Transition Literacy in High Schools - a school model

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Lifelong Learning at LSS

In k-12 classrooms across Canada, the literacy needs of students are based on the curriculum guidelines in each province and on the stated goal of the Canadian government (2002) "to respond to the challenges of the knowledge-based economy."

Public school teachers focus on teaching provincial content or curriculum outcomes to students. Teacher-librarians assist in this endeavor by collaborating with teachers and students in seeking appropriate resources and evaluating the quality of information they find. For students, this means acquiring the necessary literacy skills to use digital or print reference resources, access databases, the Internet, and all formats of multimedia.

Like all students in the Langley School District, students at LSS have grown up with technology available both at home and in the classroom. They are comfortable working on assignments using multiple sources of information and adding their own personal touches using, among others, graphics, sounds and videos. In doing so, they are using different educational tools than those available to their parents and teachers when it comes to schoolwork.

Technology in schools has changed the perception of students and their understanding of literacy. The written word is still the predominant literacy but the concept of new literacies is becoming what Beane (2003) refers to as "an integral part of today's society."

Four keys educational concepts are in place at LSS for successful integration of lifelong literacy skills:

1. Integration of Multiple Literacies in the work habits of students
2. Information Literacy Models of Inquiry to assist in their research
3. Professional development for teachers and the teacher-librarian
4. Transition Literacy, which takes into account the interconnectedness of literacy in post secondary education and the students prior educational experience.

Literacy Frameworks

Federal and provincial governments, having invested substantial resources in technology in public schools, see teaching information literacy skills as a foundation for lifelong learning.

McKenzie (1999) recognized this fact and recommended that school districts move beyond, the technology in place, to literacy. "Showing students how to ask questions and interpret the information that they find is the key to success and a necessary step in preparing for the future." McKenzie saw little evidence that having computers in schools was helpful to students.

Using the computers to teach literacy skills is proving useful and necessary for student learning so the emphasis should be on teaching strategies and developing a curriculum that uses new literacies.

"If we teach students the right information and literacy skills, they should have the power to actually improve the depth and quality and originality of their thinking because of the richness of the resources they will be able to mine." (McKenzie 1999)

Teacher-Librarians and Information Literacy

Canadian Information Literacy standards for teacher-librarians, written in 2003, establish a strong role for school libraries in helping students learn these research skills. Recent studies (Haycock, 2003; Lance, 2001; Lonsdale, 2003) show that through effective collaboration with classroom teachers, that teacher-librarians play a key role in student literacy achievement in both traditional and new literacies. The role of the teacher-librarian has grown beyond the traditional role of a manager and organizer of books to a direct participant in teaching information skills.

Why Transition Literacy?

Transition is the process a person goes through when their lives take them into new directions. It could be going from elementary school to high school, high school to post-secondary institutions, leaving school for the workforce and leaving the workforce to retire. Each of these phases in our lives requires new knowledge and new literacies to adapt to changing circumstances. Transitions are not always an easy step and it can take time before a person can adapt to his/her new surroundings.

Like the career prep teachers, councilors and teacher -ibrarians in high school, academic librarians work to assist students in understanding the requirements needed to successfully navigate academia. They educate incoming students in understanding and using the services offered in a college or university library. My aim in implementing this transition process at LSS is educating the students about academic or research libraries before they leave high school so they can feel comfortable using the services when

they arrive on campus.

Transition literacy in high school adds another literacy skill for students (Information Literacy, Critical Literacy, Technological Literacy, Creative Presentation Literacy, and Ethics of Information Use) to become lifelong learners. The Transition Literacy Program at LSS seeks to provide information and resources to its graduating classes about post-secondary research practices and by clarifying the challenges and knowledge base required of high school seniors to be successful graduates in college or university.

By combining the experience of the teacher-librarian in high school and academic librarians at a community college or a university, the aim of the Transition Literacy Program is to improve the learning experience of new post-secondary students and the understanding of library services offered in these institutions.

Graduating at LSS in 2009 means students need to have the skills to use existing technology and have knowledge of the multiple literacies skills needed to continue their studies or enter the workforce. The teachers and the teacher-librarian at LSS are committed to helping graduate students acquire the skills that can help them adapt to new technologies and multi-task using an array of tools at their disposal at LSS and as life-long learners.

What are Multiple Literacies?

Multiple Litreacies require students to have the ability to read, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of textual environments and multiple digital tools.

What Literacy Skills are taught at LSS?

At LSS, we emphasize multiple literacy skills from grades 9 to 12. These literacies were based on a model from a course presented at the University of PEI with Dr. Ray Doiron and Dr. Marlene Asselin in 2003. They are:

Creative Presentation Skills: Students at LSS must learn to go beyond the traditional project report to creative ways of preparing and sharing newly developed knowledge by using a combination of slide shows, multimedia tools, website design, CD and DVD productions.

Critical Literacy: The focus on how and in whose interests the information found are used. The LSS students need to know how to determine the authenticity and reliability of sources found in print and in digital format.

Ethics of Information Use: Students at LSS must understand the values associated with the fair and honest use of information they find in print and in digital format. They need to represent the work of authors accurately and appropriately. They need to have a respect for the confidentiality and intellectual property of authors and understand the illegal uses of knowledge

and information.

Information Literacy: Understanding how to find resources and sources that can help the student at LSS organize and structure information, synthesize new knowledge with note taking and finally using and presenting the new knowledge.

Technological Competencies: Students at LSS must learn a complex set of effective and efficient search skills for print and online resources. They must acquire word processing skills fully integrated into the writing process. They must have communication skills using email, text messaging and on-line networks. They must also learn integrating traditional and new media formats into their writing and publishing activities.

And at LSS we also introduce another Literacy skill: Transition Literacy

The Transition Literacy Program: Transition Literacy seeks to provide information about post-secondary research practices and by clarifying the challenges that LSS students will need to be successful graduates in college or university. By combining the experience of the teacher-librarian at LSS and academic librarians in post-secondary institutions, the aim of Transition Literacy is to improve the quality of education and library services for students at LSS when they start the next step in their educations.

Transition literacy is not a new concept but it is gaining momentum as a concept in schools and universities as students need to be ready to enter the next step in their academic life in an information rich environment. A group of academic librarians and a teacher-librarian in Ontario (Bryant, Farnum, Newman, Williams and Yanofsky) presented their work on transitions at the OLA Superconference in Ontario in 2008.

Selected Steps

To successfully integrate Transition Literacy at LSS, graduating students needed to understand some of the basic components of post-secondary education.

- **New knowledge.** Graduating students need to be aware that they are changing library classification systems from the Dewey decimal classification used in elementary and secondary school libraries to the Library of Congress classification used in college and university libraries.
- **New Resources.** Colleges and universities offer access to numerous databases and search tools that are not always available to public school students. Knowledge of these databases and search tools should enhance the research experience of new students from the start rather than long term as they progress in their studies.
- **Web 2.0 technology tools.** The collaborative nature of post-

secondary education requires students to use new tools like blogs or wikis to participate in the ongoing discourse and participation of students in the class. Other Web 2.0 tools will assist students in creating and sharing their projects online rather than through saving their projects on CD's or flash drives.

- **Learning how to search for information and writing papers.** A key component of an academic library's strategic plan is to change the way students view libraries, and to position the library's program in a way that is meaningful to them. New students have to understand the importance of information literacy skills in their own lives. They're more likely to do so if they understand how it relates to their immediate and future success. Assignments at college and university require in-depth research skills. Academic librarians offer numerous services from documentation, FAQ's, library instruction classes, tutorials, links to real-time library assistance, and government programs like the B.C Ministry of Education's AskAway.

1. DDC to LCC

The first step in teaching Transition Literacy at LSS is one that is often overlooked by graduating students and that is the cataloguing classification used in post secondary libraries. Students in BC elementary, middle and high schools use the Dewey decimal classification that is quite different from the Library of Congress Classification used in colleges and universities. LCC is used in bigger libraries because it has more classes, subclasses and subdivisions. Unlike DDC, LCC is not based on a decimal system based on numbers. It has 21 major classes, and is based an alphanumeric representation for classes.

A - General Works B - Philosophy, Psychology, Religion C - Auxiliary Sciences of history D - History (general) and History of EuropeE - History: America F - History: America G - Geography, Anthropology, Recreation H - Social Sciences J - Political Science K – Law L – Education M - Music and Books on Music N - Fine Arts P - Language and Literature Q – Science R – Medicine S – Agriculture T – Technology U - Military Science V - Naval Science Z - Bibliography, Library Science, Information Resources (general)

As you can see, the first subdivisions for the 21 major classes are also indicated with capital letter. (E.g. Fine Arts)

N Fine Arts (this is the main class) NA Visual Arts (General) NB Sculpture NC Drawing; Design; Illustration ND Painting NE Print Media NK Decorative Arts; Applied Arts NX Arts in general

Principal subdivisions are in turn subdivided by adding numbers to the letters. This dramatically expands subject specificity.

For example:

NB Sculpture (this is a principle subdivision)

1.50 General 60-1115 History 1160-1195 Design and techniques 1208-1270 Special materials, etc.

If a student searches for a book on Hawaii in the library at LSS, he or she could find it classified as 996.9. If the same student searches for the same book in a library at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Langley, it could be classified as DU 620. Knowing that the classification systems are different before they graduate would be useful in searching for resources next fall.

2. Search Tools in post-secondary libraries

Most post-secondary institutions in BC offer many research and reference tools not always available in K-12 schools. Taking a look at the new Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) website in Langley we find these resources:

a) Library Catalogue: A web-based union catalogue available to students online from any computer on campus and off campus.
http://webcat.kwantlen.ca:8080/uhtbin/cgisirsi/0/SURREY/0/60/502/X

b) Course Reserves: Students can search for books reserved for specific classes.
http://webcat.kwantlen.ca:8080/uhtbin/cgisirsi/0/SURREY/0/36/485/X/BLASTOFF

c) Article Indexes: KPU Libraries offer more than 70 databases for students to work on their research. Students in high school rely on digital references for doing their research. Each website they find requires that they evaluate the content to see if it is suitable for use. The databases accessible to students at KPU have been organized by reputable organizations and offer a wealth of information to students that have already been evaluated.
http://www.kwantlen.ca/library/articles/articlesfront.html

d) Journal Titles: KPU libraries offer access to hundreds of professional journals to assist students in their research divided into the following categories:

1. Anthropology 2. Biology 3. Business 4. Chemistry 5. Communication 6. Computer Science 7. Criminology 8. Education 9. English 10. Fashion Design 11. Fine Arts 12. French 13. Geography 14. Graphic Design 15. Health 16. History 17. Humanities 18. Interior Design 19. Kinesiology 20. Linguistics 21. Mathematics 22. Medicine 23. Music 24. Philosophy 25. Physics 26. Politics 27. Psychology 28. Religion 29. Resource & Environment 30. Sociology 31. Statistics 32. Women Studies
http://cufts2.lib.sfu.ca/CJDB/BSKC/browse

e) Subject Guides: KPU libraries offers subject guides in 45 categories. Resources are available online as well as selected web sites in a variety of disciplines. http://www.kwantlen.ca/library/internet/internetmain.html

f) KPU Library Tutorials: KPU libraries offer tutorials in:

Library Research
Library basics
Term paper research
Internet searching
Library anxiety – Tips for overcoming it
Library Research FAQ's
Information Literacy and Research skills
Citing your resources
APA Citation Style
MLA Citation Style
Turabian Citation Style
Other Library catalogues
Other Colleges and Universities

g) Guides and Help sheets

Using our Online Catalogue
Using our Article Indexes
Quick guides to Article Indexes
Library Research Tutorials including our Web tutorial
Citation Style Guides
Guides to our Print Collection
Other Library Catalogues
Other Colleges and Universities using the Online Catalogue
Finding Books
Finding Videos
Finding Reserves
Find Out my Pin
Requesting a Kwantlen Book
Requesting a Kwantlen Periodical
Requesting a Kwantlen Video
Requesting a non-Kwantlen Video
Requesting inter-library loans online
Viewing your Record
Accessing eBooks from NetLibrary
Renewing Books
Accessing Electronic Reserves

3. New tools for learning: Web 2.0

Professors and instructors at colleges and universities are using new web-based tools that complement their teaching and coursework such as blogs, wikis, and other social software (FaceBook, ning's) and support the creation of online learning communities.

Blogging

The journal format associated with online Blogs encourages students to record their thinking online and facilitates critical feedback by letting professors, instructors, students, peers and a wider audience if needed, to add comments and interact in discussions.

Wikis

Wikis let students and professors connect, discuss, share and create online as a community. They can set the agenda for the course though a digital platform where everyone can participate in the process.

Social Networking

Social networking lets students and professors create academic and personal profiles that are used to share information and keep in contact.

Other Web 2.0 Tools

Rather than saving their projects and working with one computer at home or a laptop, students, professors and instructors will be able to save resources, bookmarks, presentations and documents online and retrieve them from any computer at college or university. I have posted examples of Web 2.0 applications that demonstrate where technology is heading in education and can prove useful for students at LSS moving on to post secondary institutions.

4. Learning to search – Writing in a Digital Age

Colleges and universities have different expectations and requirements of the assignments, papers and essays that students hand in.

Firstly, on average, the length is longer than most high school assignments and professors and instructors expect that students' not only use digital resources but also books, professional journals, databases, and any other print, digital, audio or video resources that can used in their presentations or work handed in.

To help develop their search skills at LSS, I subscribed to Credo Reference, a database service that offers access to over 380 interconnected reference tools. They have varying degrees of content to choose from and at LSS we chose 100 reference titles for the students to use in their research.

Secondly, students at LSS need to understand the central role of writing in critical thinking on post-secondary campuses. They also need to understand the emphasis on collective and collaborative writing through blogs, wikis and other social software tools.

Thirdly, students at LSS need to be aware that positive results for their work post-secondary institutions depends on their ability to include original writings and ideas based on new knowledge that they learn, not simply a presentation of someone else's writings.

Many university and college professors and instructors post their requirements and grading criteria online and students can also find writing and style guides available for their perusal.

For the Transition Literacy program at LSS, I used several examples of course requirements, grading criteria and writing styles that are posted online at universities and colleges across Canada. It proved to be an eye opener to many students, especially the fact that they are required to look for various sources of information and resource formats for their projects and assignments.

Starting in the spring of 2009, SD 35, as well as all other districts in B.C., had free access to databases from the ERAC consortium.

They include:

From World Book

1. World Book for Kids – For elementary
2. World Book Student – For middle and secondary schools
3. World Book Advanced – For secondary schools and beyond
4. World Book Découverte – French Version

From Ebsco Host

1. Consumer Health Complete
2. Kids Search – Elementary and middle schools
3. Canadian Student Research – middle and secondary students
4. Canadian Research Centre
5. Novelist K-8 – Books and author information for elementary and middle schools
6. Novelist Books and author information for middle and secondary students
7. The B.C. Encyclopedia
8. Gale Virtual Reference Library: Art & Humanities, Alternative Energy, Ancient Civilizations, 21st Century Writers, Canadian Parliamentary Guide, Drugs and Addictive Substances, Animal Life, Industrial Revolution, Canadian Provinces, Nutrition, Governments of the World, and the History of Ideas
9. Infotrac CPI.Q. (Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly) is a database of more than 1300 Canadian periodicals in English and French.
10. The Canadian Encyclopedia
11. The Youth Encyclopedia of Canada – For elementary and middle

schools
12. The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada
13. Maclean's: A selection of articles since 1995.
14. The Atlas of Canada: Maps and facts.

Infotrac also offer two databases separately through Gale databases

1. Gale Virtual Reference Library: Art & Humanities, Alternative Energy, Ancient Civilizations, 21st Century Writers, Canadian Parliamentary Guide, Drugs and Addictive Substances, Animal Life, Industrial Revolution, Canadian Provinces, Nutrition, Governments of the World, and the History of Ideas
2. Infotrac CPI.Q. (Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly) is a database of more than 1300 Canadian periodicals in English and French.

Timeline

Fall of 2007

To get the Transition Literacy Program started at LSS, I met with the PAC parents at the school in September and outlined what we were hoping to do. With their approval, I then met with the teachers concerned, to work out a time frame and collaboration schedule, so that we could all work at a successful implementation of the program.

In November of 2007, I presented a document to the school administration explaining what we were doing and who was working in collaboration in the Transition Literacy Program in the school.

I contacted a local academic librarian to request information on the services offered at their university.

Spring 2008

After several meetings with the grade 12 English teachers, we worked out a schedule of three classes when the senior students would be coming to the library to work specifically on Transition Literacy Skills. The classes were scheduled for March and April 2008. The classes were well attended.

One other high school in Langley expressed interest in implementing a Transition Literacy program so we shared resources.

Fall of 2008 and Spring 2009

Meeting with graduate classes in session 1 – First meeting is October, second presentation in February 2009 – Credo Reference - Literacy issues + Web 2.0 - Third presentation, May 2009 – Writing research papers

Fall of 2009 and Spring 2010

Meeting with graduate classes in session 1 – First meeting is October, second presentation will be at the end of February 2010 – ERAC and Infotrac databases- Literacy issues + Web 2.0 - Third presentation will be in May 2010 – Writing research papers

Creating a Webspace

To reinforce the lessons learned and offer resources and sources of information, I upgraded the LSS library website to assist students with their projects and assignments.

Introducing Databases

We introduced Credo Reference in the spring of 2009 as part of the ongoing Transition Literacy Program. Lack of funds and the introduction of District access to databases meant that we did not renew our subscription to Credo Reference for the fall of 2009.

Collaboration

One of the important aspects of any successful program is collaboration and at LSS all the stakeholders in this program were enthusiastic participants in its implementation. I have shared my experience and resources with the other teacher librarians in the district and look forward to the program being expanded.

Teacher Librarians and chronic underfunding in school libraries

The eventual success of the Transition Literacy program is undetermined due to our financial situation. Like many other school districts in BC, SD 35 is experiencing a substantial budget deficit ($14.2 million dollars as of March 2010). The chronic underfunding has already affected the school library programs in Langley.

Based on district numbers (Fall 2009)

- 22/41 – 54% of school libraries in Langley have no teacher librarian (a majority are elementary schools)
- 6/41 – 15% of school libraries in Langley have a half-time teacher librarian or less.
- 4/41 – 10% of school libraries in Langley have more than .6 and less than a full time teacher librarian.
- 9/41 – 21% of school libraries in Langley have full time teacher librarians (most are secondary schools)

So less than a third of schools in Langley have teacher librarians, working 3 or more days a week, in the library. This should be seen as a critical time to assess the value of literacy, information literacy and information technology programs in our schools but it will be difficult looking at the deficit in place. Without budget and manpower predictions, it is difficult to determine how many school library programs will survive into the Fall of 2010 but it will be worse than this years numbers.

The Transition Literacy program will continue at LSS but its future as a district program will depend on having teacher librarians in our school libraries.

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