

# Canadian School Libraries Leading Learning

By Carol Koechlin and Judith Sykes

## Looking forward to the future!



At the [Canadian Library Association \(CLA\) 2014 conference](#) on May 30, 2014, we officially launched *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*. This unique project started as an impossible dream hatched at a [Treasure Mountain Canada \(TMC\)](#) symposium in Edmonton, Alberta four years ago. Our aspirations took shape over the next two years and at [TMC3](#) in 2012 a proposal for the work was drafted and later submitted to the [Canadian Library Association \(CLA\)](#) for support. With CLA approval under our belt, committees across the country were formed to study what was the desired future of school libraries in Canada. Starting with the belief that every student in Canada deserves and needs the benefits of excellent school library programs and facilities, we began the journey. We, Judith Sykes as project leader and Carol Koechlin as writing co-coordinator, worked out a writing process to deal with the regional realities and communication challenges of our Canadian education landscape.

It was obvious from the onset that we desired input from all ten provinces and three territories in Canada and we wanted the end result to be a national vision and plan that would call for serious reinvestment in school libraries to lead learning now and in the future. We are extremely proud of the collaborative nature of the new standards document. Collaborative digital documents provided for rich knowledge building with dedicated individuals and committees from every province and territory in our country. The regional committees were as diverse as possible, consisting in many cases of teacher-librarians, principals, library technicians, classroom teachers, parents, students, and community librarians as well as Ministry of Education members. The committees were given several tasks to do as we progressed starting with a general exploration of the state of school libraries in their region and the desired role in school wide improvement and the future of learning.

The collective voices of these champions for learning and school libraries built momentum and knit our resolve to build strong standards. To be sure there were many challenges, misunderstandings and problems to resolve but every bump in the road made the standards stronger and truly national. Every step of the way was transparent and collaborative and very exciting and rewarding for us as facilitators of this project. The journey from start to finish is archived at our [National Project site](#). The results are rich and reflective of our combined vision for leading learning with futures-oriented learning environments and building literacies and dispositions to empower all learners in Canada. The process to create this publication is indicative of the potential of a learning commons to inspire, facilitate, nourish and celebrate the work of a participatory learning community.

Traditionally, school libraries have always been about information, research and literacy. The physical facility is known by many names – the library media center, information hub, learning resources center, library information centre, and more recently as the iCenter, and learning commons. The school library learning environment has, however, expanded exponentially in the last few years as digital resources and virtual learning spaces explode to meet the needs of today's learners. School libraries take on new and exciting transformations as library professionals capture the potential to lead learning and knowledge building in their schools. The learning commons approach is not new to Canadian schools. The work of Loertscher, Koechlin, Zwaan and Rosenfeld over the last decade has assisted the transitioning of school library programs in Canada. Workshops, boot camps, webinars, and conference sessions, provided by these authors of many learning commons publications, have generated a swell of enthusiasm and created new leaders of school libraries as active centers of learning and knowledge building.

**School libraries take on new and exciting transformations as library professionals capture the potential to lead learning and knowledge building in their schools.**

School library as learning commons is embraced by many districts and entire provinces in Canada. The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) published *Together for Learning* in 2010. This document has been the catalyst for program and facility changes in

Ontario and around the country. A website is developing to keep the document alive and growing. In June 2014, the Alberta Ministry of Education released a learning commons policy to replace their former (1984) school library policy "that describes the learning commons, expectations for school authorities and guidelines for implementation" (Greg Bass, Deputy Minister of Education, Alberta). This policy, collaboratively developed over the last six years, saw the ministry work closely with the Alberta School Library Council and library leaders around this province. The link to this policy, its guidelines and related material can be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/departement/ipr/slsi.aspx>.

On the west coast, British Columbia (BC) sports many teacher-librarian leaders championing the transition to school library learning commons (SLLC) in their schools and districts. District Vice Principal Curriculum & Instruction – Learning Commons, Monica Berra, in Prince George BC, writes about district-wide transformation in *Building a District Learning Commons*. The British Columbia Teacher Library Association (BCTLA) is currently putting the finishing touches on a new professional development resource *From School Library to School Library Learning Commons*. With this rich background, the future of school libraries in Canada was envisioned in the standards as a learning commons with exciting and progressive attributes for the future of learning.

## What is a Learning Commons?

A learning commons is a whole school approach to building a participatory learning community. The library learning commons is the physical and virtual collaborative learning hub of the school. It is designed to engineer and drive future-oriented learning and teaching throughout the entire school. Inquiry, project/problem-based learning experiences are designed as catalysts for intellectual engagement with information, ideas, thinking, and dialogue. Reading thrives, learning literacies and technology competencies evolve, and critical thinking, creativity, innovation and playing to learn are nourished. Everyone is a learner; everyone is a teacher working collaboratively toward excellence (Canadian Library Association (CLA), 2014b).

## Overview of the document

*Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, currently in interactive PDF format, is presented in three main sections. The first section, 'Transforming School Libraries To Learning Commons', highlights the focus and rationale for the document, the evolution of the learning commons practice, and introduces the standards, their transitional growth stages, and themes. The 'Leading Learning Framework' follows, with standard charts, themes and indicators for each standard. The standards of practice inter-connect with a continuum of phases and indicators for each. Readers will notice that the standards are colored and symbolic rather than numbered. The standards are not hierarchical as schools may be at different points in each standard – leading in some areas, emerging in others. The work of an effective SLLC (School Library Learning Commons) is framed when the core standards of practice weave together to generate dynamic learning.

One of the most fascinating parts of the standards is the annotated indicator examples or illustrations, 128 and counting, one or more for each indicator. These examples are linked from each indicator by clicking on the 'See it in Action!' phrase in each box. Shared from schools across Canada, these examples add richness, depth, visualization and connectivity to the document. Viewers can see the indicators 'in action' happening somewhere in the country and think about how they can achieve or adapt similar expression of the indicator in their schools. Successful implementation of *Leading Learning* will be and must be contextual; based on the uniqueness of each school's learning community as the students work to achieve mandated curricular goals and outcomes. As the SLLC purpose is to support and move forward the student learning goals and outcomes of the ministries of education, the third main part of the document, the 'Moving Forward' section, presents school leadership – principals, teacher-librarians, leadership teams – with steps, charts, additional key resources and a glossary for implementing and sustaining the standards. An extensive bibliography is attached for research and reference purposes.

## The Standards of Practice

Working with a focus group over a number of months, and then sharing and refining the descriptions with provincial/territorial committees and school library leaders across the country, led to these final descriptions as indicative of what expected practice in SLLC development reflected.

The interconnected standards of practice are denoted throughout the document with carefully chosen metaphoric symbols. Prior to reading each standard and its themes and indicators, we would recommend that readers reflect upon what the symbols could mean in context of their practice and the SLLC. The symbols and full description of the standards follow:



**Figure 1: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada. Canadian Library Association, 2014b, figure, page 8, and definitions, page 11, 13, 15, 17 & 19**



### **Facilitating collaborative engagement to cultivate/empower a community of learners**

Local, regional and global connections are a vital part of the 21st Century learning environment. The 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 also is a portal to virtual connections, both local and global. It is important to acknowledge the diverse needs of all stakeholders within the school learning commons community, both in terms of resource formats and access to information and collaboration opportunities.



### **Leading the learning community to achieve school goals**

Strong leadership for the learning commons is vital to ensure sustainability and attainment of school, jurisdiction and provincial student learning goals and outcomes. Forming a team to lead the learning commons is an effective way to intentionally plan for and assess the success of the goals of this learning space. The ultimate goal is improved student achievement and the refining of essential literacy, information management and communication skills. As such, it is also key to build in opportunities for student learning and innovation to be demonstrated, shared and showcased.



### **Cultivating effective instructional design to co-plan, teach and assess learning**

Knowledge building, creativity and innovation, and honing of information management and literacy skills are key goals of the learning commons. The intentional teaching of these skills, as well as opportunities to utilise a variety of resources, technologies and spaces to support learning require collaboration and planning and thoughtful instructional design, as does the effective assessment of learning. Learners also need to 'learn how to learn' through deliberate design of opportunities to build metacognition of learning skills, process and content. It is essential to support both student and teacher growth and success in these areas.



### **Fostering literacy to empower life-long learners**

With the explosion of new technologies and methods of communication come expanding understandings of literacy which have 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 personalising learning and involves embracing new ideas and skills. The School Library Learning Commons has a leading role in assisting learners to hone and apply an expanded notion of literacy.



### **Designing learning environments to support participatory learning**

Active and knowledgeable involvement in participatory learning is a necessary skill for today's learners. Learners are moving from being only consumers of information to active producers and participants. Recent advances in technology have enabled individuals to actively and quickly comment on the work of others, as well as produce and share their own work. Inherent in these activities is the importance of security, privacy and good citizenship practices as well as effective collaboration skills and ensuring accessibility for all. Working together in groups, both virtually and in person is the new norm. A learning commons can provide both the physical and virtual learning environments as well as support necessary to be an active participatory learner. Learning commons spaces, collections and tools are changing in response to this paradigm shift.

### **Leading learning framework**

#### **Standards, themes and growth indicators for school library learning commons**

Once again, working with the focus group, committees and library leaders, a great deal of generous feedback was compiled, particularly in relation to the number of indicators for each theme that were initially drafted. We heard very clearly that we needed to be as concise and clear as possible in order that every school in Canada could see themselves working through the stages and indicators over time to develop practice and not become overwhelmed by 'yet another document'. It had to be doable, growable and livable as well as scholarly and based on pedagogical best practice. We believe that the collaborative writing/reviewing process and teams helped us to achieve all of this and more. Most standards ended up with six themes and two with seven. Each theme has four indicators across four stages or phases of development. Indicator charts begin with the emerging phase as we felt that the exploring phase supports schools just beginning to implement the standards a point of entry. We also want to reinforce the point that schools may be at different places in each phase – emerging in some, leading in others – as they implement the document and grow their practice.

## Themes by Standard:






 <b>Facilitating collaborative engagement to cultivate and empower a community of learners</b>	 <b>Advancing the learning community to achieve school goals</b>	 <b>Cultivating effective instructional design to co-plan, teach and assess learning</b>	 <b>Fostering literacies to empower life-long learners</b>	 <b>Designing learning environments to support participatory learning</b>
Vision for Learning	Planning for School Improvement	Instructional Leadership	Literacy Leadership	Designing for a Collaborative Physical LLC
Design for Collaboration	Principal Collaborative Role	Instructional Partnerships	Engaging Readers	Designing for a Collaborative Virtual LLC
Partners in Collaborative Learning	Teacher-Librarian Collaborative Role	Engaging with Inquiry Approaches	Information Literacy	Designing for Accessibility in the LLC
Student and Community Partnerships	Teacher Collaborative Role	Differentiated Learning	Critical Literacy	Designing for Responsive Print and Digital Collections
School Administration Partnerships	Support Staff Collaborative Role	Technology for Learning	Digital Literacy and Citizenship	Designing for Creativity and Innovation
District Administration and Consultant Partnerships	District Administration and Consultant Collaborative Role	Assessment for, of and as Learning	Cultural Literacy	Designing for Participatory School Culture
		Evidence-Based Practice	Literacy Partners	

Figure 2: 'Themes by Standard' figure, pg. 10, *Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada*. Canadian Library Association, 2014

### 'See it in action'

Much discussion arose in the editorial stages of the document regarding how to best incorporate the wonderful illustrations and their annotations. We hope to have a dedicated website soon which will make it much easier to link to illustrations, add webinars, videos and networking spaces. This was a challenge to achieve in a PDF document. The interim solution? When clicking on the term 'See it in Action', the reader is taken to a 'note card' outlining all the information about the example, along with a direct link to view it. Here is 'See it in Action' for the [Prince George, British Columbia, district example](#):

# LEADING LEARNING

**Standard:** Advancing the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals

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**Theme:** Support Staff Collaborative Role

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**Growth Phase:** Evolving

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**Growth Indicator:** Support staff in school or working centrally at the district level, work with LLC leadership team to manage online databases and subscription resources in the LLC.

✚See it in action✚

A school district in Prince George, British Columbia, provides a learning commons portal to support its district school libraries.

Prince George School District #57. (2013). *District learning commons discovery portal*.  
<http://prin.ent.sirsidynix.net/client/drc>

(This link will open a new tab or in a new window in your browser. Close that tab or window to return to this page.)

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Close

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## Moving forward

Transitioning to effective learning commons practice is a continuous journey that will take different amounts of time for schools. It is a whole school effort with a team approach and varied roles and responsibilities. We conceptualised 'Moving Forward' around the principle of collaborative development by the SLLC team. Strategic steps to initiate SLLC development at the school, district or even ministry are included, followed by a glossary of key terms that run throughout the document. A series of appendices provides additional practical tips and tools for implementation. Collaborative teams leading whole school ownership of learning commons development and responsibilities will propel development, implementation, experimentation and sustainability. Everyone needs to be welcomed to the process and do their part – principals and other school administrators, teachers, teacher-librarians, library technicians, community librarians, parents and students. The important part is to begin, set goals, achieve, celebrate and keep getting better! In this example from the indicator charts, the librarian from [Bowness High School, Calgary, Alberta](#), is interviewed about the community team concept in moving from to the SLLC. In Drayton Valley, Alberta, a grade 12 [student's design](#) was chosen for the SLLC changes.

Standard indicators and 'See it in Action' examples from across the country can be used as a guideline to chart growth of learning commons practice. From site-based information collected, goals and actions are set, a learning commons plan developed, implemented and importantly, sustained, to grow and get better and better.

# Key Steps for Implementation: Essential Process and Conditions for Success



Figure 3: 'Key Steps' figure, pg. 22, *Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada.* Canadian Library Association, 2014.

## Advancing and sustaining the standards as a school wide improvement strategy

Making the case for the role of school library learning commons in school improvement is key to success. This will be an ongoing process of making the connections for administrators, teachers, students and parents. Learning Commons professional staff needs to know what the school improvement goals are for their school and district but they also need to be at the table when school improvement initiatives are planned. They need to help their schools understand the potential for improving learning and teaching through the SLLC. The rich physical and virtual SLLC provides differentiated resources, technologies, spaces and

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and

instruction needed to address the needs of all learners. Everything purchased, changed, or provided in the SSLC should be linked to school and district goals. Making these deliberate links in accounts, reports and all work in the SSLC transparent for all is also very important. Technologies make the task of sharing and celebrating progress in the SSLC easy and efficient for busy administrators.

Making the case for the role of school library learning commons with school district and Ministry of Education leaders is another key to success. Funding for staffing, resources and facilities in today's climate of financial restraints will be tough. Library associations, professional educators, and district leaders will need to step up to the plate and make pitches to those who control the funding. Just as we suggest at the school level, these supporters will need to align their message with the district/ ministry agendas. They will need to seek formal presentation meetings and facilitate these sessions fully knowledgeable about regional priorities and relate how the SSLC can support these objectives. They will need to follow up with evidence of advances already underway and paint a clear picture of the standards leading the way to changes needed in schools toward futures-oriented learning, improved student achievement, and sustainable school wide improvement

*Evaluation of practice is an essential aspect of implementing the new Standards of Practice for School Libraries in Canada. School libraries and school librarians are rarely evaluated in a consistent and systematic way, but evaluations help to ensure that the library's programs and services are 'relentlessly focused on learning.'*  
(Dr Dianne Oberg [TMC3 Papers](#), 2014)

*Implementing and sustaining Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada will require each school to pose many questions and collaborate for strategic solutions to move through and beyond its phases...By following the steps to implementation and using strategic tools to provide direction and sustenance, students in every part of the country will receive the best possible preparation for their future.*  
(Judith Sykes [TMC3 Paper](#), 2014)

## Evidence-based practice

As schools across the country implement 'Leading Learning' they will need to consider sustaining practice as key leaders or champions, such as the supportive principal or teacher-librarian, move on to other positions or schools. Too often stellar SSLC programs fall by the wayside as what is seen as the 'next most important thing' turns up. SSLC development must be seen as continually leading learning as depicted in the standard 'cultivating effective instructional design to co-plan, teach and assess learning', and not another educational catch-phrase or trend. As part of this, evidence-based practice is critical to create cycles of continuous growth and reflection for sustainable SSLC implementation especially garnering the evidence of advanced student learning through SSLC experiences and practices. Leading Learning provides many practical stages and resources to engage teachers and teacher-librarians in evidence-based practice as a snapshot of this theme demonstrates.

**As part of this, evidence-based practice is critical to create cycles of continuous growth and reflection . . .**

Evidence-Based Practice	Teacher-librarians/LLC teachers work with the LLC leadership team to review the LLC learning experiences and set goals for improvement.	Teacher-librarians and teachers build and share their professional knowledge of approaches and environments to support inquiry learning and assess its effectiveness.	Teacher-librarians initiate collaborative action research with teachers to build best practice strategies and approaches to learning in the LLC and assess its effectiveness.	Teacher-librarians contribute their knowledge of best practice results in their LLC to the broader education community.
	<b>SEE IT IN ACTION</b>	<b>SEE IT IN ACTION</b>	<b>SEE IT IN ACTION</b>	<b>SEE IT IN ACTION</b>

**Figure 4: Leading Learning: Standards Of Practice For School Library Learning Commons In Canada. Canadian Library Association, 2014, page. 16.**

As teachers and teacher-librarians engage in evidence-based practice, we hope that they will become communities of action researchers – sharing findings, reflections, and ideas. Examples of this from the document are the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) Teacher-Librarian toolkit, the University of Saskatchewan's video evidence of a professional development school engaging in inquiry-based learning, the Greater Essex County District School Board, Ontario, teacher-librarian collaborative inquiry reports, and British Columbia teacher-librarians sharing tested resource based lessons on a wide variety of curricular topics.



## Action research

Action research has been foundational in creating Leading Learning. Prior to each 'Treasure Mountain Canada' research retreat, held every two years for the past six years, a call for papers was sent out to educational leaders and school library associations across the country. The papers for this year's symposium, peer reviewed, were intended to provide rationale, direction and implementation support for the new Canadian standards. We suggested either teacher research and/or academic research related to the standards of practice for school libraries in Canada and included a checklist welcoming not only print but media formats such as web sites and videos. Attendance at the symposium was not a requirement; we needed stories, research, strategies and observations to collectively build a voice for the future work of school libraries. We invited conversations for those who couldn't attend the actual event via Twitter and our blog <http://tmcanada.blogspot.ca/>. All papers, that have permission by the author, are posted for study in PDF on the TM Canada Site. <https://sites.google.com/site/tmcanada3/home>.

To encourage participation in TMC research and papers we suggest the following steps:

### *Action Research Process for Teacher Librarians Made Simple*

- Consider your present program and the needs of learners today.
- Identify a target for improvement.
- Develop questions to guide your work.
- Imagine how you might achieve your target.
- Investigate what others have tried and develop your own plan.
- Try it out, adjust strategies if necessary and keep track of your evidence.
- Analyse and interpret your results.
- Prepare a summary report and share.
- Apply your findings to better address learning needs in your school library.

This simple process for action research is an excellent guide for teacher who wants to experiment with the standards and indicators and collect evidence of the impact on teaching and learning. Although the school library community has produced volumes of academic research over the years on the positive impact of excellent school library programs and teacher-librarian leadership on student achievement and partner teacher efficacy; we are counting on leaders in each SLLC to conduct 'home grown' local research at each site. As the stories, testimonies, blogs, and seminars sharing action research findings multiply, it will be very hard to ignore the evidence. Schools, districts and regions will see the logic of serious reinvestment in school libraries as a wise business plan that gets results.

## Joining forces globally to lead learning

We are very grateful to have this opportunity to share the Canadian standards for school library learning commons with our Australian colleagues. We hope readers of this article will be inspired, and find many ideas they can transfer into their own school library situations. Strengthening ties with each other and the international school library community builds our collective knowledge of the future of school libraries and our resolve to ensure that future. Although the needs of each school and region will be different, we have a common vision. We all want the best education possible for all students; we want our young citizens to know how to learn and have opportunities to succeed at work and play in our complex world. We trust that Leading Learning will assist the actualisation of our common vision and be a significant guide for schools as the future of learning unfolds.

## Links for more . . .

- Direct link to standards <http://clatoolbox.ca/casl/slic/llsop.html>
- Link to SLIC <http://clatoolbox.ca/casl/slic/>
- CLA press release for launch of standards <http://www.cla.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=15269>
- TMC3 Google site <https://sites.google.com/site/tmcanada3/tmc3> Check out the program pages and Twitter hashtag #tmcanada2014 for work accomplished.
- TMC3 Papers <https://sites.google.com/site/treasuremountaincanada3/home>. Wonderful professional learning here for teacher-librarians!
- TMC3 Blog <http://tmcanada.blogspot.ca/>.

## Articles

*A Vision for Canadian School Library Learning Commons* <http://clatoolbox.ca/casl/slicv32n2/322cla.html>

*From Hubris to Humility: Welcoming New Standards for School Libraries in Canada* by Anita Brooks Kirkland <http://clatoolbox.ca/casl/slicv32n2/322brookskirkland.html>

*Transforming School Libraries in Canada: Leading Learning from the Learning Commons* by Judith Sykes and Carol Koechlin  
<http://ssla.ca/The%20Medium%20Issue>

*If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . .* by Doug Peterson, Computer Studies Instructor at the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Ontario. <http://dougpete.wordpress.com/2014/06/21/if-it-looks-like-a-duck-and-quacks-like-a-duck/>

*New National Library Standards for the 21st Century Officially Launched.* Teacher-librarian Jo-Anne Gibson from Manitoba writes about developing and going forward with the new standards from the provincial perspective in the article <http://www.pembinatrails.ca/Features/2014/June/library.html>

The national project website's 'Moving Forward' page continues the documentation of this collaborative journey.

**We look forward to your comments and questions. Please contact:**

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