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Article Title: C**ommunity Collaboration for Inquiry Success**

Synergy may be defined as the collaboration between two or more parties to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate parts. That is exactly what happened in Denton, Texas when all types of librarians collaborated on a community reading initiative. In 2007, Denton Reads, a One Book, One Community organization, was formed with librarians from the Denton Independent School District (Denton ISD), the Denton Public Libraries, the University of North Texas (UNT), and Texas Woman’s University (TWU).  The Denton Reads program ran successfully for three years. During their years of collaboration, the librarians at all levels realized the emphasis of instruction was on database use and critical information literacy skills were not being addressed.

In addition, a number of outside forces caused librarians to reexamine their library instruction.  Texas, recognizing the need for an educated population and workforce for the future, implemented a statewide program to increase the number of students enrolled in higher education by more than 500,000 students over the next fifteen years and to increase the degree completion rate by 50 percent during the same time.   The state curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), expect K-12 students to ask open-ended questions,  use information from a variety of sources, compare, summarize, organize, synthesize, analyze, connect to personal experiences,  make inferences, identify, generate criteria for evaluating, produce and present research, and evaluate source materials.  These expectations are found across the core content areas of the TEKS.  The AASL 21st Century Learner Standards focus on students becoming independent learners who inquire, access, and use information from multiple literacies effectively and learn from others as well as produce and share information in a variety of ways.  The Common Core State Standards Crosswalk also notes commonalities between the AASL standards and the Common Core Standards.   The Partnership for the 21st Century Skills outlines skills students must master to be successful in college, career, and life including problem-solving skills, critical thinking, collaboration, information and technology literacy, creativity, and flexibility among others.   The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards, currently under revision, also include many of these skills. With so many standards and state programs embracing inquiry and information literacy skills, the librarians saw opportunities where their collaboration would benefit K-20 goals to improve student performance and to graduate a stronger workforce.  The solution to meeting these needs for 21st century learners was to create a K-20 information literacy curriculum that included an inquiry stance.

Responding to these needs and opportunities, Donna Kearley, Denton ISD Library Services Coordinator, and Annie Downey, Department Head of UNT Libraries Research & Instructional Services, proposed to their administrators that librarians work cooperatively to impact both sets of goals positively by utilizing a spiraled K-20 information literacy curriculum integrating an inquiry process.  K-12 students taught inquiry skills and given opportunities to practice those skills would be prepared for the transition between high school and college research. Continued instruction in college would further support students to become successful college graduates and part of a well-educated workforce.

With their administrators’ enthusiastic endorsement, again all of the Denton librarians joined together to create a new organization, the Denton Inquiry 4 Lifelong Learning (DI4LL). At this point, librarians from Denton Public Library and faculty from both TWU and UNT library schools joined the group to create this unique collaborative organization. The DI4LL members searched for a model curriculum to use that taught students information literacy skills starting in kindergarten and continued through college graduate level. However, after a thorough search of the literature and finding no information literacy curriculum for K-20, the DI4LL members decided to create their own curriculum.  They selected the Guided Inquiry Design as the inquiry model.  This inquiry process offered a scaffold approach that could be woven into the expectations found in the Research Strand of the TEKS.  Students would gain a deeper understanding of the content and an inquiry process they can use in college, careers, and life.

The DI4LL team’s first action was a book study using *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Your School* by Carol C. Kuhlthau, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari (Libraries Unlimited, 2012). They launched an online book study in October 2012 along with a plan for the systemic shift from isolated information skills to a library curriculum built on the Guided Inquiry process. To build a collective sense of what inquiry was, knowledge of the steps in the Guided Inquiry process, and the rationale for the new direction of the library programs, librarians met regularly to share ideas, discuss other inquiry articles, and develop new instructional plans.

After a few months it became clear that more support was needed for the librarians.  All participants were busy with full-time jobs with little extra time to create a K-20 information literacy curriculum, learn the Guided Inquiry Design, or develop lessons to implement the new plan.  The DI4LL team realized to move this initiative forward to actual implementation they needed to provide additional assistance. Academic librarians, Lilly Ramin, Gayla Byerly, and Cindy Batman, applied for and received a Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) Cooperative grant for $75,000.00.  The grant funded a project manager and a consultant.    Dr. Judi Moreillon, Assistant Professor of the School of Library and Information Studies at TWU, consulted and wrote sample lessons plans using Guided Inquiry and the TEKS Social Studies Standards for Grades 3, 8, and 9.  Cherry Fuller, the project manager and a former school library coordinator, began working with the Denton ISD Library Coordinator, Donna Kearley, to write the K-20 information literacy units.

The information literacy units were divided according to the four subsections of the Research Strand of the TEKS English Language Arts and Reading Standards. These four units are the Research Plan Unit; the Gather Unit; the Synthesis, Create, and Share Unit; and the Evaluate Unit.  Each of these units includes the student expectations listed in that particular subsection knowledge and skills statements and the appropriate steps of the Guided Inquiry Design correlating to that subsection.  For example, the Research Plan Unit lists knowledge and skills statements such as “Students ask open-ended questions and develop a plan for answering them”.  Within that statement are several student expectations at each grade level.  For example, in Kindergarten, the student is expected to “ask questions about topics of class-wide interest (with adult assistance)”.  At the high school level, students are expected to “brainstorm, consult with others, decide upon a topic, and formulate a major research question to address the major research topic”.   The Guided inquiry Design steps Open, Immerse, Explore and Identify, correlate well with this unit topic and are woven into the learning plan of the unit.

Librarians soon discovered they would have to look at their instructional role differently.  The new plans called for more library instruction throughout the inquiry process rather than just instruction on accessing information and resources.   Librarians would be involved in the beginning stages of the research process helping students learn how to ask open-ended questions, build background knowledge and personal connections, explore the topics, and identify a research focus. Traditionally, research is assigned and students are expected to look for the information, and create the research paper.  Librarians in this scenario help students find, access, and use resources after the assignment is made and teachers assume the students have the skills to complete the project independently.  Often students search the Internet to locate information related to their topic. The results of this kind of research are reports with a set of facts the student located.  However, when implementing an inquiry process, students develop their own meaningful questions that guide their research, learn how to analyze texts, justify their ideas and share with their learning community, not simply fact-finding using a set of predetermined questions.   With guidance from the learning team, the students gain important skills that transfer to other areas of the curriculum.

As the librarians learned about the new inquiry process, they soon realized that they were actually working through the stages of the process themselves and having many of the thoughts and feelings found in Carol Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process model. There was confusion about the concepts in each step and uncertainty about changing what they were doing.  Others had only vague ideas about how to revise assignments to make them more inquiry-based.  With additional grant funds, multiple professional development opportunities were provided that immersed the librarians in Guided Inquiry, helped them develop a sense of direction by seeing examples of inquiry-based instruction, and increased their confidence and capacity to implement the new curriculum by experiencing typical strategies and the learning team intervention.  One librarian said “I’m so excited to start the school year with these new inquiry projects and collaboration ideas”.  Working together to develop these inquiry research skills at every level prepares students well for college research. Academic librarian, Lilly Ramin and high school librarian, Jamie Pouster, found an opportunity to collaborate based on commonalities with freshman and high school students.  They are targeting courses where they can develop a cross-institutional instruction that bridges the high school to college gap.

The DI4LL team continues to refine the K-20 information literacy curriculum units ensuring they meet the K-20 standards expectations and the Guided Inquiry process is clearly integrated.  Lessons, projects, and resources are being added to the units providing quick access to resources.  Academic and high school librarians continue to build relationships that promote collaborative opportunities, all focused on improving students’ research skills.  More on the work of the Denton Inquiry 4 Lifelong Learning team can be found at <https://dentoninquiry4lifelonglearning.wikispaces.com/>