

# Moving Boldly Forward with Canadian School Libraries

*By Anita Brooks Kirkland*

Canada has a new national organisation dedicated to the development of the school library learning commons. Still in its organisational infancy, Canadian School Libraries is moving boldly forward with ambitious projects focused on education and research as well as strengthening the network of associations and individuals across the country who are dedicated to advancing the school library learning commons.



## Our Challenge

Perhaps it's our challenging geography with a small population spread over an enormous landmass, perhaps it's that education is a provincial rather than national jurisdiction, or perhaps it's just symptomatic of the challenges facing so many professional organisations, but sustaining a national school library association has always been a big problem in Canada (Brooks Kirkland, 2016). The dissolution of the Canadian Library Association (CLA) in 2014 was the latest and most serious threat that we have faced in this regard. The CLA was Canada's national multi-sectoral library association, and although school library involvement in CLA was thin, it was the tie that bound us loosely together across the country.

The CLA dissolution meant that our freshly-minted national standards document, *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, was effectively orphaned. The only national journal dedicated to school library practice ceased publication. The hard fought-for national collaboration that produced *Leading Learning* was effectively disenfranchised by the dissolution. And *Leading Learning* itself, which had made a significant impression in Canada and had also received international attention, was suddenly at risk of becoming unsupported and unavailable. The new Canadian Federation of Library Associations – Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB) – emerged from the dissolution, but by its very mandate and organisational structure was not able to take on these projects.

## Innovation in the Face of Crisis

They say that it sometimes takes a crisis to inspire innovation. The notion of a new national school library organisation was discussed at the [Treasure Mountain Canada](#) 2016 research symposium and think tank, informed by the paper, [Toward a New National School Library Association in Canada: The Case, Considerations, and Potential Models](#).

With positive results from a national survey exploring interest in moving forward and under the pressures of the tight timelines for the dissolution of the Canadian Library Association and therefore potential loss of a

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platform for major national school library projects, the decision was made to proceed with forming Canadian School Libraries as a new non-profit organisation. Understanding that putting ourselves in competition for membership with provincial and territorial school library associations was neither desirable nor likely to be successful, CSL has no membership fees. Our network is our strength, and we have a mandate to leverage partnerships with other professional associations and groups. We rely on donations, grants and the proceeds of events for revenue generation. After a year-long application process, CSL recently received status as a charitable organisation.

In our short existence we are pleased to report that our audacity in the face of potential crisis has indeed made an impression. It gives me enormous pleasure to introduce you to our Canadian School Libraries initiatives.

**Canadian School Libraries**  
www.canadianschoollibraries.ca

One starting point to essential resources for advancing the school library learning commons program.

**LEADING LEARNING** / **L'APPRENTISSAGE EN TÊTE**

Leading Learning / L'Apprentissage en tête provides a guide for the transition of school libraries to vibrant centres of teaching and learning responsive to the diverse needs of learners today and into the future. It also serves as a measurement tool to help schools determine where they are now with library facilities and programs and where they want to advance to.

**CANADIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES JOURNAL**  
Canada's **only national journal** dedicated to **school library learning commons practice**. Three online editions per year.

**TMC**  
Collaboratively exploring ideas to build **collective knowledge** of the learning commons approach as **sustainable school improvement**.

**Canadian School Libraries TMC Research Archive**  
**ONE POINT OF ACCESS** to scholarly and practitioner research about the school library learning commons.

Every child in Canada deserves an excellent school library.

Link to all CSL projects from our main website [www.canadianschoollibraries.ca](http://www.canadianschoollibraries.ca).

## National Standards: Leading Learning/L'Apprentissage en tête

The development of *Leading Learning* was a remarkable collaborative process, bringing together stakeholders from across this diverse country. Project leads Carol Koechlin and Judith Sykes describe the process and the results in their article, *Canadian School Libraries Leading Learning* (*Synergy*, 12 (2), 2014). The final document promised to provide every school in Canada, no matter the status of its library, with a meaningful and achievable path to improvement. Canadian School Libraries successfully negotiated the transfer of intellectual property rights from the Canadian Library Association, including the rights to the unpublished French translation.

*Leading Learning* and *L'Apprentissage en tête* have now been published as websites. CSL has established a national committee dedicated to continuous development of the project, updating the exemplars that illustrate each standard, and raising awareness through publications and professional learning opportunities. The committee plans to develop supporting resources that make connections between *Leading Learning* and provincial guidelines and curricula.

**The development of *Leading Learning* was a remarkable collaborative process . . .**

## The Canadian School Libraries Journal

The dissolution of the Canadian Library Association meant that the only national journal dedicated to school library practice, *School Libraries in Canada*, ceased publication. CSL has now created a new publication, the **CSL Journal**, with an updated interface and renewed purpose. We have established a very strong editorial board with representation from across the country. The journal has entered into a content partnership agreement with the subscription magazine *Resource Links* for a themed book review column. Having successfully negotiated the transfer of intellectual property rights to the full archives of *School Libraries in Canada* with CLA, CSL has made the archives available on the CSL Journal website.

The CSL Journal has been very favourably received. While some provincial associations have publications for their members, the CSL Journal helps us to make connections between jurisdictions and to learn from each other's experiences. It provides incentive for Canadian researchers and practitioners to share their insights and experience, contributing to the wider education literature in the country. The fourth issue will be released in mid-May, 2018.

## Fostering Research: Treasure Mountain Canada

Treasure Mountain Canada (TMC) is a research symposium and think tank, originally envisioned as an extension of the Treasure Mountain symposium in the United States, developed by Dr. David Loertscher and colleagues in 1989. TMC is a participatory event that brings researchers and practitioners together to work on a particular theme. Scholars and practitioners are invited to contribute papers, and those papers provide the foundation for discussion and further action. The first TMC symposium took place in 2010, with successive events every second year. Each symposium has focused on a particular problem in research and practice. Previously organised by an independent committee, TMC has now been adopted as a CSL project, providing a stable home base and organisational structure for the initiative.

The fifth TMC symposium – the first under the CSL banner – was held in October, 2017. CSL partnered with the Manitoba School Library Association's annual conference, and the events had complementary themes. The MSLA conference theme, *Truth in Our Stories: Seeking a Path to Reconciliation*, focused on Canada's reconciliation journey with indigenous peoples. That set the groundwork for TMC's theme, *Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons*.



Holding a national event so early in CSL's existence was a risk, but by working in partnership with MSLA and with additional sponsorship from the Ontario School Library Association, the event was highly successful. CSL is now in the process of establishing a special project committee to build on the work of TMC5, planning and implementing supports to advance culturally relevant and responsive school library learning commons.

## Fostering Research: The CSL Research Archive

At the core of CSL's mission is addressing the compelling need for Canadian research into school library programs and practices, as called for most recently by the 2014 Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel report, *The Future Now: Canada's Libraries, Archives, and Public Memory*. Treasure Mountain Canada had originally been inspired by this need, but the research it has produced has remained largely inaccessible.

The Canadian School Libraries Research Archive website, just released at the beginning of 2018, addresses the need to make Canadian research about school library learning commons practice visible and searchable. The archive aggregates scholarly and practitioner action research papers from five Treasure Mountain Canada (TMC) research symposiums. These symposiums have contributed over one hundred papers to the literature, and with this archive site, those contributions become widely available.

CSL has received excellent feedback about the archive. Teacher-librarians can now find the 'made in Canada' evidence of effective practice to share with the larger education community and with school administrators as they explore their own innovations in practice. Moving forward, it is our hope that the archive can provide a home for an even broader range of Canadian scholarly and practitioner action research.

## Fostering Collaboration and a Common Sense of Purpose

The greatest challenge in creating *Leading Learning* was finding an approach that was useful and meaningful for all contexts in Canada, from the largest to the smallest province and for schools with sophisticated programs to those with next to nothing. Success was achieved by focusing on learning and growth rather than on unachievable benchmarks.

Canadian School Libraries has taken the same approach to our own organisational purpose. Education may be a provincial jurisdiction, but we can achieve so much more when we work together with a shared purpose. CSL has reached out to all school library associations across the country, sharing their news and seeking to involve their members in national committees and projects. [Canadian School Library Day](#) provides an opportunity to celebrate our collective successes.

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## Organisational Progress

For an organisation still in its infancy, we believe we are already making a difference to school library research and practice in Canada. We have been bold in our approach, and ambitious in our future planning. CSL is now an active member of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations - Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB), ensuring that the voice of school libraries is represented in this important national advocacy-focused organisation. CSL is reaching out internationally as a member organisation of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL).



Boldness does not come without risks. Our organisational model, with no membership fees, remains untested for long-term sustainability. Building the organisational capacity to continue growing is a constant worry. But we remain certain that these are risks worth taking. We believe that just as the school library learning commons model itself can be a catalyst for change, so can CSL be a catalyst for empowering professional learning and meaningful collaboration across our great country and beyond. We invite you, our international colleagues, to explore our website and resources.

## References

Brooks Kirkland, A. (2016) 'Toward a New National School Library Association in Canada: The Case, Considerations, and Potential Models' in *Treasure Mountain Canada 4*. Accessed at:

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**Anita Brooks Kirkland** is a writer, presenter and consultant, she specialises in the areas of information and digital literacy and the role of the school library learning commons. Anita 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 organisations. She was the 2014 president of the *Ontario Library Association*, served as president of the *Ontario School Library Association* (2005) and co-chaired *The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario* (2011-13). She currently chairs the board of directors of *Canadian School Libraries*. Anita shares an extensive collection of program resources, articles, and presentations on her website and blog, [www.bythebrooks.ca](http://www.bythebrooks.ca).