

Building Knowledge Together: Community Learning at Brisdale Public School

Shared by Melanie Mulcaster - Peel District School Board

Background Information and Inspiration:

This action inquiry project was a team endeavor. A school learning and improvement team was developed, and a proposal was created and submitted to the school board for funding.

Once approved, staff and students from K-5 in the school participated in and led the learning.

As the Teacher Librarian, I acted as the team facilitator. My previous experiences and passions for learning helped to guide our processes:

1. In the 2023-2024 school year, I had recently finished a secondment with TVO Media Education Group. During the time spent there, I was part of a team that established a series of virtual learning experiences with Ottawa Catholic District School that we titled “**Community Learning Experiences**”. I was eager to re-create a similar experience at my new school.
2. A passion to **combine literacy and STEAM** as a means for students to connect to the curriculum and explore and express multi-modalities through **cross-curricular applications** related to school improvement goals.
3. As a learner and continued unlearner I am constantly reflecting on my pedagogical practices as a **culturally relevant and responsive educator**. While I have learned so much, I still have much more learning to do.

Guiding Question for Inquiry:

Before generating our inquiry question for action research, the team had questions to consider: what was the current effectiveness of school wide events (like school assemblies) and how do they effectively engage our learning communities?

Group Reflection: How effective are community events, in particular traditional school assemblies? Who is being served? Who is not?

After much consideration, we came to develop the following question for inquiry: **How might we create learner variability and build community to engage all learners in school wide events?**

Our goal in learning was to create monthly community learning experiences for the whole school that:

- a) Engaged learners and met them where they are at
- b) Connected to their identities and lived experiences to build school empathy, sense of belonging, respect and mutual understandings while providing opportunities for student agency and leadership
- c) Founded learning on culturally responsive and relevant mentor text and stories, linking to cross-curricular expectations, school and board equity improvement goals. Stories are a rich way to establish context, and can engage learners in historically and culturally responsive perspectives, connecting us, building empathy and mutual understanding with human experiences that have been silenced or untold.

Reading, telling, and listening to diverse stories are key to learning in school. We must ask whose stories have been told and taught (and from whose perspectives) and whose stories have not. Stories have a special quality of helping children to (re)member. Dr. Gholdy Muhammad

Connections to CSL Foundations, PDSB and School Goals

Appendix D in [Foundations for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: A Framework for Success](#) outlines many of key competencies that were addressed in this action research inquiry. (pg 27).

While multiple competencies are actioned in this inquiry, we will focus on the three competencies that link to sub-themes of TMC8, board and school equity and improvement plans that connect to the inspirations outlined in the beginning of the paper.

Inspiration for Project	Connection to CSL Sub-Theme	Connection to Board Equity and Improvement	Connection to School Improvement and Equity and Goals
Community Learning	<p>Accountability</p> <p>How might we design for engagement?</p> <p>How might we help students and staff know what learning is going on in our space and how they can get involved?</p> <p>Physical and Virtual LLC Spaces/ Technological Infrastructure</p> <p>How might we work towards a school-wide culture of participatory learning?</p> <p>How might we use technology for participatory learning?</p> <p>Accessibility</p> <p>How might we apply universal design in He LLC experiences?</p>	<p>PDSB School Improvement Equity and Planning Site</p>	Connections to School Sense of Belonging Goal
Literacy and STEAM: Cross Curricular Application	<p>Culture of Growth:</p> <p>How might we design learning experiences that offer students real-world relevance?</p> <p>How might we ensure the emotional, physical, mental and academic safety of</p>	<p>PDSB Empowering Modern Learners</p>	Connections to Literacy and Numeracy Goals

	students within the LLC?		
Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogies	<p>Ethical Standards:</p> <p>How might we evaluate resources and understand how our biases affect our viewpoint?</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>How might we design for engagement?</p> <p>How might we help students and staff know what learning is going on in our space and how they can get involved?</p>	<p>Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ Action Plan</p> <p>PDSB Black Student Success Strategy</p> <p>Affirming Muslim Student Identities and Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy</p> <p>PDSB Empowering Modern Learners</p> <p>PDSB Policy 51 - Human Rights</p> <p>PDSB Months and Days of Significance</p> <p>PDSB CISS4 Selection Policy</p> <p>Ministry Directives</p>	<p>Examination of School Profile and Community</p> <p>Link to Existing Cultural Capital and Knowledge within the School Community</p> <p>Connections to School Sense of Belonging Goal through the Development of Student Led Committees to Design and Lead Experiences</p>

Outline of Action Research Inquiry Process:

1. The first step in our inquiry process was to gather information from our community, which is outlined on [slide 4](#).
2. The second step was to determine how these community learning experiences would be delivered. We decided to deliver learning through a virtual environment using Microsoft Teams - the hypothesis was that in a smaller and more focused environment, students would engage more.
3. The third step was to identify students and staff that could help develop the learning. The first Community Learning Experience occurred in September and was modelled by the Teacher Librarian. After the initial Community Learning Experience, all subsequent events were co-designed, and student led to meet the needs of the learning community. Slide Decks of all learning experiences can be accessed on [slide 7](#).
4. Throughout each month, we documented the number of classes participating to analyze and look for patterns for feedback and improvement. In May, we asked students and staff for feedback about the learning experiences through a Google Form. The feedback we received guided the final two sessions. ([Slides 10-17](#))

The BIG THINK!

Here's What	<p>What happened? (Survey Results)</p> <p>As these community learning experiences were optional, it was noted that at least 75% of the school at every event was in attendance.</p>
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	<p>100% percent of students and staff surveyed wanted the Community Learning Experiences to continue.</p> <p>Students liked the virtual format - the fact they were comfortable in their own environment and could dialogue about the learning with each other as it was happening, compared to being “squished in the gym in a school assembly”.</p> <p>Students enjoyed the connections to the texts, which helped learn about others in the community and celebrated their own identities. They felt the learning experiences connected them to each other.</p> <p>Students enjoyed the activities connected to the learning. Students specifically mentioned parts of the learning process they appreciated most - eg. <i>I liked how in the minds on activity...</i></p> <p>Students appreciated connecting with the whole school learning in the comfort of their own classroom environments.</p> <p>Students enjoyed the opportunity to take ownership, co-design and lead the learning.</p> <p>Anecdotally, a teacher passed on to me that their class once had a dialogue about which Community Learning Experience was their favourite in a community learning circle.</p> <p>What is the problem you are provided with? What new information did you receive?</p> <p>Students identified a need for additional experiential learning experiences connecting directly to STEAM (most connected to literacy and numeracy) and outdoor learning activities.</p> <p>We took this feedback into consideration and applied it in our final two Community Learning Experiences</p>
<p>Now What</p>	<p>Why does it matter?</p> <p>This learning matters because the voices of our students matter, which directly connects to our sense of belonging goal. If students feel like they matter, that their voices in their learning matters, they will have a vested interest in what is happening and be more engaged.</p> <p>I did my first two years of teaching in New Zealand. I still remember my first principal John Smith (yes, that really was his name) saying that relationships are the key to learning. “Without relationships, we will never get to the curriculum’.</p> <p>How do your experiences link to this idea?</p> <p>I think it all boils down to a quote I often reference from Andrtasha Fitzgerald in her text Anti-Racism and Universal Design for Learning “Honouring our students by creating opportunities to customize 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</p>

	<p><i>understanding which communicates a strong desire to see the entire community of learners succeed. This is honour. “</i></p>
So What	<p>How might we continue to drive learning forward?</p> <p>The plan is to continue Community Learning at Brisdale Public School for the 2024/2025 school year.</p> <p>At the end of June of last year, our team developed questions that is being applied to continue to extend our learning journeys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>How might we continue to re-envision community learning experiences so that they are created and led each month by a grade level team?</i>● <i>Would this be more meaningful than current monthly assemblies?</i>● <i>How might we extend the community learning experience to include other schools in our superintendency?</i>● <i>How might we continue to document learning and seek feedback for growth?</i>● <i>How might we continue to involve, make connections with caregivers, and/or community agencies to draw upon our community’s cultural capital?</i>● <i>What additional partnerships and relationships might we create?</i>

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