A Curation Journey: Connecting Digital Learning Resources
By Melanie Mulcaster with Iniyal Inparajah

The Context

As teacher-librarians and educators, our goal is to connect learners and communities with learning materials and resources that accelerate learning.

We strive to connect communities of learners with texts that align with curriculum and are reflective of their intersectional identities and lived experiences. By drawing upon the genius and cultural capital of the learners we serve, we can curate texts for learning with a culturally responsive stance. Indeed, using culturally relevant pedagogies and equity frameworks combined with an empathic approach to teaching and learning can increase student engagement and retention.

We seek to choose resources that are accessible for all learners and their preferred modalities. Dr. Gholdy Muhammad (2020) encourages educators to assemble "text sets" to ground learning experiences which explore diverse perspectives and include multi-modal forms of expression. These text sets not only speak to the multi-modalities in which students learn, but also can layer means of accessibility in compliance with *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) (Government of Ontario, 2005-2016; Mulcaster, Pitter-Adlam & Williams-Years, 2022).

Curating text selections for learning is a process that requires thought, purpose and intentionality. An equity informed selection (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2022), fosters literacies to empower life-long learners and can support the inclusive design of responsive learning environments, encouraging participatory cultures as depicted in the following *Leading Learning* standards (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020).

STANDARD

Fostering Literacies to Empower Life-Long Learners

New technologies and evolving methods of communication and sharing drive expanding understanding of literacy. This reality has 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 literacies and skills. The school library learning commons has a leading role in assisting learners to hone and apply an expanded notion of literacy as well as fostering an active reading culture.

STANDARD

Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning

Active and knowledgeable involvement in participatory learning is a necessary competence for today's learners. Learning commons spaces, collections and tools are changing in response to this paradigm shift. Working together in groups, both virtually and in person is the new norm. Inherent in these activities is the importance of security, privacy and good digital citizenship practices as well as effective collaboration skills and ensuring student well being and accessibility for all. A learning commons can provide both the physical and virtual learning environments as well as provide the supports necessary for the student to be an active participatory learner. The Learning Commons Leadership Team reviews and revises LLC learning environments to meet these evolving needs.

STANDARD

Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate and Empower a Community of Learners

The library 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 is also a portal to virtual connections, both local and global. It is important to acknowledge the diverse needs and contributions of all players within the school learning commons community, both in terms of resource formats and access to information and collaboration opportunities. Local, regional and global connections and collaborations are a vital part of progressive, future-oriented learning environments.

Enter the Pandemic - A "Crisis-tunity" if You Will

The term "crisis-tunity" is a term that was first introduced to me by our friend and colleague Diana Maliszewski, and I wholeheartedly believe it applies.

While there are many things I could have done without during the pandemic, the learning, listening and reflection that ensued during this time was crucial in many ways. The pandemic saw a dramatic shift to virtual learning environments and a scramble for online digital learning resources to support learning.

Communities of learners came together to share digital learning resources; many of which became available for free for a period. During much of the pandemic, I supported communities in a central role, curating K-12 digital learning resources that could be of assistance to families, learners and educators. I was in constant reflection, thinking about how we could continue to model best practices in curation of digital content in participatory cultures.

- *How* do various digital learning resources accelerate learning?
- *How* are they accessible? *How* are they curated and presented in multimodalities?
- *How* do they speak to and are inclusive of students' lived experiences and identities?
- *How* do they link to the Ontario curriculum?
- *How* do we honour copyright and original creators of content?

- *How* do we curate resources in collaboration to meet the needs of the learners we serve?

I struggled and stumbled, often making mistakes in this journey, but the learning was exponential.

Key to my professional growth as an educator and learner were the writings of Zaretta Hammond. Hammond (2015) emphasises distinctions of equity when doing equity work, and this work should be ubiquitous to and in our learning journeys with the communities we serve. We need to know our students - their identities and lived experiences in order to select the right text, for the right learner, in the right context for the right learning activity. "Indeed, reading, writing and learning need to be more than words on a page; learning needs to propel us into action and empower our whole beings. When we consider not just a text, but its ability to move us, then we are setting the groundwork for meaningful learning and learning that inspires students into action" (Mulcaster, Pitter-Adlam, & Williams-Yeagers, 2022).

Enter the "New Normal"

September of 2022 perhaps marked the most return to "normal" in our education systems that we've experienced in the last two years. While many of our challenges may still be present; we are bolstered by our learning during the pandemic, especially in the development of virtual learning environments and the curation of online digital learning resources.

In regard to how we might continue to support learners we serve in digital learning environments; I still have many questions:

- How might we continue to curate and share high quality, relevant, culturally responsive learning materials linked to the Ontario curriculum that accelerate learning?
- How might we continue to access resources that speak to the modalities in which students learn? Are they AODA compliant (Government of Ontario, 2005-2016), and follow UDL guidelines (Government of Ontario, 2013)?
- How might we continue to curate resources that are advertisement free, and are at price points that are financially sustainable?
- How might we continue to honour copyright and original creators of content?
- How might we continue to curate resources in participatory cultures and in collaboration with learning partners?
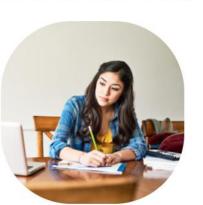
New Possibilities

In 2021, myself and my partner Iniyal Inparajah joined the team at TVO (TVO Media Education Group, 2022), as Instructional Liaisons on secondments from our respective school boards.

As an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Education and a not-for-profit, social impact charity, TVO believes in the importance of equitable education. We seek to represent the voices of communities across the entire province. To do this well, diversity, equity and inclusion are at the core of what we do every day.

We promise to spark your curiosity, inspire your discovery and champion your learning.

(TVO Media Education Group, 2022)

TVO Learn (TVO Learn, 2022), one of TVO's newest digital learning resources, was launched in 2020 in response to learning needs during the pandemic. TVO Learn is an engaging, online supplemental resource consisting of a series of learning activities used to support learning in the K-12 continuum. Perhaps what is most unique about TVO Learn is its ability to connect the power of all of TVO's digital learning resources (TVO Learn Mathify, TVO Learn mPower, TVO Today, TVOkids) under one "umbrella" so to speak. All resources on TVO Learn have been vetted and approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

(TVO Learn, 2022)

TVO Learn, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (TVO Learn, 2022)

As a current TVO employee, I wish to be transparent in my perspective. However, as a teacher-librarian, I do also recognize the learning potential for the communities of learners we serve. These resources can act as one of the many possible valuable tools or resources in educator tool kits.

Wearing my teacher-librarian hat, I appreciate that:

● TVO endeavours to create relevant, culturally responsive learning materials linked to the Ontario curriculum
● Resources have been vetted and approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education
● Resources are multi-modal in nature and designed with UDL principles (Government of Ontario, 2013), and AODA compliance (Government of Ontario, 2005-2016), in mind
● All resources are free for Ontario learners
● All resources are advertisement free, and follow copyright regulations

It is important to note that the key to the use of these resources does not lie solely in the resources themselves. Rather, the power lies in how we can connect, modify, supplement and augment these resources in respect to the identities, lived experiences, and goals of the learners and the communities we serve.

The Power to Connect

Part of our roles as Instructional Liaisons is to reach out to communities across Ontario to share the digital learning resources TVO has to offer. We aim to engage with school boards and community agencies across Ontario to connect resources on a personal level and to help meet the needs of individual communities.

My maker and teacher-librarian mind continually reflects to "no two makerspaces are alike" when connecting with community and educational organisations. No two learning spaces, community organisations, or classrooms will be alike or have the same needs.

What has become clear to me is that digital learning resources hold power when they engage and connect with the communities they serve. When Iniyal and I plan outreach sessions, either with community organisations or educational partners, strength lies in the collaborative process: to listen, to learn from and with organisations to curate content to serve the community, planning and responding accordingly. While no learning resource may be perfect on its own, or a create fulsome learning experience, it is together we can pool ideas and resources, to reinforce or re-structure a strong foundation of learning for all.

I see many parallels between my role as a teacher-librarian and my current work at TVO, but one key aspect never changes**: the placement of the learners we serve at the forefront of all we do**. I am grateful, humbled and honoured with all the learning opportunities I've had the fortune to experience, my time at TVO being no exception.

I still have much learning to do, and indeed my learning in many ways has just begun. When I do return to my school board, I will have acquired additional skills that will continue to guide an equity informed selection of digital learning resources (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2022), enabling the fostering of literacies in collaborative virtual and physical learning environments that are inclusive and responsive to learning needs and individuals.

"Honouring our students by creating opportunities to customise our instruction celebrates learning needs and learning differences instead of shunning them. Providing multiple means of representation shows students you have thought ahead about their background knowledge and experience, community and cultural references, and other aids to understanding which communicates a strong desire to see the entire community of learners succeed. This is honour" (Fritzgerald, 2020, p. 87).

May I #neverstoplearning.

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