

Thinkers' Lodge Climate Crisis Retreat

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Thinker's Essays

Building A Community Mapping Institute at the Centre of Geographic Sciences (COGS): The Place-based Education Network and Collaborative Innovation Laboratory (PENCIL)

By Ed Symons

Our operating environment, the challenge and the role of learning

We are living in a world facing a series of converging crises including deep economic and political uncertainty, climate change, resource depletion and mounting environmental degradation. It is imperative that we seek innovative solutions to these threats to make our communities both sustainable and resilient.

Amid the turbulence we face, our future is increasingly uncertain. In a time when change is accelerating and complexity is intensifying, we need to build the adaptive capacity necessary to transition us to our rapidly emerging, constantly evolving, new reality. To build this adaptive capacity it is crucial that citizens know how to learn, gather, process and use information. Investing in people who are committed to becoming a part of a learning community is the best investment any community can make. The NSCC's strategic plan recognizes that the future prosperity of Nova Scotia lies in the power of learning. As a community college we can help encourage learning, while still an individual pursuit, can also take place at a community level.

Learning communities

Educator Ron Faris defines learning communities as “Neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities or regions that explicitly use lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social/cultural goal in order to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration to promote sustainability. Civic, economic, public, voluntary, and education sectors work together to enhance social, economic and environmental conditions on a sustainable, inclusive basis.” Faris goes on to note that, “There is no cookie cutter approach to establishing a learning community because it is all about an asset-based approach and working with local people to identify the assets within their own community. Assets include not just the physical resources (like church basements or schoolrooms where learning can happen), but the human assets (the people in that community with knowledge, skills and stories worth sharing).”

Learning communities can and should be built upon a foundational process of community asset mapping. Communities need to know what assets they have and where they are located, in order to leverage their latent opportunities, which may not be entirely realized until they are inventoried, and spatial patterns and synergies emerge through visualization.

The PENCIL concept

Place-based education puts the unique characteristics of local geography first, supporting economic development that makes rural Nova Scotia more resilient. The characteristics may include the economy, history, literature, and the landscape: agriculture, forestry, climate, geomorphology.

Place is multifaceted. This project would examine both the more tangible ecosystems related to our physical landscape, as well as the more abstract economic and technological landscape. Here our work would include the development of an asset map needed to assess the state of our innovation ecosystem in Nova Scotia.

PENCIL would offer workshops in place-based methods and provide consulting services on asset mapping to both municipalities and industry. It would develop new software tools for efficient asset mapping and sharing with the wider public through community engagement initiatives designed to build community capacity.

Examples could include support for the Centre for Local Prosperity, in developing the information base for community economic development and with their efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change (the Drawdown project: Food, Energy, Land Use, Forestry).

PENCIL is an initiative that facilitates collaborations between the NSCC's COGS and the broader community for the purpose of helping communities and the community college partner and communicate with one another to help better understand their place, to co-create new knowledge, mobilize existing knowledge, envision solutions and act together.

The intent is to form a learning alliance - a collective of individuals and groups including representatives of the community college, universities, public institutions, industry and NGO'S who understand and embrace community mapping as a mechanism to improve our quality of life.

Why is PENCIL important?

Communities and post-secondary educational institutes have many shared interests. Both want to improve knowledge, to share knowledge in ways that make a difference, and to contribute to evidence-based policies and practices that optimally benefit communities. Both have expertise and resources for pursuing these interests and both recognize that their expertise and resources are incomplete and limited in important ways. Members of our local communities and COGS generated the idea of PENCIL because they realized that if they were both to pursue their goals responsibly, they needed to share expertise and resources in areas of common concern.

What is the scope of PENCIL's work? How does PENCIL work?

PENCIL would undertake projects and core activities related to community development that fit within the broad terms of its mission. It is anticipated that these projects would involve:

- Research and evaluation, to advance knowledge and to contribute to improving policies and practices

- Knowledge mobilization, to improve the ways in which policies and practices are influenced by, and influence, research and evaluation, and/or
- Lifelong learning, to increase the expertise and capacity of people at the College and in its surrounding communities for advancing the objectives embodied in PENCIL's mission.

Building foundational pieces

Over the past few years, an extensive undertaking at COGS has resulted in the development of a promising suite of community asset-mapping prototypes. Through the PENCIL initiative, the NSCC can further develop community asset mapping as a transformative tool to engage local citizens in community learning and in doing so, provide a mechanism to help plan for resilience and sustainability. This effort would help engage community members to share their local knowledge and collaborate on community development initiatives. Nova Scotia is faced with an aging demographic which possesses enormous talent and tremendous wisdom. In a Nova Scotian context, it is necessary to focus on how to guide life-long learning opportunities to nurture an intergenerational mentoring relationship.

Through our community mapping work at COGS, we are dedicated to building collaborative learning communities. Through the PENCIL Initiative, we would seek to partner with a diverse array of community members to map, assess and build upon community assets to support sustainable and resilient community development. Through ongoing mapping sessions, the NSCC would seek to collaborate with community members to create a living atlas that will deepen our understanding of the places we inhabit. By sharing their local knowledge and ideas, people would become engaged in a mapping process that will inspire them to become active participants in strengthening their own communities. Drawing upon local information, storytelling and a rich array of multimedia the maps seek to encourage lifelong learning. COGS could become a hub for community mapping initiatives throughout the province drawing people to our campus to share in their learning and celebration of place.

What does success look like?

We need to facilitate the development of place-based learning communities, document benefits, develop metrics of success, and create collaborative approaches that the college could take to spearhead the efforts to create a working regional model. Ultimately, however, given the enormous challenges we face as a society, embracing a lifelong learning agenda province wide is essential. The NSCC recognizes how critical the timing is to act as a catalyst for social change and the need to create a hub for knowledge sharing. We need to reach out to other institutions who have already recognized this creative and important work, such as the University of Victoria's Community Mapping Collaboratory in BC and University College London's successful Mapping for Change social enterprise. This work would also require looking both internally and with a broad range of external community partners to seek a common vision and a shared interest in collaboration

The NSCC is well positioned to lead this initiative

In 2007, Literacy Nova Scotia, a non-governmental umbrella organization set up to promote literacy and lifelong learning, invited Ron Faris, to host a two-day workshop to explore the development of

learning communities in Nova Scotia. The NSCC was one of the contributors who helped sponsor this event, which drew participants from a wide range of sectors. In the many years since that conference took place, we have yet to come anywhere close to fully realizing an integrative model of what learning communities could look like. Given the number, quality and decentralized nature of Nova Scotia's post-secondary educational institutions, it is vital to draw upon this network of institutions to help inform us on the best way to proceed. Indeed, a multitude of collaborating opportunities exists. Academically, many potential partnerships should be explored internally to the NSCC and externally. In Nova Scotia, the NSCC is uniquely positioned and is the obvious leader for this sort of initiative. Being a community college with 16 campuses and learning centers distributed across the entire province we are already well positioned philosophically and geographically. A physical presence within our communities is a good start; this initiative would allow us an opportunity to become much more deeply integrated into the underlying fabric of Nova Scotia communities.

Potential Partnerships

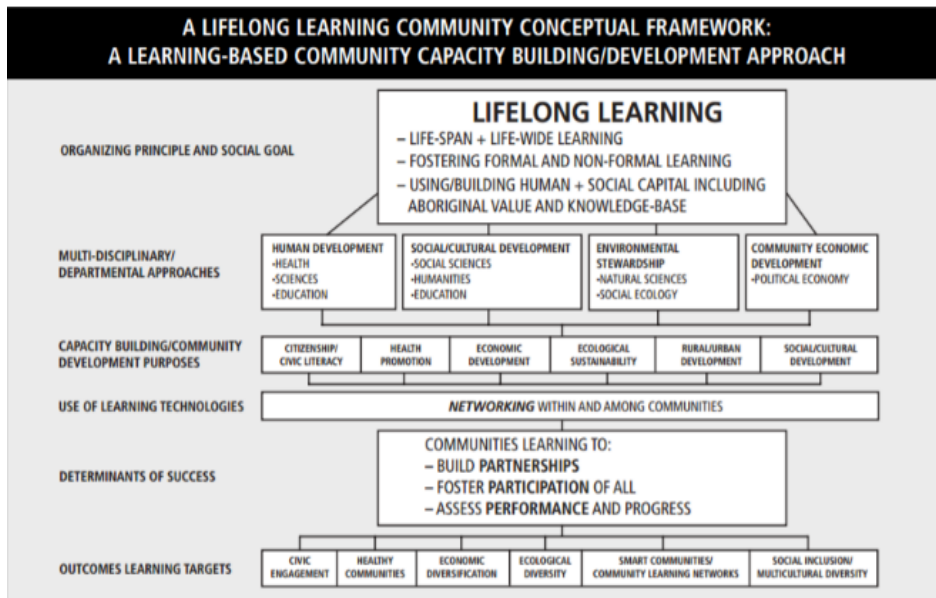
Externally, Acadia University's Community Development program and their successful Acadia Lifelong Learning program (ALL), Cape Breton University's Bachelor of Arts in Community Studies, and Dalhousie University's Community Design program would be potential partners. Our post-secondary educational institutions could act as innovation hubs that could play a central role in helping us establish a network of learning communities across Nova Scotia aimed at revitalizing their economies and enhancing their adaptive capacity. Beyond academic institutions, it will undoubtedly require a good number of partners including various levels of governments, foundations, and other public sector agencies to make such a comprehensive enterprise a reality.

Effort should be taken to explore the formation of partnerships with those in the private sector as well, like the innovative work of Learning Lunenburg. This enterprise provides analytical and descriptive planning tools, research into small community planning and organizes educational programs and conferences related to integrated planning in small communities.

Obvious potential partners exist in other sectors across the province as well, including Nova Scotia's rich networks of libraries and museums, public archives, community learning associations, and family resource centers. Various government departments could also be invited to participate including the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Labour and Advanced Education, Communities, Culture and Heritage and Community Services.

Developing PENCIL would help fulfill our campus role to implement NSCC's strategic plan as well as fulfilling the vision of post-secondary institutions acting as innovation hubs, set forth by the ONE Nova Scotia Commission. The ultimate goal would be to define and establish a network of map-centric, learning communities first across our region and then across our province that recognize, embark upon and celebrate learning in an innovative and cohesive way to build a resilient, sustainable and prosperous communities.

Map Suite Development		Participants		Data Development								Tool Development											
				Local Asset Inventory Completeness								Gather		Disseminate		Highlight		Investigate					Narrate
Domain	Youth Component (home school, private school, public school, youth org, youth club)	Community Members; Associations; Agency, Local	COGS Associate	Gathered, Raw	Est %	Categorized, 1st Order	%	Fully Developed 2nd Order	%	Level-0 Reflect	Level-1 Share	Level-2 Browse	Level-3 Discover	Level-4 Dig Deeper	Level-5 Story	Level-6 Assess	Overall Status						
1	Cultivating a Local Food System	4H; Homeschool Mappers, Booker	NSHA; Dan Harvey; Annapolis County	Gabby	601	60%	325	33%	20	2%	N/A	1	1	1	2	2	3	1.7	1	Well Developed	8	22%	39%
2	Responding to Climate Change	Horton, Booker	Anne Randy; Centre for Local Prosperity (Gregory Hemings)	Colin	50	1%	50	1%	0	0%	1	2	3	1	3	2	4	2.3	2	In Development	6	17%	
3	Enhancing Cultural Vitality	????	David Hankison, Barb Bishop	Ed	350	35%	350	35%	100	10%	3	4	2	1	3	1	4	2.6	3	Materials Need to be Pulled Together	6	17%	17%
4	Promoting Environmental Stewardship	LEC, Forest Friends	Extinction Rebellion - Nick et al; Lands & Forests	Aaron Jackson	200	20%	200	20%	0	0%	1	4	4	3	2	4	4	3.1	4	No Development	15	42%	42%
5	First Nations and Reconciliation	????	Carolyn Landry & Rowena Landry	N/A	10	1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.9	5	N/A	1	3%	3%
6	Community and Social Services	????		Ed	150	30%	150	30%	0	0%	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0		Total	36	100%	100%



The Vermont PLACE program: <https://www.uvm.edu/place/>

“The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers... It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it.” David Orr

“If America could be, once again, a nation of self-reliant farmers, craftsmen, hunters, ranchers, and artists, then the rich would have little power to dominate others. Neither to serve nor to rule: That was the American dream.” Edward Abbey

“Communities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” Jane Jacobs

The Place-based Education Network and Collaborative Innovation Laboratory (PENCIL)

A Community Mapping Institute at COGS

Dedicated to building collaborative learning communities,
we seek to partner with a diverse array of community members
to map, assess and build upon community assets to support



[Intro](#) [Cornerstones](#) [Collaborators](#) [Community Maps](#) [Get More Info](#)

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Meaningful Livelihoods

...ideas are the most powerful things on earth...

— E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful

People/Folk

“Communities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

— Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities

Our Environment, Our Place

“The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers... It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it.”


David Orr, Educator


Our Mission

Through ongoing mapping sessions, we seek to collaborate with community members to create a living atlas that will deepen our understanding of the places we inhabit. By sharing their local knowledge and ideas, we seek to engage people in a mapping process that will inspire them to become active participants in strengthening their own communities. Drawing upon local information, storytelling and a rich array of multimedia the maps seek to encourage lifelong learning. COGS will become a hub for community mapping initiatives throughout the province drawing people to our campus to share in their learning and celebration of place. [Click here to see how community mapping can help connect the dots in our local response to climate change!](#)

Community mapping can also help us to face challenges and respond to change that all individuals and communities must deal with -- be they environmental, economic, cultural or social. Below are six key components that serve as cornerstones, critical to providing prosperity and a strong foundation to every community.


Fostering a Local Food Movement


Tackling Climate Change


Promoting Environmental Stewardship





