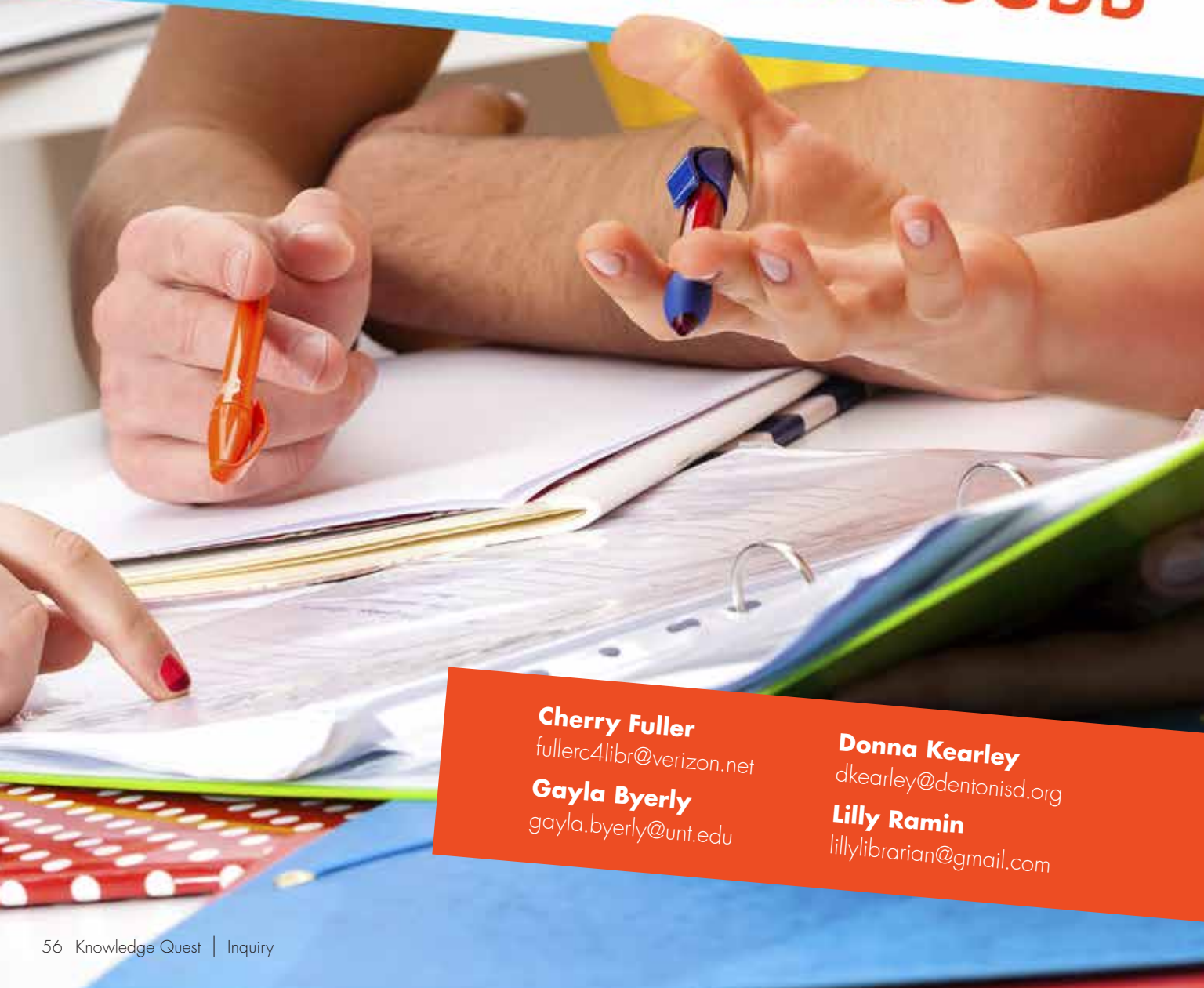


FEATURE



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION for Inquiry Success



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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 Library, 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; 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 in 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. According to the state curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), K–12 students are expected 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.

- AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* 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 AASL/CCSS crosswalk (available at www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/crosswalk) notes commonalities between the AASL standards and the Common Core State 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 focus.

Getting Started

Responding to these needs and opportunities, Donna Kearley, Denton ISD library services coordinator, and Annie Downey, department head of UNT Libraries Research and Instructional Services, proposed to their administrators

that librarians work cooperatively to positively impact both sets of goals—student performance and career readiness—by using a spiraled K–20 information literacy curriculum integrating an inquiry process. K–12 students who had been 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 that taught students information literacy skills starting in kindergarten and continued through college graduate level.

However, a thorough search of the literature revealed no information literacy curriculum for K–20. Therefore, 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 content and an inquiry process they could use in college, careers, and life.

The DI4LL team's first action was a book study using *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your*

THE NEW PLANS CALLED FOR MORE LIBRARY INSTRUCTION THROUGHOUT THE INQUIRY PROCESS RATHER THAN JUST INSTRUCTION ON ACCESSING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES.

School by Carol C. Kuhlthau, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari (Libraries Unlimited 2012). An online book study was launched 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 school library programs, librarians met regularly to share ideas, discuss other inquiry articles, and develop new instructional plans.

Moving Forward

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 that, to move this initiative forward to actual implementation, additional assistance was needed. Academic librarians Lilly Ramin, Gayla Byerly, and Cindy Batman applied for and received a Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) Cooperation grant for \$75,000. The grant funded a project manager and a consultant. Dr. Judi Moreillon, assistant professor at the School of

Library and Information Studies at TWU, consulted and wrote sample lesson 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, and Donna Kearley, Denton ISD library coordinator, began working together 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's 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.

Shifting Perspectives

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; students are expected to look for the information and create the research paper. In this old scenario librarians help students find, access, and use resources after the assignment is made; teachers assume students have the skills to complete the project independently. Often students search the Web to locate information related to their topic. The results of this kind of research are reports with a set of facts the student located. In contrast, 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 engage in 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. Some librarians experienced 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 school 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 school 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 Puster found an opportunity to collaborate based on commonalities of freshman and high school students. These educators are targeting courses where they can develop cross-institutional instruction that bridges the high school to college gap.

Continuing Collaboration

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>.



Cherry Fuller

currently serves as a project manager for a TSLAC Cooperation grant between Denton

ISD and University of North Texas, Texas Woman's University, and Denton Public Library. She has been a classroom teacher, district librarian, and regional library coordinator. She developed and implemented several statewide library projects, including a statewide purchasing consortium for school libraries and a statewide library automation system consortium, and assisted in implementing a statewide video streaming project. She is a school library consultant, presents at various conferences, and provides professional development for school librarians. She has been a member of the Texas Library Association, ALA, and AASL for more than twenty-five years.



Gayla Byerly serves

as the instruction coordinator at the University of North Texas Libraries and as

the English Department liaison. She teaches approximately 180 library orientation sessions a year for various classes at UNT. She also teaches in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University and has taught in the College of Information at UNT. Her area of expertise is assessment of library instruction. She publishes and speaks at both national and international conferences, presenting on assessment of library instruction and instruction techniques. She has taught library instruction workshops for state library associations and the state of Texas. She is also the former head of reference for the University of Texas at Dallas Library.



Donna Kearley is

the library coordinator at the Denton Independent School District. She has served

as a school librarian at every instructional level, and she is currently serving as past president of the Texas Association of School Library Administrators.



Lilly Ramin

is an instructional technologies librarian at the University of North Texas Libraries in

Denton. She was primary investigator for the Denton Inquiry 4 Lifelong Learning (DI4LL) grant awarded by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, which supports this project. Lilly is a graduate of the Association of College and Research Libraries Immersion Program for instruction. She was named a 2012 ALA Emerging Leader. She blogs at <http://lillylibrarian.wordpress.com>.