

FEATURE

# IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONAL



# & EVALUATING PARTNERSHIPS



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Bismarck (ND) Public Schools is a district full of innovative leaders who challenge themselves to transform the educational system to ensure graduating students are college, career, and community ready. Our community, educators, stakeholders, and students feel it is important to offer authentic, educative experiences and promote students' development of what we call "success skills." Success skills are the traits we want our ideal graduates to possess when they enter college or the workforce. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, the 4Cs. Our method of instruction and integration of the success skills is through project-based learning (PBL).

In addition to our having district goals, North Dakota's school library standards have undergone a transformation. In the past, our program was defined by the number of minutes students were scheduled in the school library. For example, every elementary student was required to have thirty minutes of library time a week. Recently, these time constraints have been removed in an effort to focus on quality over quantity. An extensive rubric was developed in North Dakota to evaluate library programs, focusing on teaching for learning, building the learning environment, and empowering learning through leadership. Effective instruction and collaboration have been recognized as more important than students'

presence in the physical space of a school library. It is exciting to have a vision from the state that matches our philosophy at Bismarck Public Schools. Based on the North Dakota standards, the state's school library evaluation rubric, and our district's philosophy, school librarians should be instructional, curricular, and building leaders.

In an effort to carry out the work of the district, while implementing AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, we have started training school librarians to be the backbone of the project-based learning movement. The school library is a natural vehicle to drive transformation when improving PBL teaching practices and implementing inquiry learning. As instructional leaders, school librarians can support and deliver teacher training and facilitate students' project creation. We can support implementation by coteaching and collaborating with classroom teachers on their projects. We are masters at finding and providing resources that encourage sustained inquiry and can support reflective teaching practices by modeling and facilitating positive, collaborative experiences.

Bismarck Public Schools' goals of integrating PBL across all grade levels to better meet the needs of the 21st-century student can be strengthened through a strong school library. As student projects are being developed, school librarians

are there to support learners and their classroom teachers through design, implementation, assessment, revision, and reflection. This effective support has opened the door in some buildings for school librarians to begin coteaching with classroom teachers in an effort to provide seamless integration of content and school library standards.

### **A District-Level Perspective: Misti Werle**

When we had our metaphoric foot in the PBL door, our next step as a department was to create a plan to strengthen coteaching skills. As the district-level library media systems innovator, I realized that the definition of "collaboration" varied across the district's libraries. The spectrum was wide, with some school librarians seeing their role as resource gathering while others were aiming for complete collaboration from project design through implementation, assessment, and reflection. My next step as a leader was to create an action plan to strengthen our effectiveness as school librarians by increasing collaboration and coteaching experiences with classroom teachers.

We needed a clear definition before we could move forward with an action plan. Through my work with the Lilead project, I was fortunate enough to be introduced to amazing school library leaders across the nation who could support Bismarck schools in this journey. Through these mentorships and collaborative partners, I created an action plan for implementing more collaboration across the district. Our first job was to define collaboration.

Using Judi Moreillon's work on coteaching by school librarians and classroom teachers, we developed a rubric to clarify our levels of library services. The rubric defines the differences between cooperation,

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## LEVELS OF LIBRARY SERVICES AND INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Level	Planning	Type of Service	Subtype	EXAMPLES
COLLABORATION	<b>Copanning Required</b> Copanning occurs when equal partners work together to design instruction. Educators begin with the end in mind—students' performance of learning objectives that show what students will know and will be able to do at the end of the learning activity. During copanning, educators codesign assessment instruments and align students' learning tasks with objectives and assessments.	<b>Collaboration</b> The school librarian and the classroom teacher schedule formal planning time. Together, they design a lesson or unit of instruction to achieve shared goals and specific student learning outcomes. They complement the lesson or unit using one or more co-teaching approaches. Collaborators co-monitor student progress and share responsibility for assessing and analyzing student learning outcomes.	<b>Team Teaching</b>	After collaborative planning, educators coteach by assuming different roles during instruction, such as reader or recorder or questioner and responder, modeling partner work, role playing or debating, and more.
			<b>Parallel Teaching</b>	Each educator works with a portion of the class to teach the same or similar content using the same or different modalities. Groups may switch or reconvene as a whole class to share, debrief, and/or reflect.
			<b>Station Teaching</b>	After determining curriculum content for multiple learning stations, each educator takes responsibility for facilitating one or more learning centers, while in other centers, students work independently of adult support.
			<b>Alternative Teaching</b>	One educator pre-teaches or re-teaches concepts to a small group while the other educator teaches a different lesson to the larger group.
COORDINATION	<b>Copanning Required</b> (see above)	<b>Coordination</b> Coordination requires more communication than cooperation. It includes a shared mission and may include planning and can be supported over a longer time period. Often one person will take the lead in coordination activities and others follow along in supporting roles. While there is more intensity in coordination than in cooperation, authority is still maintained by each individual.		The school librarian aligns library instruction with the topic or learning objectives the classroom teacher is addressing in the classroom.  or The school librarian may support classroom teachers by helping them implement a new strategy, tool, or resource. (extra set of hands in the room)
	A brief conversation about a lesson topic or objective			
COOPERATION	A brief conversation about a lesson topic or objective	<b>Cooperation</b> Compared with collaboration, cooperation tends to be more informal, short term, and often lacks a focused planning effort. People who cooperate maintain their individual authority. They may not have a shared mission, but rather provide pieces of a puzzle with a commitment to the whole picture.		The school librarian provides print, digital, or technical resources for students' and classroom teacher's use in the classroom or in the library. The school librarian is not involved in instruction.

Adapted from Moreillon (2018) Moreillon, Judi. 2018 Maximizing School Librarian Leadership: Building Connections for Learning and Advocacy. Chicago: ALA  
Figure 1. Comparison of collaboration, coordination, and cooperation in teaching.

coordination, and collaboration (see figure 1). To learn more about the top tiers of collaboration/coteaching, we hosted a training session presented by educational consultant and author Anne Beninghof. All school librarians invited a classroom teacher to attend the workshop to learn a variety of teaching models. We used this training to deepen our understanding of collaboration and coteaching, and then set out to practice and strengthen our instructional partnerships.

Over the course of the 2017–2018 school year all school librarians

collected collaboration data. They reported the amount of time they were spending at each level of the rubric and how many teachers they were working with each month. The amount of time school librarians had collaborated at a high level doubled over the course of the year as a result of our focused work in this area.

### Horizon Middle School Librarian's Perspective: Kat Berg

One of my goals this past school year was to assess my coteaching prowess using the "Levels of Library

Services and Instructional Partnerships" rubric (see figure 1) as a guide. To that end, Bismarck's middle school librarians turned this rubric into a Google survey. Based on the responses that I received from Horizon Middle School staff, I believed this survey could be an effective communication and feedback tool. Each month as I planned upcoming projects with teachers, I referred to the rubric to ensure that I was providing the highest level of service and partnership based on student learning outcomes.

I understood that school librarians were equal partners with classroom teachers when designing instruction to achieve shared goals and specific learning objectives and assessments. We were co-implementing lessons using a variety of teaching strategies based on the needs of our students. I realized, however, that I could "level up" my coteaching game by sharing more responsibility for assessing and analyzing student learning outcomes. With a ratio of one school librarian per 1,200 students in grades 6 through 8, the challenge was finding an effective way to co-monitor student progress throughout entire projects.

Three years ago, Horizon's visionary new principal Dr. Tabby Rabenberg invited the instructional leadership team to attend Colorado's Innovation Summit. This was a transformational experience for me. I returned to Horizon determined to transform our beautiful but oh-so-traditional school library into a 21st-century student-centered "Discovery Den." (We are the Horizon Huskies, after all!) My first step was to rewrite our Horizon Library mission and vision statements to encapsulate North Dakota Library and Technology Content Standards (available at [www.nd.gov/dpi/uploads/87/lib\\_tech.pdf](http://www.nd.gov/dpi/uploads/87/lib_tech.pdf)), AASL Standards,

PBL competencies, and the 4Cs +1 (Content):

Horizon's Discovery Den empowers students to be enthusiastic readers, fearless innovators, critical thinkers, skillful researchers, and responsible users of information. Just as the role of teachers has evolved from "sage on the stage" to facilitator, guide, activator, and catalyst, the Discovery Den is an extension of the classrooms, with inviting and innovative spaces and tools to personalize learning. When Horizon students are provided with differentiated opportunities to think critically, collaborate, create, and communicate, they are empowered to "own" their education!

After enthusiastically sharing my vision with literally everyone who crossed my path, coworkers and I created inviting and innovative spaces or, as we call them, "PAWS" (Positive Attitudes Will Succeed) and tools to personalize learning on a tight budget that required outside-the-box thinking. The custodians, technology "gurus," and my library team built:

- a Literacy PAW for literacy collaboration,
- a Reader PAW for ZONE Reading (independent voluntary reading) and Literature Circles,
- two Digital PAWs (with big-screen TVs hooked up to Chromebooks) for small-group projects like video editing,
- a Studio PAW for audio and video production,
- a Present PAW for presenting and practicing presentations,
- a Maker PAW for hands-on projects, and

- a brand-new STEAM PAW! The Science Technology Engineering Arts Math PAW, which is adjacent to the Discovery Den, was the brainchild of our principal, Dr. Tabby Rabenberg. Keeping our student-centered approach in mind, I asked my LEGO/makerspaces advisors to be the project managers. They rose to the occasion by teaching themselves how to use Google SketchUp to design the space. They also did their research and created a "Wish List" of furniture and supplies. We spent our summer vacation transforming the old orchestra room into an amazing new innovative space that is big enough for entire classes to use. It has a LEGO wall, chalkboard wall, whiteboard tables and board, a project bulletin board, an ActivBoard, workbenches on wheels, and tons of crafts and supplies. During library orientation, a group of students suggested creating a "Husky Service" center where students could bring in electronics to take apart and try to fix them (if broken).

Students can now go to the Horizon Discovery Den website <[www.bismarckschools.org/domain/510](http://www.bismarckschools.org/domain/510)> and click the "Reserve a PAW" link, determine what they need and when they need it, and then sign up for a PAW if it is available, thus empowering them to discover their "PAWSibilities"! Students (and you) can follow us on Twitter @HMSDiscoveryDen.

Bismarck schools' focus is on promoting students' development of "success skills" through authentic PBL experiences. My eureka moment came as I was walking over Memorial Bridge this past summer listening to Ted Dintersmith's *What Schools Could Be* on audiobook. Ted insightfully points out that it "take[s] a village" to design and implement innovative PBL activities (Dintersmith 2018).

He praised Bismarck, North Dakota, for receiving the first-ever PBL District Champion Award from the Buck Institute for Education. He has told school districts in New York, Boston, and Palo Alto, California, "Bismarck could blow you away."

To become true instructional partners, our school librarians need to assess our collaborative impact on student learning and strengthen our instructional practices accordingly. As a member of Horizon's Frontline Innovation Award Winner Vision 2030 team and other PBL projects—such as the powerful nanotechnology project that coteacher and collaborator Jenni Kramer describes in detail below—I am involved in the entire learning process as a true instructional partner. As Horizon students discover their individual talents and passions in a safe, supportive environment designed around the Elements of Learner Agency in Stage Three PLE [Personalized Learning Environment]: voice, choice, engagement, motivation, ownership, purpose, and self-efficacy (Bray and McClaskey 2016), I can model, teach, and guide students to "monitor their progress and reflect on their learning during the entire learning process" (Bray and McClaskey 2017, 132). As a result, students intensify their understanding about a topic, strengthen their own learning, and identify areas in which they need to develop further (Bray and McClaskey 2017). In other words, they are owning their education! I believe that the key to assessing and analyzing student learning outcomes throughout an entire project is for me to become a full-fledged member of each PBL team!

### **A Horizon Classroom Teacher's Perspective: Jenni Kramer**

Collaboration between a school librarian and classroom teacher has changed significantly over the years. What once began as, "Can you find

these books for me?” evolved into, “I have this idea. What can we do to explore—and possibly—explode it?” Sometimes during a teacher’s career, finding that special school librarian who is willing to work with teachers and go above and beyond learning in the classroom can be a challenge. Fortunately, I have been blessed with two such colleagues.

A dear friend Jan Schmidt and I worked together in an elementary school setting for twelve years and co-created many opportunities for students to grow and learn in meaningful ways. We both loved trying new things and exploring learning opportunities with our students not only in the school library, but beyond the school walls as well. She helped me catch the bug for using the school library not only for book checkout, but as a space to challenge *how* we learn and *what* we could use to engage in that learning process. Jan sparked that flame for me.

When I moved to a middle school I discovered that my new librarian, Kat, was as excited as I was to work together on projects and learn with our students. Our efforts to collaborate produced many projects, and the school library space became an extension of my classroom. At Horizon, we start each year by involving all sixth-grade students in a tour of the school library and a review of procedures, areas for students to use, and the technology available to them. We continue learning about the space by looking at how to reserve books, research databases, order materials, use the green screen, the collaboration areas, and other PAWS. Once the students have a working understanding of the space, we are ready to explore our chosen topics for our assignments, Genius Hour (a chunk of time in which students can explore answers to their own questions unrelated to curriculum), and PBL activities.

Most of our big writing projects for the school year center around PBL opportunities. Our core content-area teaching team (Team Inspire) chooses a theme or topic, usually from a science or social studies perspective, and develops an interdisciplinary learning experience for the students. Within that experience, students are given voice and choice in their research or problem-solving activities. Once the layout of the PBL is established, I look to the school librarian to enrich student learning. Since our English language arts and school librarian standards blend effortlessly, it is almost a seamless process to join forces in these projects. We see similar or overlapping standards that make our collaboration that much stronger.

#### *A Sample Collaborative PBL Project*

My (Jenni’s) teaching team, Team Inspire, created a learning opportunity called NANO PBL. We started with a whole concept-driving question to begin our learning: “How is nano science or technology changing our world?” We created a flow chart of core subject learning opportunities from every team teacher—opportunities that aligned with our standards and PBL topic. We then created a student version of a product work plan with S.M.A.R.T. goals: goals that are specific, measurable, assignable, relevant, and time-related (Doran 1981). We also included rubrics for the 4Cs and content-area objectives. As the English teacher on the team, my goal was to teach the research, informative writing, and presentation standards throughout the PBL process. To do this, I brought this PBL idea to our school librarian Kat, and we collaborated by aligning our standards within this work. At that point we found the “Levels of Library Services and Instructional Partnerships” rubric to be extremely helpful in our planning process.

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Figure 2. Students posting their driving questions based on categories as an aid to achieving focus for their research.



Once we taught the students the skills necessary to begin their research, students formed collaboration groups based on common ideas. These collaboration groups began by writing their “need to know” list of questions, a strategy for engaging students in inquiry. We then worked with each collaboration group to create a new driving question to guide their research (see figure 2). Students posted their driving questions based on categories, and we displayed these questions for all to view. We found that writing these driving questions helped students focus their research into a more manageable piece of learning. Achieving this focus was not only a benefit to the learners, but also to Kat and me when guiding students as they accessed, assessed, and managed resources.

Throughout the PBL process, the Discovery Den was a hub of learning as students used the space for research. However, they also recorded videos in the Studio PAW, collaborated on ideas in the Digital PAW, or rehearsed presentations in the Present PAW. In addition, Kat was able to view student learning in progress by visiting our classrooms during flex day activities. (Flex day is a time when students work with their collaborative groups on projects.) Because the team felt our school librarian was a valuable learning and teaching partner, Kat was able to co-monitor the entire learning process. Students began to see their school librarian as another *teacher* (as well as the school librarian) helping guide students through their learning. And from a classroom teacher’s standpoint, having another

educator in the room was a gift! Collaborating with the school librarian allowed us to team up and help all students within the walls of the Discovery Den and classrooms, and continue to teach learners how to use resources beyond the walls of the school library and of the school as well.

Many school librarians enthusiastically want to collaborate with classroom teachers. Their position in the school is a powerful one; knowledge oozes from their fingertips. What you think may be a great learning idea for kids could *explode* into a fantastic learning opportunity for all if you collaborate with your school librarian. Innovative learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom, and our school librarians are instructional partners who will challenge our teaching skills and enhance learning for students—and us! All you have to do is ask! For educators at Horizon, use of the “Levels of Library Services and Instructional Partnerships” rubric in figure 1 better-defined our expectations for students and for instruction, and helped launch us into a continuous improvement model through which we are reflective on our own practices.



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of teaching/library experience and a Master’s degree in Library Science from Saint Cloud State University.



**Jenni Kramer** has been teaching for twenty-one years in grades five through eight. She is currently teaching sixth-grade English at Horizon Middle School in Bismarck, North Dakota, and holds a Master’s degree in Education from the University of North Dakota.



**Misti Werle** is the library coordinator for Bismarck Public Schools. She has been in education for sixteen

years and holds a Master’s degree in Library Science from Florida State University. She is a member of AASL.

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