

## **Building a District Learning Commons**

### **School District #57**

#### ***Vision Statement***

***We are collectively combining our creativity, knowledge, and expertise to create a library learning commons to meet the diverse needs of all learners.***

Educational leaders can readily find literature to support “why” schools are transitioning libraries to library learning commons. It is the documented actions of “how” that leaves us searching. Perhaps this is because the transition process is as unique as the circumstances within each space. As we adopt the mindset of libraries as ever-changing learning environments, it is important to share our gained knowledge and unique experiences. This paper is not the detailed journey of building a district learning commons, but rather outlines the actions taken to support this transition.

In September of 2012, School District 57 began the transition of libraries to learning commons. Senior administration and the school board made the decision to move from an existing District Resource Center to the District Learning Commons (DLC) in order to create a model that school libraries could build upon. Senior administration and the board envisioned a centralized service rooted in a climate of experimentation and collaborative partnerships that would support learning for teachers and students.

#### **Actions Guiding the Development of the District Learning Commons**

##### **District Led Actions**

The decision to change the administrative position from Administrator to Vice Principal Curriculum & Instruction – Learning Commons immediately moved the responsibilities and focus of the position from centralized service to

student learning. The responsibility includes facilitating the transition of the existing District Resource Centre and school libraries to learning commons, assembling collaborative partnerships to support relevant learning models in support of provincial, district and school plans for student success.

Creating three .2 District Learning Commons Liaison positions ensured practicing teacher librarians as educational leaders were building the foundations of the DLC as a model for school learning commons. Next year there will be five .2 positions to continue building capacity within our schools.

Support for District Learning Team Grants focusing on inquiry, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and technology for learning built individual and group expertise and provided the opportunity for teacher led professional development. Teachers are planning for expanded teams next year.

The school board, senior administration, district and school principals visibly supported the transition to the DLC. As builders of learning commons, members of the school board met with support staff, educators, and district departments to discuss changes in practice and special projects. The focus of transition at all levels of the district is student learning.

## **District Learning Commons – Foundational Approaches**

*Building a Learning Commons* by Koechlin, Rosenfeld, Loertscher was the original blueprint for the District Learning Commons.

“Continuous inquiry, learning collaboratively, reflective practice, and learning by doing are foundational approaches in the drive for excellence in the Learning Commons.” (57)

These four guiding foundational approaches provide the framework for our decisions and actions. Building a learning commons requires an understanding that inquiry requires risk taking and is experimental in nature, that cooperation is not collaboration and conflict is part of the process. It acknowledges that reflective practice guides future practice and learning by

doing is essential. It takes time, practice, and commitment from all stakeholders. Stakeholders share the vision when they are encouraged to push inquiry, learn more than they knew they wanted to know, trust that experimenting requires reflective practice and become empathetic to the smallest change. Building collaboration requires an unpredictable amount of time. Results of initial meetings and change require relational and academic understanding that collaboration is time consuming and requires modeling. Without collaboration, there can be no sustainable growth for learning commons.

Understanding the process of change within a system and within educational practice is paramount in the transition of libraries to learning commons. First order change can be exciting, annoying, and confusing but requires very limited change in knowledge and skills. Second order change is complex requiring new knowledge and skills to move towards a concept or mindset. Second order change requires us to change the way we think and respond within our learning environment. When moving forward, second order change continues to require sustainable practice, time and an open mindset. Building intentional reflective practice into the process is a stabilizing element for creating sustainability in an environment that is in “constant negotiation and adjustment”. (67)

### **Actions to Guide the Development of a Learning Commons**

Actions taken directly from Koechlin, Rosenfeld and Loertscher’s *Building a Learning Commons* are posted in the DLC. Some of these actions remain in the discussion and exploration stage while others have moved forward. We will always be inquiring, building, reflecting, and moving forward.

- 1. Develop collaborative virtual calendars so that we can schedule learning and sharing events in both the physical and virtual Learning Commons. (36)***

There are four virtual calendars employed in the DLC. A virtual calendar is used for booking the computer lab, physical space and other spaces within the building. A Curriculum & Instruction calendar links district professional development opportunities. The District Learning Common Liaisons calendar organizes special projects, school support, and opportunities to lead professional development. Thankfully, there is the ability to link these calendars to our personal calendars to view all of the calendars at once.

***2. Build individual and group expertise by giving learners opportunities to teach others. (36)***

District Learning Team Grants to enhance digital literacy, digital citizenship, technology to support learning and critical thinking skills allowed educators to learn by doing. These opportunities provide the experimental learning mind-set “where professional development, action research and experimental programs are being led, exhibited, and analyzed before going out for widespread adoption in the rest of the school (and district).” (36) An opportunity to share learning from District Learning Teams Grants planned for May has been cancelled due to BCTF job action. It is our intention to provide the opportunity for sharing District Learning Team Grants next February and June.

The District Learning Common Liaisons host Tech Tuesdays, an opportunity to learn a variety of web-based technology, open to all teachers. These teacher leaders support schools with on-site training and exploration of e-resources, exploring and designing learning spaces and building school learning commons. All rural schools receive onsite workshops requiring travel up to 3.5 hours one way. Webinars to support district purchased e-resources simultaneously hosted at various schools are supporting professional development.

***3. Free up as much space as we can by getting more resources into circulation. BE RIGOROUS ABOUT WEEDING. Think about the 24/7***

***access you can provide to learners by investing in excellent online databases and interactive reference resources and the space this will free up in our LC for other functions. (36)***

Weeding a large collection requires collaboration of the DLC support staff, property maintenance, recycling agencies and two Integrated Library Systems client care departments. At the beginning of the process, specific policies and procedures were set to ensure that items booked in the past 5 years remained available to support learning. Once this stage was complete, evaluation and weeding continued in specific subject areas. Weeding is labor intensive and very time consuming. In support of the transition of libraries to learning commons evaluating and weeding school collections is at an all-time high.

District high school teacher librarians met for a day to evaluate district purchased e-resources to guide decisions for the following school year. Some data bases were not renewed and others were identified for future consideration. From this initial opportunity to collaborate a district learning team was formed focusing on building learning common websites reflecting the needs of all users by evaluating layouts, providing a collaborative space for exhibiting learning, and adding appropriate evaluated content.

***4. Create flexibility- Relocate shelves so that they are on walls. Put everything on roller and keep furnishing lightweight so they can be moved into different configurations. Replace desktop computers with laptops and other mobile devices. (36)***

As weeding proceeded large shelf units were removed. Natural learning spaces rose from simply putting up a folding table. Users have a voice in how changes in space and technology are implemented. Predetermined plans are often adjusted to meet the needs of current users. It is important to constantly evaluate the space and the changing needs of users to guide future plans. The design of the physical space is a collaborative process walled in by barriers, but open to possibilities.

***5. Support differentiated instruction by building resources, tools, technologies, and learning spaces that address the needs of different learning styles, needs, and abilities. (36)***

The principles of Universal Design for Learning drive the physical and virtual acquisitions of learning resources. Teachers are encouraged and recruited to request and evaluate acquisitions. Differentiated cross-curricular learning resource kits to support specific initiatives were built to support student learning. Taking on new initiatives can result in increased workload without increased funding for staff. Changes made at any level have consequences for support staff workload. Creative solutions can be provided by all members of the learning commons.

***6. Develop the Virtual Learning Commons into a showcase of exemplary teaching and learning. (36)***

To support access and exploration of district purchased e-resources and online resources District Learning Commons Liaisons create beginner guides and post them on the District Learning Commons Discovery Portal.

Sharing innovative practice to enhance learning, while complying with British Columbia's Freedom of Information Protection and Privacy Act, is an ongoing collaborative effort. Schools are sharing and building school websites to support digital access of resources and to support collective inquiry.

***7. Design the Virtual Learning Commons for the client. (36)***

The collaborative process of building the District Learning Commons Discovery Portal involves learning commons teacher librarians, teachers, vendors, and library technicians.

As we continue into our third year of transition to learning commons we continue to pursue continuous inquiry, collaborative learning, reflective practice, and learning by doing. Educational leaders both within and outside of our province will continue to influence our vision and actions. We are creating professional learning communities within our schools, across our districts and with others who are transitioning their libraries to learning commons. Our collective understanding and ownership of the learning commons mindset in School District #57 continues to grow.

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