improvement. The School Library Learning Commons is dedicated to building teaching partnerships to design and guide engaging and effective collaborative learning and participatory knowledge building experiences.

Leading - The fourth level is to provide opportunity for exemplary program and leadership to take us forward, as this is a growth continuum not a rubric we don't stop; we keep on responding to changes and needs and in the true spirit of learning commons reach out to help others and build capacity as a national and global community of learners.

Developing the Standards

A focus group of individual school library leaders across Canada was charged to build on the work from TMC2 and develop the areas of focus, which eventually evolved into five standards for School Library Learning Commons. The standards were sent out to regional committees for review and comment. Using the regional committee responses to each standard as a base, we applied the ideas put forward to build a continuum of growth indicators for each standard. Continuous growth charts have been developed to indicate beginning steps for each standard and progressive stages of implementation. Each stage builds on the accomplishments of the previous stage thus the indicator language is not repeated in most cases but takes on another layer or another aspect of implementation growth. In keeping with the responsive nature of the School Library Learning Commons (SLLC), there is no end to the continuum as it evolves to keep pace with information and technology changes and school needs of the future. Each indicator is supported by a link to work taking place in school libraries today thus bringing the document to life.



Source: “Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons” figure, from *Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada (Draft)*, Canadian Library Association (CLA). Copyright © 2014 CLA. All rights reserved.

Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate/Empower a Community of Learners

Local, regional and global connections are a vital part of the 21st Century learning environment. The learning commons plays a key role in cultivating and facilitating collaboration to provide rich experiential learning opportunities. It provides not only a physical space to develop skills and engage learners, but also is a portal to virtual connections, both local and global. It is important to acknowledge the diverse needs of all stakeholders within the school learning commons community, both in terms of resource formats and access to information and collaboration opportunities.

Leading the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals

Strong leadership for the learning commons is vital to ensure sustainability and attainment of school, jurisdiction and provincial student learning goals and outcomes. Forming a team to lead the learning commons is an effective way to intentionally plan for and assess the success of the goals of this learning space. The ultimate goal is improved student achievement and the refining of essential literacy, information management and communication skills. As such, it is also key to build in opportunities for student learning and innovation to be demonstrated, shared and showcased.

Cultivating Effective Instructional Design to Co-plan, Teach and Assess Learning

Knowledge-building, creativity and innovation, and honing of information management and literacy skills are key goals of the learning commons. The intentional teaching of these skills, as well as opportunities to utilize a variety of resources, technologies and spaces to support learning require collaboration and planning and thoughtful instructional design, as does the effective assessment of learning. Learners also need to 'learn how to learn' through deliberate design of opportunities to build metacognition of learning skills, process and content. It is essential to support both student and teacher growth and success in these areas.

Fostering Literacy to Empower Life-Long Learners

With the explosion of new technologies and methods of communication come expanding understandings of literacy which have made the refinement and demonstration of strong literacy skills ever more important for learners. Exploring and connecting various ways of knowing and learning is part of the process of personalizing learning and involves embracing new ideas and skills. The School Library Learning Commons has a leading role in assisting learners to hone and apply an expanded notion of literacy.

Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning

Active and knowledgeable involvement in participatory learning is a necessary skill for today's learners. Learners are moving from being only consumers of information to active producers and participants. Recent advances in technology have enabled individuals to actively and quickly comment on the work of others, as well as produce and share their own work. Inherent in these activities is the importance of security, privacy and good citizenship practices as well as effective collaboration skills and ensuring accessibility for all. Working together in groups, both virtually and in person is the new norm. A learning commons can provide both the physical and virtual learning environments as well as support necessary to be an active participatory learner. Learning commons spaces, collections and tools are changing in response to this paradigm shift.

Now you are joining our journey.

We have given you a pre-publication peek at some of the major concepts behind the standards. We hope you are as excited as we are about future possibilities. You have so much already in place in the Saskatchewan school library community to build on. We congratulate you on your hard work, and your school and district leadership as well as the vision of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. You have a strong and active

school library community that not only support each other in your daily work but also are active producers of concrete supports that propel school libraries into the centre of teaching and learning. The recent collaborative Inquiry project has reconfirmed the pedagogical role of teacher-librarians and empowered all teachers with a wealth of tools to further inquiry learning in their schools. Now we ask you to take the lead again!

How will we know that the school library learning commons is helping schools to achieve school goals?

How will we know that the standards framework is working?

The Learning Commons has the potential to drive the changes needed to bring schools into the future, improve student achievement, and thus sustain whole school improvement. This is not a pie in the sky wish but a reality of change possible when schools embrace the Learning Commons as a whole school approach to educating for the 21st Century.....Teachers and learners as well, make informed decisions about improving their performance by considering theories about 'best practice', reading the research ('what the experts say'), as well as by careful assessment of their own experiences. (Loertscher, Koechlin and Zwaan, 2011).

Call for action research to implement the standards

Teacher-librarians can study issues pertinent to their own professional growth and the school's student learning goals through action research as a professional development tool in order to take action that facilitates a desired change or answers significant questions related to learning, teaching, and professional growth. (Sykes, 2013)

Action Research is Key

Action research is key to moving forward the Canadian standards of practice for the school library learning commons within the context of each school. It can provide deep knowledge for you and your school staff regarding the impact of work in the School Library Learning Commons for student learning; You may recall research projects from graduate study and recognize the value; but struggle with finding time to engage in research in your everyday work can you find "time" to engage in action research and move into strategic reflective practice? We have to ask ourselves questions such as: Why do I feel so pressed for time in my school? What does this say about the culture of my school? My profession? Is this a new phenomenon in my profession? Is it the same for others in my school? How do they feel about it? How does the issue of time affect

student learning? (Sykes 2013) -What are we doing with time in our lives and our practices? What can we stop doing so we can start doing other things that may be more helpful to our students and staff?

Make action research your teacher professional growth plan.

Once you have the full standards document, consider your entry points on the continuums. Consider your school goals. Develop an action research project for your growth plan: e.g. How can the school library learning commons perspective enhance mathematics learning in our school?”. How can my work with teachers co-designing inquiry learning advance student achievement? How does the virtual learning commons build a collaborative learning culture? When you meet with your principal to formalize your growth plan you will find another level of support and concrete evidence to advance your work.

Think like a researcher

Like physical fitness (another life/work balance challenge) short increments - five or ten minutes here and there throughout the day - all add up to great benefit. Take ~~ten~~ five minutes to make a note about something that has occurred related to your project, take another five-to create questions you are pondering, and another five minutes to archive a good resource you want to explore. Use technology - there are many charts/outlines/even APPs available digitally. If you need a “research refresher” or want extended time for a project, explore what your school district or teacher’s association may offer around grants or short-term study leaves for teachers to conduct research project. Action research really does need to become a “lived practice and process” that provides the critical lens of “questioning and inquiry” to the everyday work we live and do.

Sometimes once you have spent time in depth on a project once returning to work you will find it easier to continue to live in practice and adopt these skills and processes to engage the staff and students.

Listening to that “voice”

Action research is often spurred by a critical incident or a lingering problem. There is a concern that you are very passionate about; an issue or idea that is constantly nudging you as you strive to make headway. Listen to your inner voice. Think about the problem in terms of how the learning commons could impact the study of your concern or idea. Explore the benefits this could bring to the school and the students, the inter-connectivity and inter-disciplinary learning you could facilitate.

Keep it simple:

- Consider your present program and the needs of learners today.
- Identify a target for improvement.
- Develop questions to guide your work.
- Imagine how you might achieve your target.
- Investigate what others have tried and develop your own plan.
- Try it out, adjust strategies if necessary and keep track of your evidence.
- Analyze and interpret your results.
- Prepare a summary report and share.
- Apply your findings to better address learning needs in your school library.

Be Collaborative

Sharing action research challenges and success enlightens all of us in the school library learning commons community. Working with another teacher or a small group will enrich the process. It is always helpful to build a learning network and bounce ideas around with others. Many of the resources below also offer links to other teacher-librarian action research projects and discoveries. Many teacher-librarians, such as ones identified in Sykes 2013, are pleased to have other teacher-librarians contact them for questions or advice. Replication of other studies can also reinforce or change findings, important to transformative work around our Canadian standards of practice for the school library learning commons.

Over to You

We hope we have inspired you to join this journey from whatever point you find yourself on the transition continuum. Explore the potential, network with others, ask questions, start documenting your progress, gather the evidence of your success, experiment with solutions, get creative and enjoy knowing that the library learning commons is a journey worth leading.

Resources to Get You Started

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