

Task 12: Student Library Learning Commons Action Plan

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Introduction

As a current classroom teacher, and not a practicing Teacher Librarian (TL), the intent of this action plan is to create a blueprint to realistically outline what to do and work on in the first year of being in a TL position. In no way will this blueprint serve or be workable or universal in any given situation.

Module 1: Redefining the space and the practitioner (SLLC & TL)

The space of the SLLC is imperative to creating a learning culture in a school community. A variety of seating and of various heights is critical to student success and feeling like the space is meant for them. Including staff in decisions regarding seating is certainly necessary, as well as administration. Seating and tables should reflect a clean and workable atmosphere. In communities where lice is a persistent problem, absolutely no fabric should be used in the SLLC. In SLLCs with a history (or no history) of critters, food and drink policies should be created and enforced. The SLLC is no longer a place where students are expected to sit down and be quiet. The SLLC can be a working space for filming, studying, collaborating, and researching, among others. Some of these tasks certainly require a particular level of volume to work, but in schools with increasing breakout space needs, the SLLC has become more flexible in it's space.

In terms of the practitioner, the TL must be approachable, friendly, and willing to bend over backwards to assist both staff and students. A calm, but upbeat demeanor goes a long way with staff and can be viewed as favourable among students. Appearing as an expert is important to staying relevant and informed - participating in ongoing professional development with other TLs and technology opportunities, as well as staying one step ahead of others in terms of knowledge of the needs of the school has a significant impact. Having treats and beverages on

hand, inviting teaching and non-teaching staff into the SLLC can impact budget, needs, and buy-in. Personally, I am known as the teacher with the stash of candy, hot water on demand, and a healthy stash of tea and instant coffee sachets. In my classroom I have implemented flexible seating, which draws staff in, especially when I have relaxing music playing and the fluorescents off and my lamps on. My personality lends itself well to the TL position as I am firm and clear in my direction, holding my students accountable and having high expectations. Teaching and non-teaching staff in my school have communicated that they appreciate how I “run things” so-to-speak because I am consistent and do not beat around the bush. By not changing who I am as an educator, I feel like I would easily fall into a TL role if given the opportunity.

Module 2: School libraries in the wider library context (public, academic, community)

Most SLLCs appeal to and serve a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes. The SLLC serves it’s student population by providing learning opportunities to enhance 21st century skills, collaborate, and communicate, among others. In an academic sense, SLLCs serve it’s population by providing opportunities for research and higher level learning, often including STEAM activities. Publically, an SLLC might provide outreach services to parents to encourage reading at home, to the elderly to be involved in the school, and to preschool age children and families to get comfortable with using the library.

In my future SLLC, the main focus I would take on would be in inviting and hosting parent information blocks, afternoons, or after school groups. I think that by teaching parents the how and why reading is important can be imperative in a child’s educational success. Often, parents are asked to donate time or money to the school, with no real help to them and fostering their relationship with their child. With a TL run program geared toward parents, with the focus on reading, library materials available, or STEAM activities to try at home, the relationship

between school and home can be strengthened, as well as the relationship between parent and child. With offering a program geared toward parents, it becomes a program where everyone wins: the school, the parent, and the child.

Module 3: Crafting your Policy

There is no doubt about the importance of policies and procedures and how they contribute to the success of a well-run SLLC. In my own SLLC, depending on what has been implemented or set by the district will determine which policies and procedures will be reworked or rewritten. If the policy on checking out books were limited (as I have noticed in many schools), I would expand the policy.

In an ideal situation, I would rewrite or rework a policy which limited student choice and student opportunity. We, as educators, spend a lot of time fostering the love of reading in our students but often SLLC policies come into effect and limit that. In my own SLLC, I would create a check-out limit of 25 books. In many classrooms, teachers are implementing the Daily 5, where students have access to a book bin where they house anywhere between 6-12 books, depending on the grade level. The books in students' book bins must be a combination of fiction and nonfiction, but of course some students lean more toward one type of book. A policy indicating a limit of 25 books across the board provides opportunities for students to check out what is required in the classroom and more for home. There is always the possibility books are left at home, so giving enough wiggle room to me seems reasonable. I would also drop failure to return fines and work more money into the budget to replace lost books. I would rather have students "lose" books and keep them at home to read over and over again, or have student really lose their books but still feel welcome in the SLLC versus having them feel uncomfortable. In response to educators who may say that dropping a fines policy does not teach responsibility, I

would say that those students losing the book either on purpose or by accident are likely hearing about responsibility from their teachers in their classrooms. It seems foolish for the SLLC to sever a relationship between a student and access to resources or reading for their academic career in that school over a fifteen dollar book.

Module 4: Your Clientele: Staff, Students and Administrators

It is my belief that the TL should make themselves indispensable, as the title of our text for this course states. This means knowing more than others about many different topics and being considered an expert in the SLLC. Having an expert-status might mean knowing the book collection inside and out (which in reality is unlikely as a new TL), but it could also mean knowing how to fix technology, who to call, offering to come into classes and teach a lesson on copyright or digital citizenship, setting up Google Classrooms for teachers, setting up accounts for new students, distributing locks, or being the one who always has ginger ale, crackers, and medicine in the cupboard.

In my own experience, I am considered indispensable in my own school, which is what I would like to carry forward into a TL role. I am the director of technology in my school, so I have been working on making our school recognized by Apple as an educational institution with the goal of being able to purchase apps to legally put them on our school's iPads. Believe it or not, Apple, as a company, for the last two and a half years has not wanted to take our money and made me jump through a lot of hoops. Once I was able to finally purchase apps, a weight was lifted off of my shoulders. In a SLLC, many TLs are in charge of gathering resources for teachers, adding apps, or making recommendations to the district's technology team. A significant part of the role is in troubleshooting, and often, getting ahold of someone at a district office is not the easiest task. Since classroom teachers have their classrooms, assignments, and

students they work with during their prep periods, many teachers and administrators feel it is the TL's responsibility to have the technology in the school organized and working. I agree with those classroom teachers and administrators. I do think that TLs are overworked, but as a classroom teacher, having the responsibility fall onto someone who has access to a phone during odd periods of the day, or can move their schedule around without looking for coverage is easier. Administration often is dealing with discipline issues, budget issues, and meetings at the district and local level. This added responsibility on the part of the TL can be viewed as an opportunity for any TL to become indispensable within a school.

Module 5: What's my Image?

Marketing a SLLC can be complicated and conflicting for some TLs. From my perspective, anything that a TL can do to bring students into the SLLC (within the budget) is worthwhile trying. Marketing, in my opinion, is best done through social media in a junior high or high school, whereas marketing within the classroom or over the announcements is best done in an elementary setting. In my own SLLC, I would start an Instagram page for the SLLC where I could post events, polls, and pictures of new and exciting titles. I could also share STEAM challenges, technology tips, or advertise apps recently purchased by the district. I might consider also using Snapchat, as it is also easy to use and may reach more students, but my personal experience with the app is limited.

In an elementary setting, I would invite myself into classrooms to do book talks with students, as well as make announcements and hold contests in the SLLC. Many students in an elementary school use the SLLC because the teacher brings them there, so my main goal would be to keep the students' interest while they were visiting and encourage them in their book choices while they are there, while supporting the teacher.

Module 6: How to Manage a Budget

In the area of budgeting, my plan for my future SLLC is to plan ahead, advocate for the SLLC and my budget, and determine the next year's budget early and submit it early to administration. The easiest way to get more funds is to simply ask for more. If the justification is there, and administration is able to see how well the previous year's budget was allocated, they might see if they could find money elsewhere within the school budget or advocate for the SLLC at the district level.

Another approach I would take would be to do fundraising within my school. While crowdfunding is not a common practice within schools in Canada, and many districts will not support or allow it to take place, there are other ways of raising funds. The most common way of raising funds and easiest to take on as a new TL would be to host one (or more) Scholastic Book Fairs. I believe that this is most effective at the elementary and middle school level, as students in my school purchase Scholastic books up until grade 6. I have not personally held a Book Fair, but have attended a number of them. Given what most of the practicing TLs have said in the discussion forum in our course, Scholastic Book Fairs generate significant funds in the SLLC. Of course, the Book Fair must be marketed adequately to ensure its success. In my own SLLC, I would host an evening where parents could attend with their child to choose books, as I think that the practice of blindly sending money with the child to the school and restricting the hours of the Fair hinder its success.

Module 7: Dealing with the Resources

Personally, I have done a lot of considering of resources and practiced weeding in my own classroom library. While it is easy to get sucked into a mentality where "we might need this later" it does not help keep our SLLCs relevant and current. Enlisting the help of department

experts is important and considering the lack of circulation of materials is equally important. If there is a void in the collection for a particular curricular outcome, I would be hard pressed to get rid of the sole book in the collection which addresses that particular outcome. However, if the information contained within that text is inaccurate, weeding it is absolutely necessary.

Another aspect to consider while weeding is what to do with the materials weeded. It is my belief that if it is not good enough for the SLLC, it is not good enough to give to students or teachers to use in personal or classroom libraries - there is a reason why the item is weeded! There is no doubt that many of those weeded materials would likely make it back into the SLLC, even if 'DISCARD' were written in bold letters across the cover. It would be concerning to any staff member or administrator to see boxes and boxes of books being carted out to the dumpster, so being discreet in weeding is imperative. Personally, I struggle to come to terms with this, as it seems sneaky to me, but I understand why it is necessary and think that I would not necessarily explain it to a staff member in a way they might understand.

Module 8: Personnel & Facilities: some thoughts

When considering facilities, I am reminded of my last school where the TL had access to seeing the entire SLLC, but the Vice-Principal who was across the SLLC, did not. I think that arranging furniture and resources in a way where there are no "hiding spots" is important for all grade levels. This approach also maximizes space, ensuring every part of the SLLC is used.

While I addressed fabric and seating options earlier, I believe that colour also plays a big role in the atmosphere of the SLLC. Warm colours are inviting to many students, but having too many posters or resources on the walls do not benefit those learners who struggle with distractions and a messy workspace. Having a variety of places for students to work is important

to meet those learner's needs. In my own classroom, we have a meeting area near our bookcase where we do our daily morning meeting. It is the expectation that students will meet there after the first bell and before the second bell, as well as being changed for gym. In an SLLC, having space for filming, working independently, technology workstations, as well as collaborative workspaces are essential for the facility to appeal to most learners in a school environment.

Module 9: Tackling the Technology Piece

A focus that I would like to have in being a TL is certainly around technology. I have a wealth of knowledge of apps and various tips and tricks, but I would like to continue learning more about new technologies for SLLCs. One focus of that learning would be in using Apple Classroom.

Apple Classroom is an app which allows teachers to see what is on the screen of a student's iPad at all times, the teacher can view what is on the iPad, and intervene by freezing the screen or locking the iPad until a physical intervention can be done. Apple Classroom requires student accounts to be made on Apple School, as well as iPads with at least a 32GB capacity. The potential for this app within the classroom is so exciting, mainly because it addresses the issues most teachers have with integrating technology into their lessons. I would consider myself to be well versed in most things relating to technology, but would not consider myself to be knowledgeable in Apple Classroom. Becoming an expert in using this app would go a long way in helping staff in a school, another way to be viewed as indispensable.

Module 10: Leadership and Pro-D

It is my belief that all teachers and TLs should take on a leadership opportunity at some point. The TL is often at a disadvantage because they may be left out of emails, staff, or grade level meetings. Taking on a leadership opportunity either within the school or outside of the

school is important to the growth of the TL. In the future, if I were to ever work in a Leader in Me school, I would certainly join the Lighthouse Team, as they meet weekly and as a TL, I would gain regular face-to-face time with teachers outside of the classroom, planning for students and events going on in the school.

I also believe that it is important for TLs to gather with other TLs. There are a number of aspects to the TL job which classroom teachers cannot fully understand. Gathering with others of the same vocation is important for maintaining expectations and also for mental health. Getting together with other TLs does not necessarily mean in person - such as a conference, but may be limited to using the LM-NET site, posting on discussion forums, joining Facebook groups, and networking on Twitter. I would certainly attend the B.C. Teacher Librarian Conference if I were to obtain a TL position, once I made my way to B.C. as I believe the conference provides the greatest and easiest opportunity to network with other like-minded people.

Conclusion

Understanding what is involved in being a TL is difficult to imagine unless fully immersed in the position. Splitting up the roles, responsibilities, and aspects of the vocation allow someone not currently in the position to gain a glimpse into the delicate balance all practicing TLs must take. Overall, the TL must be considered a team player and an expert in many areas. Only when the SLLC collapses with the absence of the TL will the TL be viewed by others as indispensable. Given what I have discussed, there are a variety of small steps a TL can take to have this effect.