

Treasure Mountain Canada: Inspiring home-grown research and school- wide improvement

By Anita Brooks Kirkland and Carol Koechlin

Snapshot

Carol Koechlin and Annita Brooks-Kirkland describe the amazing symposiums known as [Treasure Mountain Canada](#) that have been running biannually for a decade. This project brings together researchers, practitioners and scholars to share and explore research and professional knowledge and evidence about the library learning commons.

How can we inspire teacher-librarians to gather evidence of success through action research, and facilitate meaningful discourse between practitioners and academics?

The challenge for the profession is to move beyond simply reporting state studies to crafting a compelling narrative that starts with local evidence of practice and links to the wider formal research evidence for practice. (Todd, 2015)

Canadian school library professionals have taken up Ross Todd's challenge in many formal and informal ways. This article will introduce Synergy readers to one national approach applying Todd's wisdom.

Thirteen years ago a small group of keen Canadian teacher-librarian leaders attended a conference preceding the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) conference in Reno Nevada and led by Dr. David V. Loertscher and Blanche Woolls called [Treasure Mountain](#). Ross Todd and many other school library greats were participants at this unique forum. This meeting of the minds sparked the idea to adopt a similar professional learning experience here in Canada and thus [Treasure Mountain Canada](#) (TMC) was conceived. A small committee was formed and with the support of Dr. Loertscher the work commenced to develop TMC as a school library learning commons research symposium and think tank. The hope was to create an incubator for much-needed research into school library practice in Canada that would gather and analyze homegrown research at the school and district level to benefit all in the pursuit of advancing teaching and learning.



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Treasure Mountain Canada, modelled on Loertscher's approach, is not a traditional conference but very much a participatory experience. Symposiums are deliberately designed to model best learning approaches that we find in an [excellent school library learning commons](#). Participants are supported by collaborative physical and virtual learning spaces and engage in participatory learning experiences, robust

challenges and collaborative knowledge building. This project is devoted to collaboratively exploring ideas to build collective knowledge of the learning commons approach as sustainable school improvement. TMC symposiums are held every other year, in locations across Canada and in partnership with other organizations or associations. In 2016 Treasure Mountain Canada became a project of the newly-formed national organization, [Canadian School Libraries](#) (CSL). CSL is dedicated to supporting and sharing research and professional knowledge about the library learning commons for and with school library practitioners, scholars and researchers.

The first Treasure Mountain Canada, held in Edmonton in 2010, focused on [Transforming Canadian School Libraries to Meet the Needs of 21st Century Learners](#). We were so fortunate to have both David Loertscher and Ross Todd with us as we embarked on this learning journey. In Ottawa in 2012 the focus became Learning for the Future: Working Towards Revised National Standards for School Libraries in Canada. In Victoria in 2014 the focus was the launch of the CLA document [Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada](#). TMC4 in Toronto focused on deeper implementation of the new national standards, and evidence that the standards are making an impact on teaching and learning in Canada. TMC5 was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba in partnership with the Manitoba School Library Association (MSLA) SAGE Conference. The work of TMC5 led to a CSL project to help schools build [Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons](#). This year TMC6 took place in Toronto again in partnership with the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference. The theme [Participatory Learning in the Library Learning Commons](#) inspired diverse papers from across Canada.

CSL has built an archive for collecting all TMC programs and papers over the years. Already there are over a hundred 'homegrown' research papers catalogued and archived for study and reference.



Date	Location	Conference Partner	Theme / Research Focus
June 2010	Edmonton, AB University of Alberta	Canadian Library Association	Transforming Canadian School Libraries to Meet the Needs of 21 st Century Learners
June 2012	Ottawa, ON University of Ottawa	Canadian Library Association	Learning for the Future: Envisioning National Standards for Program Development
May 2014	Victoria, BC	Canadian Library Association	Leading Learning for the Future: Release of <i>Leading Learning and Planning for Implementation</i>
January 2016	Toronto, ON	Ontario School Library Association	Growing Impact of Leading Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-Teaching for Greater Learning • Innovation for Learning • Building a Learning Community
October 2017	Winnipeg, MB	Manitoba School Library Association	Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Environment • Instructional Approaches • Learning Partnerships • Leveraging Technology
February 2020	Toronto, ON	Ontario Library Association <small>(With the Ontario School Library Association & The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario)</small>	Participatory Learning in the Library Learning Commons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Environments • Culturally Relevant and Responsive SLLC • Accessibility for All • Creativity and Innovation • School Culture

The theme and sub-themes for TMC 2020 were established by the planning committee based on a Leading Learning standard of practice that needed better profile, [Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning](#). Current trends in education and learning point to a need for the deliberate design of participatory learning experiences and inclusive and responsive learning environments where learners can work, create and play both independently and collaboratively, physically and virtually. We already had the vision and now was the time to gather evidence of best practice implementation and make the connections to school-wide improvement.

After establishing the theme and location for each TMC, CSL prepared many supports for potential paper writers. The committee prepared [annotated lists of resources](#) to get folks thinking about the theme. To support approaches to research for TMC papers and other teacher research, a comprehensive [Research Toolkit](#) has been developed by a small committee and posted on the CSL website.



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Practitioners and academics in the world of school libraries were invited a year ahead of the symposium to conduct their research and to submit papers. Papers are shared on a collaborative platform well ahead of the event and participants are encouraged to study them, ask questions and add comments, thus enabling the building of community and collective knowledge before meeting in person.



You are welcome to read the TMC6 papers and events posted on the [TMCanada blog](#). Although words cannot fully describe the positive buzz and collective synergy created, here is a brief summary of symposium events. All day Friday TMC participants attended regular conference programs and speakers at

the [OLA Super Conference](#). Friday evening at our kick-off dinner we were treated to an inspiring keynote by Eric Walters, one of our highly acclaimed children's authors. His commitment to supporting readers right across Canada is infectious. It was Eric's challenge to schools to set books free for the summer that led to [CSL Summer Lending Program research](#). It was his vision and passion that resulted in the recent [I Read Canadian Day](#), a national success story.

After a wonderful meal together, we honoured the Pembina Trails School Division from Winnipeg, Manitoba, as the very first recipient of the [Leading Learning Implementation Award 2020](#). We were thrilled to also award three outstanding teacher-librarians with the [Angela Thacker Memorial Award](#) – Alison Bodner of Manitoba, Alanna King of Ontario, and Sarah Wethered of British Columbia. All recipients were in attendance which added to the celebratory atmosphere of the evening.



A meeting of minds: Canadian education scholar and keynote speaker Garfield Gini-Newman deep in conversation with David Loertscher.

Saturday we learned from spotlight speakers [Laura and Garfield Gini-Newman](#), [Leigh Cassell](#), and [Deborah Dundas](#) as well as all paper writers in attendance. We invested our energies and diverse talents into working on challenges and collaboratively exploring innovative ideas to advance school libraries in Canada. Commitment to leading whole school participatory learning was sealed with a [BIG THINK](#) activity that truly demonstrated the collaborative genius of the room!

David Loertscher's Big Idea: "Yesterday, you had a learning commons. Tomorrow, take over the whole school! Be visible and indispensable."

More Big Ideas from TMC6

Participatory learning is really about focusing on who the students are – their lived experiences and identities, learning needs and interests – and this applies to collections, programs and learning approaches.

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School libraries are about enhancing the moral purpose of schools, as well as the educational or scholastic purpose.

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And new questions

Rethinking the power of the learning commons beyond the physical space of the school library – how can the entire school be an example of the learning commons?

What systemic structures do we need to dismantle to truly disrupt our current thinking about the library learning commons?

Transformations in the school library learning commons are never finished, always in beta. How can we build this continuous change mindset with administration and staff school wide?

How might we expand and diversify the voices in school librarianship across Canada? What responsibility do we have to lead the learning by amplifying the voices of other practitioners?

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The bottom line

The TMC 2020 experience exceeded expectations, creating a rare learning dynamic that seemed to empower everyone. Presenters, paper writers, organizers, volunteers and every participant felt the synergy build from Friday's workshops and evening dinner festivities right through

Saturday activities to the [Loertscher Big Think](#). We are now making plans for TMC7 and hope this forum of national research will continue to evolve to enrich the future of learning in school library learning commons for the benefit of every child in Canada.

What about Australia? It is Australian Ross Todd's challenge to link local evidence of practice to the wider formal research evidence that has guided the work of Treasure Mountain Canada.



TMC6 2020 Planning Committee (L-R): Anita Brooks Kirkland, Kate Johnson-McGregor, Carol Koechlin, Andrea Sykes, Jennifer Brown.

You are the change! You are the local action. This responsibility requires gathering evidence to make your claims about students' mastery of curriculum content; critical-thinking and knowledge-building competencies; mastery of complex technical skills for accessing and evaluating information and using these skills to construct deep knowledge; outcomes related to reading motivation, comprehension, and enrichment; outcomes related to attitudes and values of information use and learning; and the development of self-concept and personal development. This is your evidence agenda, and this is your future. (Todd, 2015)

Our experience with the Treasure Mountain model has rejuvenated interest in conducting research into school library practice in Canada. Treasure Mountain Canada has inspired teacher-librarians from across the country to take initiative locally, integrating action research into their own practice and share their experiences so that we can build collective knowledge for moving forward. Is it time for Treasure Mountain Australia?

Reference

Todd, Ross J., (2015). Evidence-Based Practice and School Libraries: Interconnections of Evidence, Advocacy, and Actions. *Knowledge Quest* 43(3). Accessed at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1048950.pdf>

As a writer, presenter and consultant, **Anita Brooks Kirkland** specializes in the areas of information and digital literacy and the role of the school library learning commons. She draws on her extensive experience as a teacher educator, both as an instructor in teacher-librarianship for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, and in her previous role as the Consultant for K-12 Libraries at the Waterloo Region District School Board. Anita was a contributing writer to [Together for Learning](#), Ontario's guideline document for the school library learning commons. Anita is very active in professional organizations, currently serving as chair of [Canadian School Libraries](#). She was the 2014 president of the Ontario Library Association, and has also served as president of the [Ontario School Library Association](#) (2005) and co-chaired [The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario](#) (2011-13). Anita shares an extensive collection of program resources, articles, and presentations on her website and blog, www.bythebrooks.ca.

Carol Koechlin is an experienced educator who has contributed to the field of information literacy and school librarianship writing professional books, articles for professional journals, facilitating on-line courses, and presenting workshops in Canada, United States and Australia. Working with Dr. David V. Loertscher, the team has developed foundations for the transformation of school libraries and computer labs into a Physical and Virtual participatory Learning Commons. Explore their work at [The School Library Learning Commons – Future Forward](#). Carol is a founding member of [Treasure Mountain Canada](#) (TMC) and has co-chaired TMC Symposiums since 2010. Carol was a contributing writer for [Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons](#) and writing coordinator for [Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada](#) (Canadian Library Association, 2014). She is currently a director of [Canadian School Libraries](#) (CSL). Carol's favourite saying, '[Empower students to own the question.](#)'