

Small Interactions Can Nurture Impactful Collaborations



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What do the following have in common: a smile, an invite to join a professional development session, a note in a mailbox, small talk in the teacher's lounge? The answer: They are all ways, individually or collectively, you can build authentic collaborative partnerships in your school building. A combination of these activities is what started a professional dialogue between high school math teacher Sarah Zehnder and me, a high school librarian. Fast-forward eight years, and now we have planned and collaborated on about ten projects each school year. This approach to teaching and supporting learners led, in part, to our being named the recipients of the 2021 AASL Collaborative School Library Award!

The most comprehensive collaboration Sarah Zehnder and I implement each year tasks her Advanced Geometry students to research, plan, and design a renovation project for the school library. It is a semester-long project that can be completed individually or in pairs. The goal is for students to analyze the needs of the current school library, identify ways to improve its space and services for the twenty-first century, design a realistic renovation plan, create a scaled drawing of the renovation, and pitch their project to an

audience of their peers, teachers, librarians, administrators, and district personnel. This project is an authentic assignment as Henry Clay High School plans to incorporate many of the students' ideas into the upcoming school library renovation currently included in our district's facilities improvement plan. While Sarah and I have incorporated this project into geometry classes over the past eight years, each year it looks a little different as we modify assignments and experiences to make the project stronger. Indeed, this year a second geometry teacher, Michelle Samet, has joined our collaboration and is having her students take part too.

Our Process

The Library Renovation Project is a joint collaboration from beginning to end. As a school librarian, I sit at the table with these teachers in late December as we review our reflections from the last implementation, revamp individual lessons, set due dates, clarify who is responsible for which pieces of the project, and give input about expectations for students and grades. While the classroom teachers serve as the discipline experts for all things mathematics-related, the rest of the activities are a joint effort to design learning experiences to scaffold the

students' learning to best facilitate the inquiry process.

As the school librarian, I am the one designing the learning activities within the library and reaching out to other experts in our district as needed. For example, this year we decided to replace our usual Hour of Code activities in early January with an exploration of a 3D software application that students could potentially use later in the semester to design a scaled drawing of their project. In deciding between a couple different programs, I reached out to a district digital learning coach to brainstorm which might be the best fit for our activity. Once we narrowed it down to a couple of options, we looped in Sarah to explore the pros and cons of each and collectively opted to use a program called SketchUp.

Next, I found a tutorial to teach the basics of the program and set up an assignment within the learning management system for Sarah's students to complete. On the day of the lesson, students met in the library, and Sarah and I both explained why we were in the school library, the objectives and specific outcomes for the day, and worked with students to complete the activity (see figure 1). Introduction of a design software package has been a great addition to



Figure 1. Learner working with SketchUp application.



Figure 2. One of my slides linked to renovation resources.

the project and is definitely already on our reflection list to keep as an activity in the future.

To stimulate the students' curiosity about the library renovation, this year I designed a Kahoot! game that students will play to learn about how and when the library is used throughout the year. Previously, I had designed a survey for students asking them their perception of how many people use the library, ways they think the space is used, the number of items housed physically in the space, and more. The modification to move from an individual static assignment to a more interactive one proved effective because the presentation of the library's data became engaging and personalized.

After completing the Kahoot! game and learning about how and when the library is used, students completed a bingo game in small groups. For this activity, together Sarah and I designed a bingo board with activities for students to complete in the library. While many of the activities can be done, achieving a completed bingo row isn't possible. Our current 5,000-square-foot space simply isn't

designed for the changing needs of our learners. The activity is designed to show students that, while lots of things can be done in our current space, the renovation and addition of an additional 5,000 square feet is an opportunity to better equip the space to be more flexible, more suited to collaboration, and more inviting overall.

To facilitate students' exploration of resources for the Renovation Project, I designed interactive Google Slides that students can click on to view a variety of floor plans, technology options, furniture, and other elements of the renovation. (See example in figure 2.) This resource has allowed students to have access to the materials both at home and at school.

As students progress through the project, we involve community members to provide additional perspective. For example, students toured the Jessamine County Public Library, a building that was renovated in 2016. Employees discussed with students how the facility changed with the additional square footage to better meet the

needs of their patrons and shared specific ideas on what they wish they had done differently. Next, students visited the William T. Young Library on the Lexington campus of the University of Kentucky. There students not only paid attention to the architecture and layout of the building, they also got a sense of how an academic library caters to the needs of patrons. During both of these experiences, students were expected to take pictures and notes on accessibility, flow/layout of the various spaces, available technology, and types of assistance and services provided by the libraries, and then determine which elements should be included in the future Henry Clay High School Library renovation. Learners were also expected to articulate the reasons behind their proposed changes.

For each step of the inquiry process, the classroom teachers and I work together but have delineated tasks to complete. For the field trip to other libraries, Sarah completes the paperwork for the district and obtains approval; both classroom teachers collect the money from

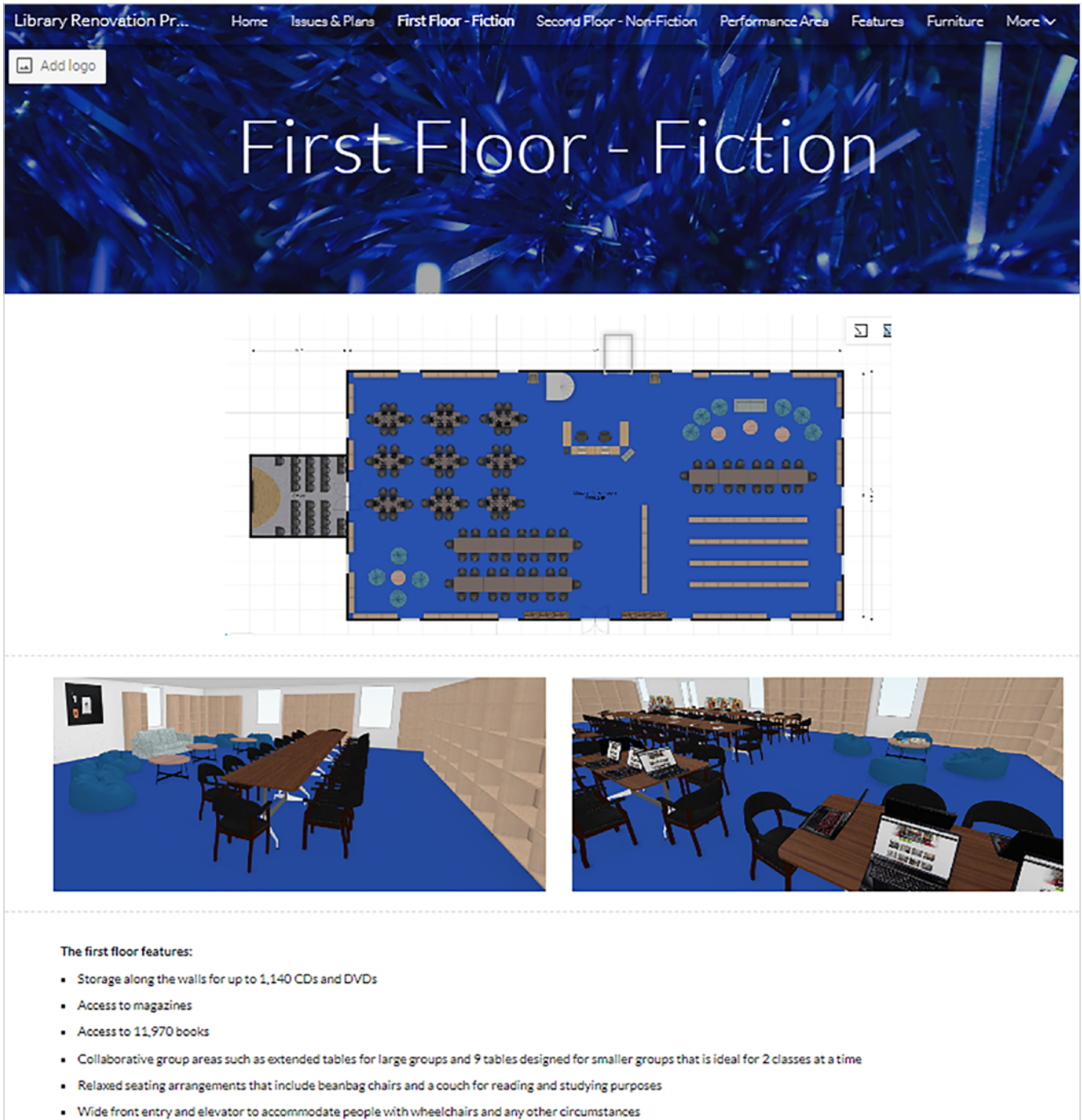


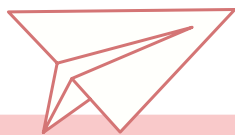
Figure 3. Example of webpage from student's final project.

students and turn it in to the bookkeeper, while I coordinate logistics with the libraries we plan to visit. On the day of the field trip, all three of us supervise students on separate buses, work with the

drivers to ensure we get where we are going, and interact with students throughout the day.

Students have complete flexibility and autonomy in designing their final

product. Students can create websites (see figure 3), Minecraft simulations, scaled models, Google Slide presentations, or a product in any other format they choose. Using the Guided Inquiry Design framework



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described by Leslie Maniotes and others (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari 2012), as learners work their way through the project they complete a needs assessment, research technology and current trends of libraries, embed the geometry skills they've learned throughout the year, and apply Common Core mathematical practices to make a realistic renovation proposal.

Once our school library has undergone its renovation, I fully expect Sarah and I will pick a new emphasis for this project. The meshing of mathematical concepts and real-life problem-solving is a great way to show students authentic implications of their learning.

Collaboration Is Key

What made this project—and others—work so well was the collaboration. It's when we as teachers and librarians work alongside each other and bring our diverse skill sets together that we make learning engaging, authentic, and comprehensive. For more information on our collaborative projects, access the slide deck for our

2019 AASL National Conference concurrent session “Engaged²: Ongoing Math and Library Collaboration at the Secondary Level.” The link to our presentation is <<http://bit.ly/aaslmath>>.

Partnerships like the one Sarah and I share can be cultivated in your building, too. It takes time, opportunity, and shared experiences. It doesn't happen instantaneously. Give yourself and the other educators in your building time to warm up to your ideas and support. I've been a librarian in my building for seventeen years now, and there are still teachers who opt not to collaborate. That's okay. Plant the seeds with anyone and everyone in your building, nurture your professional relationships over time in a variety of ways, and watch what develops in your learning community.

So where should you start? First recognize there's no single way to initiate collaboration. It can be done in a number of ways!

Pitch an activity or idea to a classroom teacher. Inspiration for collaborative ideas can come from anywhere: Twitter, conferences,

reading blogs or professional journals, even commercials or those “ah-ha!” moments while running errands. Don't feel like every activity or idea has to be fleshed out before you share it. That's the beauty of collaboration!

Co-plan a unit with a classroom teacher. Librarians are a great resource for all teachers in every discipline. Curating a variety of potential resources, recommending apps, sites, or other technology to enhance student engagement and learning, identifying subject-area experts outside of the school, coordinating cross-discipline research, and helping draft rubrics are some of the ways that school librarians can foster collaboration in the planning process and provide support.

Design instructional activities to scaffold a project and then offer to teach or co-teach. Whether it's teaching a single portion of a class or facilitating the learning for multiple days, stepping up to lead or co-lead in a classroom (or library) establishes that you are a teacher. Sometimes a lesson taught in a new space (the

library as opposed to the classroom) can energize a class or project. Your helping to craft instructional activities can help a classroom teacher see their content or lesson through another perspective as well as take something off their plate—a blessing most teachers will appreciate.

Chaperone field trips. While this doesn't rank anywhere near my top 100 things to do, colleagues find it a blessing to have another educator on the trip. These shared experiences often strengthen our professional relationship and often lead to conversations that ultimately give me ideas on how to work alongside the classroom teacher in the future. Field trips are also opportunities to get to know the students better. This is especially helpful in a high school situation where I don't have consistent and routine interaction with all the students.

Attend or facilitate professional development focused on collaboration. A district-led book study for school librarians using the book *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School* by Carol C. Kuhlthau, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari prompted me to be more intentional about collaboration in my school. The book provided research-

based methodologies and practical guidance for implementation of the inquiry process in classrooms using a whole-team approach, regardless of discipline or area of study. From there, I led professional development on Guided Inquiry Design in my building and structured the PD to be informative and practical. Attending or facilitating the professional development for teachers in your building allows time for you to brainstorm and work alongside teachers to authentically involve you in their planning and learning processes. They better understand how you can support them and that you are interested in being included in any lesson, project, or whole unit they'll allow.

Moving Forward

Collaboration isn't always easy. Not every teacher will respond to the professional development invitation you extend or allow you to co-teach in their classroom. However, continually sharing ways you can support your colleagues conveys both your willingness to help and eagerness to partner with them. No matter how small or great the collaboration, school librarians are powerful resources to help create authentic and engaging learning experiences for all students.



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Kentucky. A member of AASL, she served on the Association's School Library Event Promotion Committee 2020–2022. She received the 2022 Carol J. Parris Mentoring Award from the Kentucky Library Association, and served as 2017–2018 president of the Kentucky Association of School Librarians. She and math teacher Sarah Zehnder received the 2021 AASL Collaborative School Library Award.

Works Cited:

Kuhlthau, Carol Collier, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari. 2012. *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

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