LLED 469 - Learning Log 4

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Identify, source (if possible) and discuss the most important design element that can be implemented in a school library learning commons to optimally enhance inquiry-based learning.

The most important design element which can be implemented in a school library learning commons (SLLC) to optimally enhance inquiry-based learning is to provide flexible spaces. Flexible spaces enhance inquiry-based learning as inquiry-based learning looks very different from teacher to teacher and student to student. Providing opportunities to reimagine what a space can do or how it can serve the school population is significant and conducive to helping establish an inquiry mindset. In Peter Lippman's 2013 article Collaborative Spaces, he makes a convincing argument that architecturally and historically, collaborative spaces are left out of the design process, and that "In order to create alternative settings, the physical environment must be planned to include a variety of defined areas to support individual, 1-to-1, small group, and large social groupings" (pg. 34). I would suggest that the spaces do not need to necessarily be defined, but need to be flexible to accommodate a variety of needs. Space is often at a premium, and often the SLLC must rise to the occasion of hosting a multitude of events and opportunities for students throughout the year and throughout the school day. In my previous school, our SLLC was used for classes, research, book fairs, read alouds, art, filmmaking, bucket drumming, independent work, exam and test make-ups, portrait and graduation photos, as well as staff meetings and support staff meetings. Once a school is built, it truly is hard to reimagine what a space can do and how it can serve the school's population. In my own experience, furniture was rearranged to make room for more collaborative spaces, two of the three offices

were converted into student work spaces and flex areas, and large bookshelves were purchased to make a "cave" area for students to do independent work but be unseen by others. *Leading Learning* suggests that the first step to achieving physical changes in a SLLC is to "First free up space by reviewing what is not being used and remove from the facility" (2014, pg. 34). The risks, we found, were primarily due to spaces not having teacher or support staff access or supervision, so the Teacher Librarian spent most of the time in her office when students worked in the "cave" to supervise from a distance and window coverings were taken down to ensure student safety in the offices, as we used them for flexible spaces as *Leading Learning* suggests to "Clean out underused seminar rooms and establish stations for specialized work e.g. video production, drama, makerspaces" (pg. 34). Lippman also suggests that "collaborative spaces are where learners have access to peers of greater, equal, and lesser ability; where transactions between students and teachers, verbal and otherwise, occur in the daily routine; where investigating an array of activities is permitted; and where low levels of adult supervision give students considerable freedom in what they accomplish and how they accomplish it" (pg. 35). I partially disagree with this view because in my own experience, students with minimal adult supervision have taken advantage of their situation or been taken advantage of. While I understand that students may become anxious about having adults around, especially when engaging in inquiry, many learners are able to develop positive relationships with their teachers and they do not feel scared or threatened by them, especially if they have been given some freedom. In an ideal world, a flexible SLLC would include spaces for students to work both independently and together, for teachers and teacher-librarians to work together, to work at a

variety of volumes, to access technology, create, and for students to be able to access help from a

teacher or staff member, which is what I think Lippman's point really boils down to.

Discuss the aspects of inquiry design (or re-design) that you find the most rewarding and the most challenging.

What I find to be the most challenging part of inquiry design or redesign is keeping up with students and their needs. In the discussion forum, I am consistently impressed with how teachers are able to conduct inquiry in their classrooms. As a self-contained teacher, I have opportunities to connect with my students throughout the day and can keep up with them if I take a host of notes during our meetings regarding their inquiry process. I find that if I do not take diligent notes, what we discussed goes in one ear and out the other. I have a number of students who have learning difficulties so having a plan, copying that plan for them, and helping them stay organized can be very taxing. Often, at the end of a block where we are engaging in inquiry or doing research, I am mentally exhausted, so practicing inquiry at the end of the day is more preferable for me, or before we are headed outside for a break. I can only imagine how a Teacher-Librarian must feel being in a position supporting students in inquiry and potentially juggling the needs of inquiry for an entire school. Some coping mechanisms I might practice in a teacher-librarian position might be taking notes, asking for forgiveness because I cannot remember every detail about each student's inquiry project, and helping write down a plan for the student to take with them. Often, when I see my writing a few days later, I remember what the context was and it jogs my memory. Creating goals with the classroom teacher as well as the students will help foster a sense of community as well as help keep everyone involved focused. As Stripling writes, "Starting with clear goals and assessments will help you determine which tasks and activities facilitate students' construction of content knowledge and strengthen skills involving information fluency and critical thinking. By chunking the unit into meaningful learning experiences, you also develop a sequence that allows for students to incrementally

acquire and experiment with new information" (pg. 10). With having clear goals, students are better able to dictate their own learning and potentially rely less on the classroom teacher or teacher-librarian. With enough practice, students can understand how the inquiry process works.

What I find rewarding about inquiry design is how my students have control over what and how they learn, which provides me time to connect with them. I am also able to work with them to "Ponder. . . what must be directly taught and what type of support or scaffolding might be necessary" (Stripling and Harada, *Designing Learning Experiences for Deeper Understanding*, 2012, pg. 6). The guiding framework of inquiry is an aspect that is invaluable to our students' learning. In a time where our students are coming to school less often, appearing less engaged, it is our duty as teachers and teacher-librarians to try to personalize their learning to make it more important and relevant to them. As indicated in *Designing Learning Experiences for Deeper Understanding*, "Stripling defines inquiry as a process for learning that involves connecting to personal interests and a desire to know, gaining background knowledge, asking questions that probe beyond simple fact gathering, investigating answers to gather evidence from multiple perspectives and sources, constructing new understandings and drawing conclusions with support from evidence, expressing the new ideas through a variety of formats, and reflecting metacognitively on both the process and product of learning… [It should] result in new understandings for learners, but not final answers" (2012, pg. 7). The sole purpose of inquiry, according to Stripling is to provide opportunities for understanding curricular outcomes in a individualized manner with the intent of making the learning relevant. I find this rewarding because often, it can be difficult to keep students engaged with content in the classroom which

results in an increase in problematic behaviours. By offering personalized attention and goals,

teaching and learning becomes a much more relaxed and enjoyable experience for all.

Use your own information search process to identify an additional inquiry model. Discuss the additional model and compare it to one of the three Canadian models listed in Module 9.

An inquiry model I am somewhat familiar with and is not listed in the three Canadian models listed in module 9 is Manitoba's *Guided Inquiry Model*. This particular model takes after the common lesson planning technique used in Manitoba called the Triple A Model. I completed my education degree and taught for the first five years of my career in Manitoba, so this inquiry model is particularly fitting for my own work and experience. The *Guided Inquiry Model* begins in the planning stages, called curricular connections (big ideas), curricular outcomes (GLOs and SLOs), Instruction: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategies, and Learning Resources/Sources. The portion I will focus on is the Instruction aspect, as that is where the inquiry process is noted as taking place (Manitoba Education, *Independent Together*, 2003, pg. 6.6).

Manitoba's *Guided Inquiry Model* uses the format of activating, acquiring, and applying. The activating stage is primarily about remembering past curricular material, finding a theme or topic, asking questions, and finding possible resources (Independent Together, pg. 6.8). There are portions on the planning page for teachers to indicate where an activity might be teacher led, shared/negotiated, or student led. Most often, the teacher walks the class through a KWL chart. This is very fitting for what Manitoba primarily does in their work, which is a slow release of responsibility. After the activation stage comes the acquiring stage. This stage in the inquiry process is where information is gathered and and extra information is discarded (pg. 6.11). In my own work, I would have my students print out the articles and strike out in sharpie anything not helpful to them and their inquiry process. In the final stage, applying, students determine how

they will communicate their new learning. At times, this might take the place of a report or essay, a presentation, or a visual project. I would argue that the main focus of the applying stage is not necessarily the content of the new learning, but the understanding, reflection, and connection to the learning (pg. 6.13).

    This particular model is similar to the Alberta model in that there is a planning element, an opportunity to access information, something new is created, and it is shared with others. Some common words between the two models include: identify, plan, evaluate, focus, organize, and make connections. Each of these terms apply to what I think of inquiry, which I find to be very open-ended (as it should be). I do not care for the Alberta model where it has an evaluative component because I personally think that assessment of inquiry is going to be so highly individualistic that it would be difficult to assess on any sort of continuum besides the specific learning outcome. The experience of inquiry and the reflective nature of the inquiry process is more important in my opinion. Often, I feel uncomfortable in assessing my students' inquiry projects beyond evaluating if they understand the outcome due to the individualistic nature of the final product.

References

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