OLTD 502
Reflection on Evidence 2

Program Learning Outcome:

- Understand, design and commit to student success in online learning environments
  o Design inclusive learning environments
  o Share engagement strategies and tips
  o Engage in mentoring and coaching with educational partners

Evidence: Course Design with COI website

The major project for OLTD 502 was the culmination of learning in year one of the OLTD program, also serving to set the stage for potential areas to pursue more deeply in year two or onwards into the Master's program. I chose to begin this piece of evidence, the Course Design with Community of Inquiry website, in an effort to create a resource that documented and shared my ongoing learning and process in applying the Community of Inquiry model (COI) to the online courses that I use in my own teaching practice.

I believe that the content on the website as a whole demonstrates a good understanding of elements that can enhance student success in online learning environments, and ongoing growth in my ability to design inclusive learning environments that will support student success. When creating this site I reviewed previous research on COI conducted in OLTD 503, then continued to explore this topic through new readings related to each aspect of COI. In particular, I focused on the concept of humanizing the online classroom which incorporates both the teaching presence and social presence aspects of COI, and instructional design models in order to expand on what I knew about cognitive presence and strategies for best supporting this aspect. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emerged as an instructional design model that seems to best fit the context of the blended learning program in which I currently teach. As a model intended to focus on reaching and supporting the learning of students with diverse learning needs, UDL fits well within a learning environment that includes learners who choose online and blended learning for a vast array of reasons, including academic, physical and mental health challenges, unique time demands due to athletic or other pursuits, or the need for schooling that is location independent for travel or other purposes.

Through the process of planning the direction of this major project, I moved beyond my comfort zone of focusing on how I could improve my own professional practice to considering how I could share my learning and the strategies applied with other educators to help support positive change throughout our school. In his presentation at the Leaders to Learn From event, Michael Fullan (2015) referred to leaders with key leadership qualities as Lead Learners, and discussed leadership from the middle as the most effective strategy for implementing change in an organization, as well as the importance of investing in capacity building and the collaborative culture as a powerful leadership strategy. "The quality and sustainability of an organization is a function of the strength of its lateral relationships" (Fullan, 2015). Collaborating with colleagues and establishing our own professional Community of Inquiry is a step that I am excited to take as I strongly believe Fullan's words about the power of collaborative culture and capacity building across the organization. While Leader may not be a title that I am comfortable with, Lead Learner is. This Course Design with COI website is a representation of my growth towards becoming a Lead Learner.

Student success is the ultimate goal in education. Understanding the specific challenges associated with the online learning environment and strategies for mitigating these while also building upon the strengths of blended and online learning environments will allow me to better support student success overall. When educators are willing to share their knowledge and skills with one another, this then serves to further support student success through the increasing base of collective pedagogical knowledge and repertoire of strategies that can be applied in a wide variety of scenarios. Moving forward I plan to build upon this site as a resource while continuing to revise and build my own courses, implementing the COI model and an instructional design approach in which the elements of UDL are considered and applied. In the coming school year I would like to share this resource site with my colleagues in the hopes that this may inspire and support positive change in their practice too, and that in turn new ideas and effective strategies will be shared back to me, creating a cycle of collaboration and capacity building across our school.

Reference:

Fullan, M. (2015). Three keys for maximizing leadership impact. [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_FyUAsO-Pg