

Guiding School District No. 40 into the 21st Century: Media and Technology
Inquiry Proposal EDCP 508a
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New Westminster was selected the first capital of British Columbia in 1859. It is a town steeped in history and traditions and has a small town feel in a big city metropolis. School District No.40 (SD40) is proud of our history and we embrace our traditions; however, we are often slow to change and have struggled over the past ten years due to cutbacks and shortfalls in our budget. Nevertheless, the tide is changing. In the past year and a half, with a new superintendent as our CEO, SD40 has a surplus budget and a desire for change. As a result, senior administration has embarked on a visioning journey. A teaching and learning working group, comprised of parents, senior administration, administrators, teachers, CUPE members, and students have begun a series of meetings and workshops to look at what we believe, what we want, and what we do. From these workshops the working group has developed a set of belief statements. The next step, this fall, will be to develop an action plan, the “what we do”. My interest in joining the teaching and learning working group was to examine the integration of media and technology in teaching and learning.

Through the working group workshops and meetings and while completing EDCP 470 and EDCP 508a, I realized educators require a shift in pedagogy from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. That shift involves a 21st century vision of education. 21st century learning can be defined as learning that encourages high-level thinking skills and the development of technological literacies (Ralph, 2015). 21st century competencies include problem solving, critical thinking, self-directed learning, creativity, innovation, the ability to use technology and digital resources, cultural and ethical citizenship, and collaboration by solving real-world scenarios (C21 Canada, 2015). The Premier’s Technology Council outlines an education system rooted in personalised learning. The K-12 education system must be transformed from learning information to learning to learn, from data to discover, from one size fits all to tailored learning, and from classroom learning to lifelong learning. In order for this shift to happen the Premier’s Technology Council outlines how the K-12 system would need to function: transformation of the curriculum to a more flexible curriculum which allows for more in depth study, a blended system of face to face, online and virtual learning, access to learning objects, teaching tools, and information, open access to information systems, and constant feedback and assessment. With the introduction and adoption of the new curriculum and a brighter future for the district financially, SD40 is set to begin their own journey of transformation into the 21st century.

Inquiry Question

In 2008, SD40 created a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) action team. Over the years, the action team has examined UDL principles and teacher pedagogy. Universal Design for Learning is “a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn” (“How Has UDL”, n.d.). UDL has three main principles: provide multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement. With the use of technology, specifically SMART Boards, SD40 UDL action team members have been implementing the UDL principles in their curriculum design and teaching. Seven years later, there is a desire from the team members for further change and exploration.

In order to balance my personal, professional and now student life, I will be combining my graduating project with SD40’s goal of developing an action plan in regards to media and technology with the permission of the assistant superintendent. Over the next two years, I intend to explore the following questions: How can the district administration team create an environment within SD40 that facilitates the use of media and technology? How can I facilitate

a Technology Innovations Action Team that inspires teachers to become leaders in media and technology in their own schools? I will focus my inquiry research on teachers who join the action team. My initial research will look at what are the current teaching practices in their schools and classroom and how media and technology is used in their pedagogy. The next step in the research will examine what does the action team want to do and what is our action plan. I will conduct surveys and interviews of students and teachers throughout the inquiry. The end goal will be to use a train the trainer model where teachers will learn, explore, collaborate, share, and create in order to become a leader in their respective school. I will conclude the research with evidence that shows the results and progress the action team has made towards the integration of media and technology into their pedagogy and describe the barriers that still need to be overcome.

Inquiry Purpose

The outdated transmission model through which teachers transmit facts and knowledge with textbooks and lectures continues to be the predominant form of teaching (Rosefsky, S.A & Opfer, V.D. 2012). Students may learn facts and skills but don't get an opportunity to use critical thinking skills, to apply the knowledge to new contexts, to question, to develop creativity and to use technology in meaningful ways. Youth are hard wired to the digital landscape, and we need to "transform public education to ensure relevancy for today's modern learner" (C21 Canada, 2012, p.4). According to the authors of C21 Canada, educators need to shift our minds. This includes the understanding that "we need to shift what we teach and how we teach to engage, empower, and position learners for success." (C21 Canada, 2012, p.5).

SD40 is proposing the creation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to help develop and implement an action plan based on the belief statements established by the teaching and learning working group. The Technology Innovations Action Team will become part of the PLC. Other teams that will be part of the PLC will be the UDL Action Team and a Personalised Learning Action Team. The Technology Innovations Action team will be comprised of teachers from K-12 who are interested in exploring the technology and learning belief statements developed by the teaching and learning working group.

The draft belief statements are:

- We believe that technology provides the opportunity to enhance learning and engagement.
- We believe technology supports the critical role of the educator to facilitate student learning.
- We believe that all members of the school community must be digitally responsible citizens.

Key Concepts

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is commonly defined as "participants working together regularly, over an extended timeline, shared values and vision, practical activities focused on student learning, taking an inquiry stance, being reflective and collaborating and sharing experiences" (Owen, S. 2014, p.55). In order for a PLC to be successful several factors need to be in place. The PLC will need to have a purpose, function, and capability. The purpose and function of the team will be one of the many discussions that will need to take place during our initial meetings.

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, innovation is from the “Latin *innovationem* meaning restoration and renewal and something new or unusual,” from Old French *noveleté* (Innovation n.d). The word innovation is defined as “a new method, idea, product,” by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Innovation n.d). Innovation for SD40 will differ from many of our surrounding districts. Due to our past financial difficulties, SD40 may have fallen behind in regards to media, technology, and 21st century skills and knowledge. Only of our schools has Wi-Fi, the minority of teachers have access to any kind of technology in their classroom, and support at the district level has been cutback to a barebones level. Despite these limitations, there is a desire for change and exploration.

As technology and media are a key part of my proposal, it is imperative I define these concepts in relation to education. “Technologies and technological curricula refer to devices, media, processes, symbols, cyborgs and robots, cyberspace, and knowledge as well as to disciplines, specializations, and the volition animating these things” (Petrina & Rusnak, 2011, p. 877). Media is defined as the “main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet) regarded collectively (Media, n.d.).

Ethical Considerations

As I am implementing my inquiry, I will need to approach the inquiry with a ground up, discursive and collegial methodology and not a top down, administrative approach. My goal is to provide administrative guidance to the action team while respecting teacher autonomy. In addition, as an educator, I need to follow the professional standards and guidelines as outlined by the teacher regulation branch. I must value and care for all students and act in their best interests, act ethically and honestly, understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development, implement effective practices in areas of planning, instruction, assessment, evaluation and reporting, have a broad knowledge base and understand the subject areas I teach, engage in career-long learning, and contribute to my profession (“Welcome to the TRB”, n.d.).

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