Deborah McCallum
Treasure Mountain Canada 2014
Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

Knowledge Building is an essential learning process in the 21st century. The Learning Commons provides a framework for knowledge building. 21st Century technologies facilitate this knowledge building process for our learners. The technologies increase the potential for global connections and opportunities for collaboration and learning. The Learning Commons fosters the knowledge building process with 21st century technologies.

The purpose of this paper is to apply the knowledge building process to the 5 key standards of practice for school library learning commons published by the Canadian Library Association. The standards are:

- Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate and Empower a Community of Learners

- Advancing the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals

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

- Fostering Literacies to Empower Life-Long Learners

- Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning

First I will explore the standard of **Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate and Empower a Community of Learners.**

The Learning Commons represents a new model of the traditional library. The purpose of the Learning Commons is to foster collaborative engagement to cultivate and empower communities of learners. Effective learning communities build knowledge from rich experiential learning environments. The use of physical and virtual environments promote collaboration and

Deborah McCallum
Treasure Mountain Canada 2014
Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

knowledge building. Effective learning communities require the contributions of all players and diverse needs within the learning environment. Therefore, the facilitators of the knowledge building process are instrumental in providing access to information and opportunities for collaboration. It is the facilitators that ensure equitable access and opportunities to share, build and reflect on knowledge.

There are infinite amounts knowledge and information that exist in the world. The Learning Commons has the potential to be the great equalizer. Societal struggles including those of resources, money power, dominance, colonialism will always continue. There are clear implications in our world when we consider what knowledge will have the opportunity to develop and be shared. This includes politics, governments, economies, corporations and systems including education. Educators have an important job to do, to help learners collaborate, and create knowledge. Not just consume it. The constant opportunities to consume information on the internet will always exist. This highlights the importance of the learning commons model to help our learners to be critical thinkers throughout the knowledge building process. Further, it is also important to question and acknowledge not just what learners perceive from their senses and surroundings, but also that which is not being shared. This includes questioning the knowledge that may be hidden, or knowledge that consumers are prevented from seeing. The knowledge building process from the Learning Commons model promotes equal opportunities for consumers to become producers. It provides equal opportunities for learners to 'stake out' claims to new virtual blank spaces; an essential component to cultivating and empowering a community of learners. This next section will explore how learning communities can achieve school goals.

Advancing the learning Community to Achieve School Goals

Deborah McCallum
Treasure Mountain Canada 2014
Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

Another goal of the library Learning Commons is to facilitate student achievement. Essential skills including literacy, research, inquiry and communication skills are necessary and require intentional planning and assessment of the goals within each unique learning space. Strong leadership is vital to ensure sustainability and attainment of school, district and provincial student learning goals. Opportunities to showcase and share student work are also key ways do demonstrate direct connections to School improvement plans. Other strategies also include the inquiry and helping students to understand the power of their own thinking. Further, flexible planning is essential to follow new lines of thinking and creativity. Clear frameworks and structures for using resources appropriately are also essential. Just because a learner is savvy with technology does not mean that they will understand the knowledge building process. The structures help students to enhance their critical thinking skills, including reflection and metacognition skills. They help to build physical and electronic collections, identify targets for improvement as implicated in school and board achievement plans, incorporate digital citizenship and opportunities for student learning and innovation to be demonstrated, shared, and showcased. The next section will discuss how to cultivate effective instructional designs for the teaching and assessment of learning.

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

A key element to effective instructional design for teaching and assessing learning lies in the intentional teaching of key skills. This includes the frameworks for knowledge-building, creativity and innovation, and honing of information management and literacy skills. Intentional planning is essential to helping learners use resources, technologies and spaces to support effective learning. The goal is to support both student and teacher growth and success in these areas. Student and teacher growth can also be supported by opportunities for innovation. Intentional planning needs to account for student voice to allow for innovation, growth and

Deborah McCallum
Treasure Mountain Canada 2014
Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

success. Planning needs to allow for the voices to shape how instruction will be designed. This opens up possibilities not previously imagined. Heeding to learner beliefs of how the world works will allow knowledge building to occur in innovative ways that go beyond linear and modern day trends of standardized and computer based understandings of how the world works. For instance, there are First Nations, Metis & Inuit voices and others that view the world as needing to have balance between the physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional domains. When we are out of balance, this is when problems crop up. If the knowledge structures of our world are balanced toward solely the intellectual domain, then we are at risk of neglecting and ignoring those voices that can show us that there are other ways of knowing and being in the world. Intentional planning and the incorporation digital media with careful consideration of what we are doing with it, why, and how our pedagogy will support.

It is essential to focus attention on how digital media can amplify social inequity, or promote equity. To be aware of the exploitative and exclusionary possibilities of information that exists within digital media, can make us more aware of how to build knowledge in new and equitable ways. Holistic approaches to knowledge building can also be fostered within the Learning Commons. Innovation in knowledge building also grows from understanding how information is interconnected and how knowledge is distributed across our brains, emotions, spirits, bodies, locally and globally. Growth and success builds from attention to all domains, but also connecting them directly to literacy. The next section will look at how we use different types of literacies to engage learners in the knowledge building process.

Fostering Literacies to Engage Life-Long Learners

Literacy can be fostered in new ways in the 21st century with new technologies that have emerged. Methods of communication are evolving with the new technologies and are also

expanding the repertoire of available sources for building literacy skills. Literacy skills are

essential to effective knowledge building. Digital literacies improve knowledge building when

they used in ways that promote participation vs consumption. Digital Literacy can be the be that

important link that allows teachers to help students map out effective learning strategies and

processes that also help our students to be critical and safe online learners. It should strive to

help educators map out the important stages of the learning process, including the importance

of planning, researching, analyzing, evaluating, and employing critical thinking strategies. It

should encompass the steps that a student has to take in the planning and cultivation of an idea

or topic, and the creation of a clear map of how they are going to use the tools at their disposal,

how they will know when they have reached their goal, and what they are going to do after that.

We need a clear and concise framework that outlines the principles of Digital Literacy, and a

framework that also outlines how digital literacy can be facilitated by educators and learners of

all levels. We cannot assume that everyone needs to be equally savvy at this particular day in

age. But we do need to find ways to effectively support everyone for where they are at, and

create plan to move the skills forward! It is inevitable that we will all be influenced by the

ongoing scientific and technological advances within our society, especially as it pertains to the

evolution of online and Web 2.0 Social Media platforms. Educators need to be supported to be

able to cultivate the learning of the whole-student, and help them understand how to effectively

and safely map out their learning both in the present, and the future. Further, literacy is

connected with knowledge production and knowledge creation. Literacy skills supports students

in the organization of information in meaningful ways that creates new knowledge. The

knowledge building process also builds key literacy skills. Literacy has the potential to go far

beyond book knowledge and basic literacy skills. There are opportunities and possibilities

through technology that can help with the integration of more complex tasks that foster

knowledge building and development. These complex tasks include the promotion of critical literacy, metacognition, and reflection and student voice.

The ultimate goal of information literacy is to help learners become critical consumers of information. This includes self-direction towards the knowledge that is both personally meaningful, but that also has reliability and validity. Students are also active producers of information. 21st century technologies can be harnessed to promote knowledge production by providing opportunities for engagement and inspiration. Information Literacy skills are valuable for the knowledge building process. They are necessary to help students contribute to the greater good of the world by posting and sharing meaningful information throughout their lives. Students do not acquire higher order thinking skills on their own. Teaching is an art form that needs to include students as active users of information through technology. While kids show confidence with technology, this does not translate into information literacy skills. Teaching information literacy skills works best when embedded within other areas of study. This helps to make the skills relevant and applicable across the curriculum, and translatable to other areas of life. Therefore, lesson planning that provides meaningful opportunities for students to engage in these important areas will serve learners throughout school and beyond. The final next section will examine the impact of the design of learning environments and the impact on participatory learning.

Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning

Critically thinking about the design of learning environments is essential to the effective implementation of a participatory learning culture. This is essential to promote effective knowledge building. Design features that promote the collaboration of virtual and physical spaces, and that promote safety, inclusiveness, equity and access are instrumental in the

Deborah McCallum
Treasure Mountain Canada 2014
Knowledge Building in the Learning Commons

knowledge building process. Every learning space will differs depending upon its unique challenges and strengths. Learning spaces can be designed to promote flexible and responsive spaces that can meet the ever-changing needs of your school both now, and in the future. For instance, furniture that is easily moveable can enable flexible instructional spaces throughout the day, and promote engagement and collaboration in different ways.

Spaces that respect diversity and make all students feel safe and welcome are also essential for co-construction of knowledge. This includes attention to colours, resources and visual representations that reflect diversity. In addition, this can also include mobile learning clusters, laptops, chromebook clusters, gaming centres, eReading/reading/audio-visual centers. Also, study rooms, research centres, and spaces for Social Media connections are important to engage and inspire. Educators can harness social media to create strong online frameworks that support and facilitate knowledge building.

Conclusion

Knowledge building is an essential skill in the 21st Century. Learners need to feel safe to take risks to engage in the knowledge building process, they are willing to take risks and share their own unique voices. Equitable and accessible learning spaces empower learners to build knowledge and make significant contributions to the world. The 5 standards identified by the Canadian Library Association support the essence of knowledge building. These include Facilitating Collaborative Engagement, Advancing the Learning Community, Cultivating Effective Instructional Design, Fostering Literacies and Designing Learning Environments. All learners have a voice based on beliefs, values, culture and connections. All learners can build knowledge that is reflective of voice, and thus create balance and equity throughout the physical

and virtual spaces. Indeed, knowledge building is perhaps the most important skill of the 21st

Century.

Deborah McCallum