

Report of the Planning Committee on the 2018 Members' Forum

Held at the Nouvel Hôtel, Montreal

26 October 2018

Organized by the Planning Committee:

Lorne Huston, chair. Members: Claire Booth, Hassan Elshafei, Sandra Frisby, Leslie Paris,
Peter Roberts, Sid Rosen, Marie-Claire Zirpdji. Observers: Irwin Kuzmarov, Gerri Barrer.

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Executive Summary

A Members' Forum was held on 26 October 2018 to discuss the issue of peer learning at MCLL. The three major findings and the four recommendations are presented here.

Major Findings

- **Peer learning should be seen in terms of quality of discussion rather than a type of study group.** Peer learning is not declining at MCLL, it is evolving. Peer learning is no longer tied to the notion of participants presenting research papers to each other. Participants felt that their expectations of peer learning were fulfilled when an informed, structured discussion was held between members at each meeting of a study group.
- **There does not seem to be a way to accurately assess which SG have little or no discussion or where the discussion is not productive.**
- **Much works well at MCLL and this fact should not be overlooked.**

Major recommendations

Recommendation #1: That the Curriculum committee should develop means of obtaining reliable information about membership satisfaction, effectiveness of support for moderators, and the participation of moderators in MCLL as an organization.

Recommendation # 2: That council appoint a committee¹ to support “Active learning workshops”. These workshops would be designed to match members interested in improving their active learning skills with members who would like to work with them.

Other recommendations

Recommendation #3: That the Planning committee carry out a general survey of members to better understand concerns of people who did not attend Forum

Recommendation #4: That the Communications Committee make the ideas of peer learning, active learning, and discussion, more prominent in the image MCLL projects in the calendar, in “slogans”, in MCLL communications (Newsletter, Bulletin, Facebook page).

¹ Perhaps under the authority of the Curriculum Committee?

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Description of Event

Context

On 26 October 2018, a Members' Forum was held to discuss the issue of peer learning at MCLL. For the past fifteen years or so, this type of meeting has been held every two or three years to give members a chance to reflect upon issues that touch upon the core mandate of our organization. The last such meeting was held in October 2015.

Objectives of the event

There were basically two main objectives of this event:

1. To clarify what is meant by peer learning
 - a. for MCLL as an organization and
 - b. for the individual members. (a chance to rethink our views.)
2. To define the place of peer learning within the overall activities of MCLL.

When, Where the event was held

The event was held at Le Nouvel Hôtel, 1740 René-Lévesque Blvd. West, Montreal, from 9 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Friday, October 26, 2018

Programme of the day

9:00 AM	Registration & refreshments	11:30	Pause to change tables
9:15	Introduction	11:45	Roundtable discussion 2: Is peer learning on the decline at MCLL? If so, is that a problem for you and why?
9:30	Keynote speech: Dean Carola Weil, School of Continuing Studies	12:30 PM	Lunch
10:15	Focus speech: "Peer Learning at MCLL" by Lorne Huston	2:00	Report and discussion
10:30	Task briefing	2:45	Wrap-up and quick survey
10:45	Roundtable discussion 1: What is the most effective form of peer learning for you?	3:00	Adjourn

Summary of Dean's keynote speech

The keynote speaker at the Members' Forum on October 26th, 2018 was the dean of SCS, Carola Weil. She began by saying that one of the challenges for her and for us is to how to better integrate MCLL into the life of the School of Continuing Education. While SCS's focus on practical college preparation or on career shifts, third age learning is more complex and multidirectional. The tension that exists between the autonomous structure of MCLL and the fact that it is still part of SCS is an example of border management that needs to be addressed. As time progresses we shall see an ever-increasing number of adult learners and organizations such as MCLL and Schools of Continuing Studies may well move from the sidelines to the centre of education.

Attendance

Eighty-four members attended.

Major Findings

- **Evolution of our understanding and application of the concept peer of learning**
First conclusion: Peer learning is not declining at MCLL, it is evolving. Peer learning is no longer tied to the notion of participants presenting research papers to each other. In general, people felt that their expectations of peer learning were fulfilled when an informed, structured discussion was held between members at each meeting. The means of generating that discussion are varied. It could come about just as much from well thought out lectures with a structured discussion period afterwards as it could from a stimulating presentation of a research paper, not to mention a host of other formats, like discussing excerpts of books, articles, recordings, videos, etc. Peer learning is thus not tied to any one type of study group or pedagogical strategy. As long as the study group generated fruitful discussion, a vast majority of participants felt that peer learning was present.
- **Much works well at MCLL and this fact should not be overlooked**
 - Several comments to the effect that much works well at MCLL. Do not fix what ain't broke. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, etc.
 - General consensus that diversity of learning approaches is a strength
- **There does not seem to be a way to accurately assess which SG have little or no discussion or where the discussion is not productive.**

Major recommendations

Recommendation to Curriculum Committee

Preliminary note:

The Planning committee recognizes:

- That moderators are volunteers and not employees. Their contribution has to be enjoyable for them and they need to feel comfortable about the way they do things.
- That the Curriculum committee (CC) has a challenging job to do: soliciting new moderators, keeping good moderators, supporting moderators who need help and, in general, keeping a cohort of moderators who, semester after semester, provide interesting learning environments for our members.
- That the CC has done very valuable work over the years and has accumulated a good deal of expertise. The *Moderators' Handbook* (September 2018) is an excellent document. Over the past year (2017-2018), the planning committee has very much appreciated the willingness shown by the CC to encourage moderators to promote and integrate more peer learning oriented practices into the design of study groups.

For this reason, our recommendations here will not focus on specific, technical suggestions for improving the quality of discussions in study groups. A number of good suggestions were made by participants at the Forum. See Appendix C, D, and E. Our remarks will focus more on operational goals. The Planning committee recommends:

Recommendation #1:

That the Curriculum committee should develop means of obtaining reliable information about membership satisfaction, effectiveness of support for moderators, and the participation of moderators in MCLL as an organization.

- **Degree of member satisfaction with discussion in SG.**
 - This can be done in a variety of ways: through feedback forms, through random surveys, through soliciting comments and suggestions. The CC can test different methods and make its own decisions, but the important thing is to be able to know if and where there are problems (and successes!) and to be able to act in response to these situations. The ways of obtaining feedback should be continually tested. Are there problems occurring which our feedback mechanisms did not tell us about? Why not? How can they be improved?
- **Effectiveness of support for moderators**
 - Do we know who needs support?
 - Do we know what kind of support?
 - How effective are the means of support we provide? Do moderators find this support useful?
- **Moderator participation in MCLL**
 - How can we minimize the number of moderators who come, run their study group and go home with little or no interaction with the rest of MCLL? To what

extent is this reality present at MCLL? Apart from measures of support for moderators which can be provided by members of the CC, it may be possible to increase the support which moderators give each other. Who is attending moderator-oriented events? Who is not? What can be done to make communication between moderators a more standard part of a moderator's experience at MCLL? What can be done to offer useful, enjoyable and varied exchanges amongst moderators? Set objectives in this regard. Are there other ways of facilitating the sharing of expertise?

Recommendation to Council

Many participants in the forum stressed the importance of helping individual members better prepare their contributions to their study groups.

While many of these suggestions were very good, the planning committee was somewhat at a loss as to how these ideas could effectively be put into practice. Of course, each individual member can be called upon to do their part. Moderators can be asked to play a role as well. But if there is not a body of some kind to oversee the implementation of good ideas, it is unlikely that they will have much of an effect. For this reason, the planning committee recommends

Recommendation # 2:

That council appoint a committee² to support “Active learning workshops”. These workshops would be designed to match members interested in improving their active learning skills with members who would like to work with them.

The main focus of this sub-committee would be to promote “Active learning workshops”. These workshops, which could take the form of small groups, practice sessions amongst peers, or even individual tutoring, would be designed to help members to improve specific active learning skills (related to research, presentation, speaking and moderating, for example).

Already within MCLL, we sponsor a number of learning activities which are neither Study Groups nor lectures. There are workshops, brainy bars, and informal training sessions, often offered by Ana (on audio-visual equipment, for example). There are break-out sessions after the moderator's meetings. What we suggest here is setting up a committee which would have as its main focus the promotion of active learning at MCLL through flexible peer learning workshops which could be organized on short notice between interested parties. These could be free of charge and not entail any formal registration.

Some of the needs that participants in the Members' Forum felt could be addressed were as follows:

- **Research:** library initiation, finding information, evaluating sources, introduction to Endnote.

² Perhaps under the authority of the Curriculum Committee?

- **Presentations:** finding a focus, structuring a presentation, setting the stage for discussion, working with supports for presentation (PowerPoint, videos, documents, images, maps). Working with a partner.
- **Speaking:** Imagining your audience. Using text and visual aids. Managing nervousness.
- **Moderating skills:** framing discussions, formulating discussion questions, managing discussions, etc. Choosing a subject for a SG. Preparing a SG. Working with ASK Interface. Using audio-visual equipment. Working with a co-moderator.

Other recommendations

Recommendation to the Planning Committee

Recommendation #3

That the Planning committee carry out a general survey of members to better understand concerns of people who did not attend Forum

Recommendation to the Communications Committee

Recommendation #4

That the Communications Committee make the ideas of peer learning, active learning, and discussion, more prominent in the image MCLL projects

- In the calendar, in “slogans”, in MCLL communications (Newsletter, Bulletin, Facebook page)

Follow-up measures

- Send a short version of this report to all participants at Members’ Forum 2018. The full report can be made available online.
- Write up short articles in Newsletter and Bulletin, outlining recommendations and concrete changes which have occurred.
- Ask planning committee to prepare a report for the December 2019 council meeting which sums up what changes have occurred and where there is room for improvement.

Thanks

This forum would not have been possible without the real dedication and enthusiasm shown by so many people at MCLL. The planning committee offers its heartfelt thanks to the

1. Moderators and scribes

Ruth Allan Rigby, Sandra Baines, Gerri Barrer, Nola Brunelle, Marlene Chan, Hassan Elshafei, Nancy Grayson, François Labonté, Catherine Main-Oster, Nina Maksymiwi, Mary Ann Mongeau, Normand Nault, Lesley Regnier, Marilyn Riley Nault, Peter Roberts, Robert Robinson, Diane Rowley, Judith Schurman, Astri Thorvik, Jacqueline Yarosky

2. **Curriculum Committee.** From the outset, Tony Frayne and the Curriculum Committee took the theme of this forum, Peer learning, very seriously and helped us formulate our questions and concerns. The Curriculum committee also vigorously promoted the Forum
3. **Communications Committee.** Sandra Baines as head of the Communications committee put the full weight of her committee behind efforts to publicize the Forum. Gerri Barrer gave prominent coverage to the event in the MCLL electronic Bulletin. Lesley Regnier made sure that the Forum was well covered ahead of time with in depth articles in the MCLL **Newsletter.**
4. **Volunteers.** Susan Biggs played a vital role in the registration process as coordinator of volunteers. She oversaw the check-in process with Nola Brunelle and Anne Tittler and other volunteers distributed brochures to the classes ahead of time.
5. **Special Events Coordinator.** Laura Grundberg, did an excellent job as coordinator of special events and worked very seamlessly with Donna Graziano and her team of personnel at Le Nouvel Hôtel.
6. **Photographer.** The organizing committee is particularly grateful to Gordon Campey, photographer, who made a wonderful video of the event which has been posted on Facebook and Youtube (see Appendix B).

Appendixes

Appendix A: Link to Dean's speech on Youtube:

<https://youtu.be/2QlgdSOGX9U>

Appendix B: Link to Gordon Campey's Visual Souvenir of the 2018 Members' Forum

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBs5ARumDbY>

Appendix C: Summary of Discussions on Question One

Question 1: What is the most effective form of peer learning for you?

- What are some of the best examples you have seen of people taking collective responsibility for the learning process?
- Why did it work then, and what were the ingredients for success?

In general, most people favour discussion as the most desirable element in a SG, followed by short presentations. By far the majority of the comments, however, concerned moderator preparation, attitude and ability to form a cohesive, safe group environment.

Discussion

- should be a main element
- should have a structural framework and be focused
- based on information provided by the moderator or an individual member
- where applicable, pre-reading or viewing will be followed by discussion in class
- open-ended questions lead to good discussion
- leave time for each person to speak
- need interactive discussion to clarify ideas
- benefit from life experience of other members

Presentations

- emphasis was on researching
- presentations should be short
 - leave room for discussion
 - overcome resistance by reluctant members
- there should be a clear objective
- one can do research /preparation to be presented by another participant OR two people can do a presentation together
- presenter should summarize key points
- discourage reading of presentations and/or reading of PP slides

Technical issues³

- only a tool
- videos can be used as a basis for discussion
- moderator to send out information about how to use the Internet, make PPPs, use the CD player, etc.
- try to use the new technologies (Facebook, Whatsapp groups to share information and ideas so all can contribute, and the learning goes on beyond the study group

³ Technical issues usually relate to presentations, but I'm putting them in a separate category.

- presentations should have some visual content
- presentations can be emailed to other members

Engagement of individual members

- members must be committed to sharing experiences
- to listening and being open to new ideas
- to taking ownership for their own and others' participation
- to be challenged to learn about an entirely new topic

Support for moderators

- the moderator provides structure
 - pre-meeting contact with the group:
 - ten-week plan
 - list of presentation topics
- scope and limit of study group
 - sets the level of research required and fosters use of library resources
- the moderator sets the tone of the SG
 - animates, is not-judgmental, is cheery
 - is well-prepared
 - fosters a sense of inclusion
 - encourages questions
 - actively enforces the basic rules for conducting a discussion
- other responsibilities of the moderator
 - sets up an introduction period in the first class
 - gives each person a chance to express themselves
 - moderator should be able and willing to comment on presentations
 - moderator should be able to add a few pertinent points following a presentation, and to lead the discussion
 - moderator should have a back-up plan!
- moderators need technical training
 - to set up a topic that fosters a variety of opinions
 - to use the expertise and life experiences of participants
- co-moderating should be encouraged (older and younger member together is best scenario)
- members of CC should be allowed to come into a SG at will

Additional comments

- There is a place for actual teaching by moderator on very complex topic
- We should consider intergenerational learning within the classroom
- finding opportunities outside to mingle
- Hand-out packages at the outset (eg) Theatre Quebecois: outstanding package provided by the moderator)

Appendix D: Summary of Discussions on Question Two

Some people feel that peer learning is on the decline at MCLL. Is that a problem for you and why? If so, how can we address this:

- As members?
- As moderators?
- As an organization?

Members

- “Presentations” do not require PPT; alternatives include leading a discussion or showing videos relevant to topic
- Work with partners; “co-moderate” a session on a topic
- Discussions are of primary importance; informed participation should be encouraged; ideas shared; we get most out of the SG when participants really participate, i.e., react, ask questions, etc.; if moderators are just lecturing, help them to open up their SGs to more participation
- Make presentations shorter: 15 min.
- Choose classes that suit your learning style; participation in SG should be voluntary; participants should not feel obligation to present. Not speaking is acceptable; participants should be tolerant of one another.
- Update computer skills: besides library, use e-books, social media as resources for learning; some members need more technical support to use these
- Need training on how to structure and prepare presentations

Moderators

- Break the ice and make people comfortable, establish trust Make sure everyone introduces self at start of session and has visible name cards. Have party in the middle of the semester instead of at end.
- Encourage collaborations as joint responsibility.
- Make sure that participants can prepare in advance (give “homework”); this will improve their participation; give an example (read something or write a question)
- Provide mentoring, coaching for members for presentations
- Be clear about parameters for discussion and manage problems with communication and delivery
- Provide stimulus for and encourage discussion, allow more time for it, and let people talk! Encourage/support “out of the box” thinking.
- Provide more flexibility in scheduling presentations to allow people who are initially reluctant to sign up later (after they’ve built up some courage or have received support)
- Discussion group model is very effective. Many SGs use this model. Moderator must play important role. You don’t have to be an expert!

MCLL

- Provide coaching on shaping a SG (Curriculum Committee?):
 - During orientation, especially for *new* moderators and *new* members, emphasize peer learning model as well as range of peer learning methods
 - Provide moderators with training/support in methods of peer learning other than presentations and in tips for moderating discussion (how to frame questions to elicit participation, especially to encourage reluctant participants, how to deal with those who monopolize discussions...)
 - Pair experienced with new moderators to support them.
- Communicate better with members about resources available, like library, tech; moderators can help with this
- Peer learning:
 - Help people understand that peer learning does not mean presentations (only); emphasize role of research in SGs as well as giving presentations
 - Peer learning should be our emphasis, but there is much to be learned from other formats as well
 - Do more advertising about MCLL emphasizing multiple styles of learning
- Hold think tank for topics
- Feedback from SG members should go to Curriculum Committee; very important
- How do we deal with poor performance of some SGs?
- Room setup needs to improve: access to seats, safety
- Smaller groups: max 10
- Change cadence of offerings (???)

Appendix E: Summary of “Was Your Voice Heard” Evaluation Forms

At the end of the forum, the participants were asked to respond to two questions

1. Is there anything important missing from the shared summary of the round-table discussions, perhaps an idea of yours or an idea from your table(s)? If so, please share that with us.
2. Which points that were made do you feel most strongly about?

Participants took this occasion to express their views very seriously and wrote long and constructive comments. The following is an attempt to synthesize these comments, first in a thematic fashion and then in summarizing the main specific points they suggested.

Part A : Thematic summary

Main points

1. Curriculum committee must have a way of evaluating success of SG so that it can provide support for moderators.
2. Provide support for moderators
 - a. How to stimulate discussion
 - b. Encourage communication between moderators
 - c. Encourage co-moderation, buddy systems,
 - d. Suggest topics that people would like to hear about.
 - e. Help participants make the leap to moderating
 - f. Provide tools, facilities and training.
 - g. New technologies
 - h. Workshop for moderators starting in winter semester
3. Provide support for participants
 - a. How to research
 - b. How to present
 - c. How to participate in discussions (preparation)
 - d. How to share
4. Allow and encourage diversity of approaches. The important thing is discussion, participation and socialization.

Other things

1. Better marketing – get the peer learning message out
2. Don't fix what isn't broke.
 - a. Variety is strength
3. Suggestions for survey questions (p.17)
4. Make sure members get feedback from this event.

Part B: Specific Measures

MCLL in General:

- Enhance overall communications and clarify expectations of all members; be they moderators or participants.
- Greater use of MCLL/McGill resources such as April and McGill library – still not widely known/ suggest April address each SG
- Online registration taking precedence over manual is unfair to senior (elderly) members who are not able to use technology
- Physical environment is not conducive to peer-learning. Move tables around; experiment with seating arrangements so that people are sitting closer to one another depending on study group
- Stick to 'intellectual' development and leave exercise-type offerings to other organizations
- Offer a SG on moderating and another one on Participating; they could be a 5-week offering.
 - For moderators, how to stimulate discussion
 - For participants, how to research and produce presentation
- Find specific ways of making new members feel welcome even outside their chosen SG

- Social aspect of attending SG is of utmost importance
- Very senior members (80-95) do not want to be pressured to make presentations; they want to listen and observe
- Initiate a list of interested members who are willing to co-moderate a SG

Curriculum Committee

- Greater involvement from this committee
 - Audit SG to assess success
 - Receive and review evaluation forms for each SG
 - Offer more support to moderators
- Canvassing members to find topics for SG – then, finding would-be moderators to take those subjects on and offer a SG

Moderators

- Need more training
 - How to conduct first session
 - Stimulate discussion
 - Manage discussion and overbearing participants
 - Offer help to reluctant participants
 - How to use equipment in classrooms
- Training should be mandatory

Participants

- Responsibilities
 - Come to SG prepared (previous reading, etc.)
 - Join in the discussion
- Other ways to contribute
 - Take attendance
 - Organize gift and/or party
 - Volunteer as IT resource if qualified
 - Discussion leaders / 1st responder