

Learning Partners Advisory Council Briefing Document

Goals and Directions

April 18, 2016

Draft

Designing an Integrated Learning Ecosystem for Prince Edward Island

At the inaugural gathering of the Learning Partners Advisory Council (and via email both in advance of and following the meeting), members identified a number of ideas and priorities for learning and learners, from context and goals to specific issues, challenges, and possible directions. This input was organized into the following six thematic areas:

- Building a Learning Culture
- The Community as a Partner
- Curriculum, Pedagogy and Technology
- Transitions
- Supporting Teachers
- Fulfilling Every Learner's Potential

In the broadest sense, this input indicates that to support learners in getting to the next “rung of the learning ladder” from birth to life, learning should be viewed as a multi-sector ecosystem. By definition, an ecosystem is a system formed by the complex interactions of a community of organisms with each other and with their environment.¹ Ecosystem thinking has been applied to learning environments for a number of years.

In the context of PEI, our traditional learning institutions (ie early years centres, public and private schools, post secondary institutions), community settings, workplaces, workforce development programs, after-school and summer programs, public libraries and museums, and experiences at home and in a variety of environments together constitute a learning ecosystem. The learning ecosystem identifies and harnesses the unique contributions of all these different settings and the people involved to enable learners to become engaged, knowledgeable and skilled as they progress through childhood into adolescence and adulthood.² The learning ecosystem must be designed to meet the diverse needs, expectations and aspirations of learners, with a view that all learners can and will experience success in whatever unique form this takes.

This ecosystem approach is designed to provoke one's imagination, to embrace different ways of thinking and be transformative. Council members communicated a number of potential goals, actions and possible directions that could be explored, including:

- Prepare learners for life as contributors to their community and as global citizens.
- Cultivate creative thinking and an entrepreneurial mindset among learners.
- Prepare learners to successfully transition into, within or between learning levels (early years to K-12 to workforce/post-secondary) and into or out of the workforce.

¹ Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies (www.caryinstitute.org)

² STEM Funders Network (stemecosystemes.org)

- Mobilize existing and new community partners (ie government agencies, non-government organizations, municipalities and the business sector) who can contribute to the thinking, planning, resourcing and implementation of hands-on, real-life, and relevant learning experiences.
- Design cross-sectoral partnerships within government departments/agencies and the community to support learner mental health and well-being at all ages.
- Enhance learning experiences in multiple settings that encourage learners to explore and enables them to build complex skills to improve their society and career readiness.
- Design and connect learning opportunities to reflect the reality of learner’s lives.
- Enable learners to tinker, experiment and explore areas of interest that they care about.
- Integrate existing and new digital/technology tools to enhance learning and build digital literacy among learners.
- Design a learning system characterized by a high level of coherence and interdependence, with more paths that lead to success.
- Equip educators to support the multiple learner needs/contexts, to engage all learners in active, collaborative and rigorous learning.
- Diversify learning/schooling formats to better serve the unique needs of learners and their communities.

In designing such an ecosystem, this holistic view of learning, puts the focus clearly on the learner, his or her uniqueness, environment, resourcefulness, resilience and well-being. Further, it emphasizes the importance of our interdependence in advancing excellence for all learners in the province and supports the “all hands on deck” reality needed to position education and learning as the pillars to support prosperity.