

teacher | librarian

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Learning Commons
Motivation and Lifelong Learning
Collaboration



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GROWING SCHOOLS: EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debbie Abilock, Violet H. Harada, and Kristin Fontichiaro examine issues and opportunities for planning and implementing professional development activities for classroom teachers. Using a small case study, these three leaders provide not only insight into practical activities for PD but also guidance for personal/professional interactions.

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DEFINING A VISION OF OUTSTANDING SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Nancy Everhart, during her recent term as president of the AASL, took a "Visions Tour" of school libraries across the country to collect proficiency data augmented by interviews and observation. Her findings revealed attributes shared by outstanding library programs. Her findings and analysis provide an important and fascinating look at excellent programs.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 2013 NATIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAM OF THE YEAR WINNERS

Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux, TL coeditor, presents her annual look at the National School Library Program of the Year winners, who provide their own examination of their winning characteristics.

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HOW COMMON IS COMMON? AN ANALYSIS OF THE RECOMMENDED TEXT EXEMPLARS

Elizabeth Burns, Sue Kimmel, and Kasey L Garrison examine a list of exemplar texts included as an appendix to the *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. Their findings are surprising and important, and offer another opportunity for teacher librarians to play a key role in understanding and implanting the CCSS.

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DOING THE LEGWORK, BUILDING THE FOUNDATION, AND SETTING THE STAGE FOR MEANINGFUL TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL LIBRARY TO LEARNING COMMONS

Christina A. Bentheim moved to a new school for the 2013-2014 school year to serve as media specialist and social studies instructional coach. She recounts here her early plans and activities to transform the traditional library into a learning commons for the 21st century. Her ambition, ingenuity, and legwork paid off and her story offers both inspiration and concrete guidance and ideas for others.

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"RESEARCHING STUFF IS THE BEST!" DESIGNING ASSIGNMENTS THAT FOSTER INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Sherry R. Crow argues that, to make students life-long learners, teacher librarians need to help students discover that information seeking is—at the very least—useful to their well-being and can even be truly joyful. This article discusses tips for making assignments intrinsically motivating to students, namely encouraging student-driven goals, infusing playfulness, and allowing creativity. Crow's findings are important and as useful as the tips. A good balance between academic research and practical advice, this article should be read by practitioners and instructors, alike.

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TIPS AND TACTICS: LIBRARY-CLASSROOM COLLABORATION STIMULATES READING, TEACHES SO MUCH MORE

Patricia Vermillion and Marty Melton, school media coordinator and social studies teacher, respectively, collaboratively developed a program for students to prepare booktalks, from selecting titles, to videoing their classmates' booktalks, utilizing QR codes, more. This deceptively simple program provides students with the opportunity to learn not only content and educational technology, but also self-confidence, public speaking, collaboration. We really like this activity.

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NOTEBOOK



A New Year, New Opportunities

David V. Loertscher and Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux

School has started, and with it a renewed interest in making this school year memorable and positive for our students.

What about us, though? The pace at which our work is changing and how learning in our libraries is changing leaves us breathless. We find ourselves swirling in a vortex of opportunities and challenges as we weave new ideas and technology into our library programs. We want to help students be even more creative, collaborative learners. Just as we choose to equip our libraries with quality reads, so must we equip students with many quality opportunities. And that isn't easy. We find we must give up much of what we know for much that we are still learning. This issue of *Teacher Librarian* encourages you to stretch and grow, learn and do. Try out some of the ideas – the authors are candid about what worked for them and what they needed to adjust, just as you will in your particular setting.

Abilock, Harada, and Fontichiaro, three leading thinkers in our profession, look at various issues and talk about opportunities to plan and implement professional development activities with classroom teachers. Using a small case study, these three thinkers give us insight into how to create professional development activities to meet the needs of classroom teachers. They help us understand the value of our interactions with others in the education field and how to ensure those interactions are effective. Everhart, a recent AASL president, spent much of her year as president visiting each state's defined "exemplary" school library. She saw many things, and shares with us the insights as well as the common characteristics that she found in these libraries. Look at what she saw and see how many of these characteristics mirror your setting. Marcoux presents her annual look at AASL/Follett NSLPY winners (2013). She asked the winners to evaluate what made them exemplary and what they hope for their libraries' futures. Burns, Kimmel, and Garrison take a critical look at exemplar texts included as an appendix to the Common Core standards. Their findings are interesting and worth noting and offer another opportunity for the teacher librarian to play a key role in the implementation and success of the CCSS.

Bentheim's article describes her work at a new school and how she developed a plan to move the traditional school library into a learning commons. Her leadership, ambition, creativity, and hard work paid off and can be

Online Learning: Possibilities for a Participatory Culture

David V. Loertscher and Carol Koechlin

Online courses are proliferating rapidly for children and teens. What is driving this virus in education? Does online learning really have anything to do with learning? Students are dropping out and tuning out of courses. What is to be done?

We have discovered that some U.S. states are now requiring young people to take at least one online course during their schooling. This is perceived as a solution to educational financial crunches and touted as a way to make good use of technology. These misconceptions are fueled by confusion with past-century distance learning and entrepreneurial businesses that clearly smell the potential monetary gains.

It seems that the construction of these courses is based on an effort to guarantee content delivery and make a profit. To provide sustainability and maximize profit to the investors, a course needs to be developed, tested, revised, and then sold over a period of time with many students. These “design once, teach many” courses are expected to produce very predictable results. For example, when students sign up, they may face the assignment to complete a certain number of modules in the class. Each module is very directive: read this, listen to a lecture, do that, take a test, repeat if necessary. Predictably, students find this instructional design deadly boring. And the research saying that such courses provide temporary improvement but not long-lasting results is beginning to appear. Just like postsecondary school, the dropout rate is very high because online coursework is not about learning and thus is not pedagogically sound. It is another cookie-cutter approach to education based on financial profit rather than student improvement.

But from the perspective of those working in the wide world of information and technology, we see another major problem. Any specialist in the school who has a mission to make a difference across the school—such as a teacher librarian, a teacher technologist, a reading teacher, or an instructional coach—immediately notices that they are locked out of such approaches. In such packages,

all the information and technologies to be used are supplied as part of the package. There is no need to go outside of the package for anything. To the instructional designer of such courses, this makes the outcome more predictable: everyone has read or heard or done the same thing and thus can be tested on the same thing. Predictability is the major selling point. Some companies provide some choice, but even that is locked in. We repeat: the teacher librarian and other specialists are locked out. And we notice that we are not the only ones worrying about such issues and possible solutions.

Do students really need to be out in the world of information? Do they really need exposure to a variety of technologies? The argument is that with much more freedom allowed, that predictability factor is lost. It is all about performance on a test that allows this cookie kid to be compared with that cookie kid across the world.

To those interested in predictability, the idea of “real” learning—engagement, creativity, and self-directed learning—is nice, but impractical and not cost effective. Engage any of the companies in such a conversation and you will get a sales pitch that describes wonderful this or wonderful that, but direct teaching of content and predictability reign.

Over the past ten years, a variety of content management systems have emerged that provide the structure of an online learning experience and the instructor supplies the content. Some of the popular systems are Desire to Learn (D2L), Canvas, Blackboard, and Adobe Connect. These systems come with a considerable cost to the institution, but their major drawback is that the structure itself encourages traditional top-down learning experiences. There are ways to add lectures, specific assignments, discussion forums, and grade books. We have not seen these packages used for coteaching by the classroom teacher or professor and the teacher librarian. The very structure of the software encourages and reinforces that the “proper” way to learning is through direct instruction, lecture, assignments, rubrics, and traditional assessment practices.

THE RISE OF THE LEARNING COMMONS CONCEPT

In 2007 we started working on a concept that would transform the isolated school library and computer labs to the Learning Commons and published our call to lead the way in 2008. We re-envisioned the school library as both a physical and virtual participatory learning space where the various specialists of the school officed and worked together to make major differences in teaching and learning across the school. Both places were to be participatory, with a sense of ownership being developed by both learners and teachers. Both spaces were envisioned as collaborative, focusing on designing best learning experiences and environments and the idea of commons, as well as growing together as learners.

As more and more closed online education began to raise its head as teaching machines had done decades earlier, the authors wanted to elaborate on the concept of the Virtual Learning Commons that would be a replacement for the static and one-

way stream of information from librarian to patron. We, along with many others, were noticing that patrons were googling around the library. We also noticed that early adopter classroom teachers who were using technology began to design their own classroom websites that were directed at their own classes and rarely, if ever, included either teacher librarians or teacher technologists. Unwittingly, many specialists were assisting teachers in developing their own course websites that perpetuated the idea of the isolated teacher in the isolated classroom. The teacher learned to provide not only assignments but also the information and resources to be used in accomplishing the varying tasks. Thus the authors wrote a second book and expanded the idea of a collaborative Virtual Learning Commons in 2012.

In this virtual space as it has been developed over the last several years by the authors and graduate students at San Jose State University, five major participatory virtual “rooms” were developed:

- The Information Center
- The Literacy Center
- The Knowledge Building Center
- The Experimental Learning Center
- School Culture

It was in the Knowledge Building Center that we envisioned that the teacher librarian could move squarely into the center of teaching and learning in the school to become the “heart of the school” that had been the focus of the school library program back as far as the 1960s but not realized in many school library programs.

What could be done in virtual space that seemed so difficult in many schools? The answer to that question came in the appearance of collaborative technologies, often referred to as Web 2.0, and the emergence of a suite of tools known as Google Apps for Education. These tools were not just ways of creating multimedia or enhancing efficiency, but they could be used to deepen understanding of topical content in ways not possible before. The emerging popularity of the SAMR[Q: spell out] model led the way for educators to search out and implement new ways to boost teaching and learning to new heights. Best

of all, these tools were free or very inexpensive and could be used on a number of devices either furnished by the school or owned by the student. A major advance toward equity was now possible.

Using such tools brought new possibilities for the assessment of teaching and learning. Instead of relying on one set of scores that measures a singular aspect of learning, assessment could now focus on multiple measures at three important levels:

- Personal expertise: what the individual knows and is able to do
- Cooperative group work: demonstration that when a product or project must be built to specifications, that each individual could contribute a piece, a puzzle piece as it were, into the mix and that the pieces would fit together to make a whole that “worked” or made sense, or filled a requirement in the overall learning experience

- Collaborative intelligence: the idea that truly collaborative work by learners could create something new when added together; new ideas, new solutions, inventions, creative solutions. The whole would be greater than the sum of its parts.

In reality, assessment could be as varied as individual learners and could not just celebrate the meeting of an expected level but could exceed that expectation. Looking at a variety of measures, the coteaching partners could celebrate the percentage of learners who rose above what was originally expected rather than concentrating on just achieving minimums.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

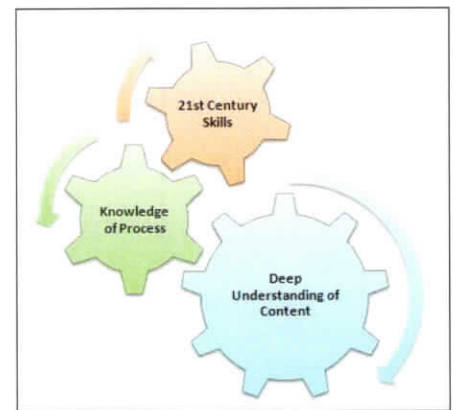
We asked ourselves a variety of questions:

- How could two adults make working collaboratively a natural experience rather than a contrived one?
- How could learners participate and grow as learners in a networked flat environment rather than in a pyramidal top down directed teaching experience?
- How could a vast array of information and technology resources be saddled to promote wide learning rather than narrow fulfill narrow expectations?
- How could engagement be stimulated

to help learners achieve more than minimal expectations?

- How could assessment efforts recognize diversity, creativity, and even innovation on top of the normal minimums?
- How could the best ideas from constructivist experts and disruptive technologies be used under an experimental model and under a best practices model?

There is a growing number of voices shouting out a much more constructivist approach to teaching and learning, but demonstrations of this are lacking. In this article, we recommend three approaches that put teacher librarians and teacher technologists at the center of online learning experiences. These approaches also ensure that learners develop and apply the skills needed to build understanding and accomplish the work, a clear comprehension of the process of learning in a networked world, and the expectation that these two factors will drive a much deeper understanding of the topical content of the unit as pictured in this diagram.



The three approaches are:

- Knowledge Building Centers
- Book2Cloud
- QuickMOOC

The foundational idea of all three approaches is that when a teacher librarian or teacher technologist joins forces with a classroom teacher, a creative synergy produces proven results. If these partners then adopt a participatory partnership with the students in a learning experience, then much richer, more engaging, and beyond minimal outcomes actually occur. Consider the possibilities of encouraging ev-

ery student to meet or exceed expectations rather than just achieving the minimum. Consider the possibilities of high engagement, the building of resilient learners, and the possibilities of real projects and experiences that push young people into a much more self-directed world of learning. It is not just about being minimally ready to get into some kind of college or career; it is all about exceeding the expectations that businesses and educational institutions expect; or it is all about young people launching their own future world as entrepreneurs, inventors, ready to make changes for the better in in society and in the world. To accomplish this task, the very structure of online learning would make a collaborative and participatory learning culture seem like a natural way of designing a learning experience.

Below is the description of three approaches mentioned above for teacher librarians and teacher technologists to consider promoting to the people they work with .

Each of the learning designs could be used by students to

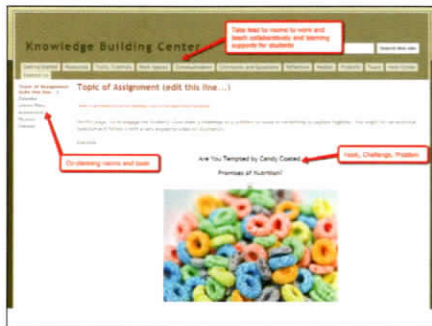
- proceed through the experience alone or with a group, with mentors totally online
- experience a “blended learning” approach where some online learning is used alongside the mentors in a physical school environment
- use the model course as a jumping-off place where learners design their own learning experience under the guidance of the mentors

In any case, the learning is structured in such a way that at least two adults are mentoring the learning experience as coteachers. And the students are expected to become self-directed responsible learners rather than just being asked to fill a series of closely structured assignments.

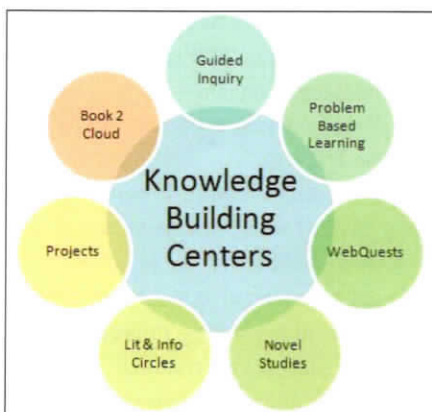
KNOWLEDGE BUILDING CENTERS

This approach to designing excellent learning experiences in new collaborative environments was first introduced to readers in an article in this journal, “Knowledge

Building: The Heart of the Learning Commons,” volume 38, number 3. Since then this approach has been refined and adapted successfully by many teacher librarians willing to experiment with the template (<https://sites.google.com/site/knowledge-buildingcenter/>) as pictured below:



Many types of project-based and inquiry learning experiences work very well in the Knowledge Building Center (KBC) environment because the actual learning organization is available anywhere, at any time, and on various devices, as shown in the illustration below. This visual expands on some possibilities: What makes it unique is its design to encourage collaborative coteaching by the classroom teacher, the teacher librarian, and any other specialist. The appropriate adult mentors are “in the room” together as they plan, teach, and assess the learning alongside a participatory culture of learners. The KBCs can be constructed around a number of instructional designs, and because the template is a Google Site, it is available to both adults and learners 24/7. These learning experiences can be used and then moved to a museum as evidence of experimentation with learners and documentation of impact by each of



the mentors. KBCs are particularly useful when linking various classes in the school together or classes across schools or groups around the world, no matter the time zone. And if you don't care to use a Google site, the template will provide ideas for working in other technologies, such as Moodle.

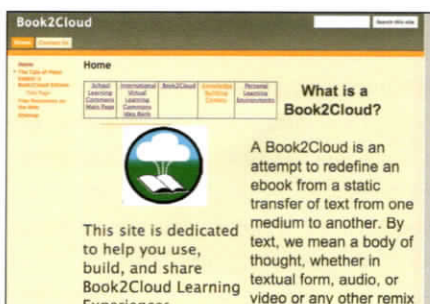
Virtual Knowledge Building Centers are collaborative construction zones between adults and students

- places to learn, solve, work, create, think, achieve, shine, demonstrate
- participatory learning
- higher level thinking and metacognition
- ventures into the real world of information
- free or almost free
- simple to create on a variety of technologies
- super learning experiences

In our book *The Virtual Learning Commons: Building a Participatory School Learning Community*, you will find an entire chapter with much more about the potential of KBCs to actually transform learning into new and exciting experiences, as well as other KBC template designs and examples to explore created by teacher librarians.

BOOK2CLOUD

A Book2Cloud experience presents learners with an engaging text, document, video, or other material that challenges the mind and requires deep investigation to create meaning. Using this “text,” a virtual room is created where individuals or small groups create meaning around pieces and parts of the text and then put them together to build deep understanding of the whole. You can see many examples and explanations at <https://sites.google.com/site/book2cloud/>.





GRAPHIC NOVELS

HEROIC TEAMS

Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. **March: Book One.** Top Shelf, 2013. 128p. \$14.95 Trade pb. 978-1-60309-300-2. John Lewis was one of the men who, in 1963, marched on Washington and who, in 1965, marched across a bridge in Selma, Alabama. This powerful book opens on that second day, just before the outbreak of police violence that would lead to the day being called “Bloody Sunday.” Through elegant, moody illustrations, it weaves back to Lewis’s childhood preaching to children and then forth to his adolescence searching for a Christianity that would tie his community together and embolden it to make the world a better place. This is only the first book in Lewis’s story, but already this deeply personal portrait of a life of nonviolence marks it as a classic of the medium.

Showcase Presents: DC Comics Presents – Superman Team-Ups Vol. 2. DC Comics, 2013. 568p. \$19.99 Trade pb. 978-1-4012-4048-6. Grades 3 and up. The latest in DC’s “Showcase” series, a series of books printed on less expensive paper and without color in order to deliver almost 600 pages of story at a low cost, is a reprint of Superman team-ups from the early 1980s, and the level of inventiveness is impressive. Superman teams up with obscure heroes such as Manbat, science fiction heroes such as Starman, parallel heroes such as Captain Marvel (who was originally created as a rip-off of Superman), bizarre heroes such as the Dial-H-for-Hero characters (who turned into different heroes each day), and even the Joker! It’s a book of thought experiments, and they’re just as fun today as they were in the 80s.

We have created a Book2Cloud free template for easy construction of such learning experiences in your own school. You can find this template at <https://sites.google.com/site/book2cloudtemplate/home>.

Book2Cloud is most appropriate when you want to help learners understand the power of curation and collaborative learning. It is also an important tool for those working on complex texts as a part of the Common Core standards in the United States.

QUICKMOOCS

A third approach to collaborative online learning is a variation on the currently popular MOOC (massive open online course) movement popular in the university community. A QuickMOOC takes a topic similar to a unit of instruction rather than an entire full-length course; a way of spending two to three hours in an on-topic participatory community where the learner is in command of his or her own learning. As illustrated in the instructional design model below, a learner can come into this learning experience either as an individual or with a group under the guidance of such mentors as the teacher and the teacher librarian. Here they encounter an umbrella question and then develop their own questions that fit under the larger topic. They proceed to a room where they get started by building background knowledge and then into a gallery where there are many possibilities to build their knowledge depending on what they already know and what they want to pursue. Using this knowledge, they progress to the workshop with lots of possible projects or pathways to follow, and this will lead to some kind of badge or conclusion they work out with their mentors. Finally, this is topped off with a Big Think where they reflect on what they have learned and how they

learned it. Instead of exiting, they can stay in this participatory community as long as they wish, mentoring others, contributing content, ideas, or other resources. Here is the model:

The first QuickMOOCs to be developed center on professional development topics for teacher librarians and classroom teachers, but others are on the radar for individual learning units directed at K–12 students. For example, one topic centers on the creation of the physical learning commons in the school. Unlike the other two approaches, there is a small fee to take one of these short courses as a way to encourage a higher completion rate. The major difference in this online learning design is the idea of self-directed learning under the guidance of mentors, the idea of joining a participatory community, and a variety of outcomes based on the individual learner’s need and interest. Descriptions of the various offerings are at <http://quickmooc.com>.

CONCLUSION

So what do we need to consider when designing online learning? If “learning” is what we are after, whether blended or totally online, then a move must be initiated from locked-in, content-driven packages to participatory knowledge-building experiences. Learners need to be free to work individually, cooperatively, and collaboratively, with the best information available in technology-rich learning environments. Teacher librarians and teacher technologists are uniquely positioned to lead in inventive ways to make online learning really work. Bring your expertise and the rich resources of the library learning commons into the center of online teaching and learning. Seek new ways to work with teachers to infuse learning to learn skills and processes with curriculum content in online environments. Experiment with our ideas and models and templates and create your own. Share back with us and with your professional networks. Help the online learning thrust move into the new networked world of participatory knowledge building.

Lead—don’t be locked out!

