



Introduction

The Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Coweta Class of 2019, a group of 30 interdisciplinary professionals from various corners of the county, recently took on a developmental project to benefit students at Ruth Hill Elementary. The project, Developing, Enhancing and Documenting the Launch Pad Library, was designed to provide enrichment opportunities within the current learning environment at this local elementary school.

The 2019 class felt this project would be a great initiative to give back to the local community in a way would enhance the learning of our next generation. The Library Specialist at Ruth Hill Elementary, Anne Graner, shared with Leadership Coweta's 2019 class her vision via a video created with the aid of Ruth Hill's students. Following this video, the 2019 Leadership Coweta Class knew this project was a task they wanted to complete for the betterment of local students. Additionally, members of the Leadership Coweta group knew this type of project would help exemplify true leadership by leading our next generation to greater heights.

Here in the "blueprint" overview, you will learn the intricacies of Launch Pad Library by highlighting how it got started, how it will be sustained, but most importantly how it will enhance each student's learning experience for years to come.

History of the Launch Pad Library

The Launch Pad Library (LPL), from inception to now, has only a short history at Ruth Hill Elementary and it's establishment needs to be explained in a document such as this so that other educators and media specialists at other schools can understand the reasoning behind the change and the early success that this effort has had. It is our hope that this document can be a catalyst for future growth at more schools in our area and abroad.



Our Interview with Anne Graner, Ruth Hill Elementary School's Library Media Specialist:

Share with us how your career has led you to this point:

Throughout my multiple careers, I've sought to empower others and to encourage creativity and outreach. I've been a school library media specialist for eight years at both the elementary and high school levels. When I was the library media specialist at Carrollton High School, our library was named the GA DOE Exemplary Library Media Program of the Year for high schools in 2012. In 2017, I was a finalist for Coweta County Schools Teacher of the Year.

Before becoming a library media specialist, I was an elementary classroom teacher for ten years and also enjoyed careers as a documentary filmmaker, yoga dance instructor, expressive arts teacher, and workshop facilitator.

Share with us a bit about what makes Ruth Hill Elementary the perfect school for this type of project:

First off, the library was very traditional and it was not set-up in a way that met the needs of our students. There was an old card catalog and a large circulation desk that was used to block off an area that students could not go. The books were arranged by the Dewey Decimal System. (More on this below)

Second, Ruth Hill Elementary has around 410 students. 85% of these students are considered economically disadvantaged. The diverse student body consists of 47% Black, 35% White, 14% Hispanic and 4% Multiracial. With the addition of the Media Center as a Specials class we needed to do a better job of engaging with the students during those times of the week when they were there for class.

At what point did you feel there was a need for re-inventing your school's library?

The re-inventing process started from closely observing students- what needs and desires they expressed, what was missing from their classroom experiences- and from an inner urge to transform a traditional library into an active learning space focused on exploration and discovery.

When I was a classroom teacher, I wished the school library could be a more dynamic place for students to learn, not just a place to check out books. I was also frustrated at



how certain books, such as biographies were organized. I wished they could be organized by topic, not by person's last name. As a high school library media specialist, I paid attention to what the students were asking for, such as biographies on athletes, and immediately began re-arranging books to serve their needs. This turned into a genrefication project of the whole library, where books were grouped by genre and topic.

At Ruth Hill, I wanted to go beyond this and create a space where anyone walking through would see students engaged in meaningful projects, where the space itself supported learning concepts, and where clusters of books, such as sports fiction and sports non-fiction were in the same area. I also envisioned having active, hands-on activities in each cluster along with other books and resources connected to an overall theme of the cluster, such as yoga mats, weights, and a brain model in the 'Stay Fit & Healthy' area.

Where was the name "Launch Pad Library" derived from?

There's a group of Ruth Hill teachers, the Library Think Tank, who meet periodically to re-imagine what we can do with our library. At one meeting, we were discussing naming the space to distinguish it from a regular school library and wanted the name to reflect our vision of the space. I mentioned that we would use the space to launch our students, and one of our 4th grade teachers, Molly Breyne, immediately said, "The Launch Pad!" We all thought this was great and added on "Library" because literacy and reading is foundational to all we do. What we had been previously referring to as learning clusters now became learning portals to connect to the Launch Pad name.

What year did you start up the Launch Pad?

The school year 2018 to 2019 was the first year of the newly arranged space with its six learning portals, hands-on activities and community partners for each portal. Prior to that, some of the space was transformed. During my first year at Ruth Hill, 2016 - 2017, we turned my office into a Recording Studio and a storage room into a Green Screen Studio. We also organized the fiction collection into genres that year. During 2017-2018, we began the visioning of the six learning areas, formed the Think Tank, and got input from other library media specialists and local educators about this nontraditional arrangement of books and connected activities.



What were your biggest obstacles?

In setting up the Launch Pad Library the biggest obstacle was the physical moving, rearranging, and grouping of the book collection and the shelving into the six learning portals. We took several weeks in the summer to do this.

One of our current biggest obstacles is managing time during Library Specials to train students on our different pieces of equipment (recording, filming, sewing, 3-D printing) so they can be successful in creating their projects. Since I don't have an assistant, I am trying to develop a system of training student leaders to help with the management.

The other current biggest obstacle is having the funding we desire for moveable bookcases, book collection development, and engaging visual aspects.

What are a few of the biggest successes you have seen?

The biggest success we've seen is with the students. They are excited to be in the Launch Pad Library and for the most part, are creating projects they are meaningful to them and others. Our book circulation statistics have increased significantly. Also, we've had success with community partnerships as evidenced by donations of money, supplies, and hands-on activities. We've received a lot of encouragement from community members after seeing the students in action during Open Houses.

Why did you pick the portals that you selected?

In jotting down the fiction genres and the non-fiction topics found in our book collection and considering ways to group them into common themed areas, there emerged overall themes. This categorization (more on this below) was reworked several times until everything seemed to fit. We wanted the names of the portals to begin with action verbs and to be phrases for life-long learning and living. We chose: Learn From the Past, Stay Fit & Healthy, Investigate Nature, Express Yourself, Discover a Solution, and Travel the World & Beyond. We had students evaluate the portal names, and they provided positive feedback.



What is your vision for future Launch Pad growth?

Regarding the physical space, currently we have temporary book racks, shelf signage and decorative elements designating each portal. Our vision is to make the space more visually engaging and enticing to the students so that when they enter, they say, "Wow!" We also want to have an outdoor connection to each of our six learning portals, such as an herb garden for Investigate Nature and a fitness path for Stay Fit & Healthy.

Regarding programming and teaching, we want to host more events connected to the curriculum and student interest, such as Poetry Cafes in our Express Yourself portal. We want the teachers to use the space more and to collaborate more when I'm not teaching Specials. Regarding our book collection, we continue to update our books to create a dynamic book collection that students will love and that would entice those students who say they aren't readers. Regarding volunteers and community partners, we want to find people who can consistently help during our Specials classes and who will also mentor students who are creating unique projects. We would like for our students to earn designations for each learning portals, similar to Boy Scout badges, and need help with creating this system.

Who have been the most prominent people in seeing your vision and helping you get the library to where it is today?

I first presented this idea to my Principal, Dr. Aaron Corley, who thought it was a great idea and has supported us each step of the way. After his approval, I met with Dr. Karen Baker, our school system's Curriculum Director, who provided great feedback and encouragement. Our Assistant Principal at that time, Cheryl McChargue, believed in the vision and connected me an out-of-state fabulous library media specialist, Nikki Robertson. Through Skype discussions, Nikki brainstormed with me how to improve my original idea, such as including more STEM activities in each portal.

Then I was ready to form the Library Think Tank, that included a teacher from each grade level and other personnel who were interested I and also began seeking input from our students. Along with this, I asked Mark Whitlock, CEO of Central Educational Center (a publicly funded charter college and career academy) for his advice and suggestions about bringing something totally new into reality. Based on his experience of doing this with CEC, he suggested I meet with him and several key people: Amanda Fields, Coweta Development Authority; Cynthia Bennett, Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce, and Schwanda Jackson, Coweta County School's Director of Instruction.



After meeting with this group, we all decided that they would be our Advisory Team. They have been instrumental in our growth and development.

What is your schedule and when do you see students and/or classes?

The library is part of the Specials schedule on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so I see K-5th grade classes all day on both of those days. On Fridays, 2nd - 5th grade classes come in for book check-out. 1st grade book check-out is on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Pre-K comes in for story time on a scheduled basis. We also have the Burwell Alternative School students check out books two times a month on Mondays.

Mission, Core Values, Objectives

Mission: Empowering students to embrace their full potential

Core Values: (the 'CORE + CP' Launch Pad foundation):

- Collaboration
- Observation
- Resiliency
- Empathy
- + Creativity
- + Professionalism

Objectives:

Launch Pad Library exists to create an engaging learning space where students explore, discover their interests, understand others, and create projects that impact others.

Launch Pad Library exists to collaborate with partnerships locally and globally on creative and meaningful projects for students.

Launch Pad Library exists to expose students to opportunities and experiences that expand their worldview.

Launch Pad Library exists to surround students with quality resources to increase literacy and learning engagement.

Launch Pad Library exists to teach employability and soft skills to increase confidence, communication skills, and problem solving.



Learning Portals

The Launch Pad Library currently consists of 6 learning portals. Learning portals are the backbone of the Launch Pad library because of the connection between the book collection and the hands-on activities that occur in each portal. The portals were determined based on the existing book collection in the media center.

To begin, all of the fiction genres and nonfiction subjects were listed. Next, groups were formed based on common themes. Some groupings were obvious, such as grouping all of the nature books together. Other titles were not as obvious to place but were placed where they made the most sense. *More details about the genrefication of the library can be found in the section below.*

The next step was to brainstorm titles for the group “clusters.” All clusters at the Launch Pad Library begin with an action verb, as mentioned above. Once the name "Launch Pad Library" was established, the clusters became known as Learning Portals and were named as listed below.

- Learn From the Past
- Stay Fit & Healthy
- Investigate Nature
- Express Yourself
- Discover a Solution
- Travel the World & Beyond

The next step was to create activities for each portal. The Library Media Specialist or the Portal Experience Partner (PEP) determines the teaching activities for each portal.

Portal Experience Partners are members of the community that choose to sponsor a Learning Portal. More details on partners can be found in the "Community Partnership" section below.



Examples of Learning Portal activities:

Learn From the Past (PEP: Newnan Coweta Historical Society)

Historical Clothing

PEP loaned a bin of clothes from the past that the kids can use for dress up.

Military battles

PEP created a display in the Launch Pad Library for students to learn about WWII

Soldiers, tanks, etc. – Students use the military items and books to recreate battles or to create their own battles.

Stay Fit & Healthy (PEP: Summit Family YMCA)

Yoga mat and poster with poses

PEP brought in yoga posters, mat, and workout posters.

Students try out the poses and workout activities to create their own fitness routine.

Code & Go Robot Mouse

Create a fitness path or football game with the cheese – students code the robot mouse with a set of directions so the mouse knows which direction to go. Students can even set up challenges for each other.

**Purchased with library media funds*

Investigate Nature (PEP: Coweta UGA Extension Office)

Butterfly learning station and art activity

PEP created an art activity showing the life cycle of a butterfly.

This learning station will also include a caterpillar for the students to watch transform into a butterfly soon!

Flipgrid video station for creating animal videos

Students use the online Flipgrid subscription website

(www.flipgrid.com) to create videos focusing on animals.

Students use the books within the portal as well as stuffed/plastic animals for demonstrations in their videos.

**Flipgrid is free for educators*



Express Yourself (PEP: Nixon Centre for Performing and Visual Arts)

Recording Studio

Students use the equipment to create podcasts, music, audio recordings, and interviews

**Created from donated funds*

Green Screen Studio

Students create newscasts and videos. Dress up clothes and props are available for students to use in their creations

Two connected monitors are used for scrolling dialogue

**Green screen and spotlights paid for by CCSS*

**Media Center funds used to purchase iPad and Do Ink green screen app*

Discover a Solution (PEP: West Georgia Technical College, Newnan Campus)

3-D Printer

The students use the printer to create individual items.

Once the students have mastered the skills we hope that we will be able to sell the items created.

**The school owned a 3-D printer that just needed a little work to get it going. There is also a 3-D printer on loan from the school system in the Media Center.*

Sewing Machine

We have two machines in the Launch Pad Library. Students are first taught to sew seams, then to make small pillows.

Then, they are allowed to make other items.

The Launch Pad Library received a grant that allows the students the materials to make weighted lap pads for Autism students at the school

**One machine was donated by the family member of a student and the other by a member of the community*



Travel the World & Beyond (PEP: Uniglobe Travel Partners)

Cars and Roadway

Students create imaginary trips. The trips can be local, across the country, or even to outer space!

**The cardboard rolls that are used are recycled laminating rolls*

Map Puzzle

Students have the opportunity to learn more about their country and the world around them

**Puzzle, travel books and brochures, and atlas provided by PEP.*

Additional Learning Portal activities can be introduced outside of the Media Center. For example, Leadership Coweta sponsored the creation on an herb garden that will connect to the Investigate Nature portal. It will allow students to grow plants and herbs, create a product following a business plan, market the product based on a marketing plan, and create revenue. The revenue can be donated to charities or used to add additional items to the Launch Pad Library.

Genrefication of the Library

As mentioned above, the Launch Pad Library was all set in motion because of a passion to help students better understand the library so that students would be able to engage with more books of their particular interests. This was a stark departure from both the history of the Ruth Hill Elementary School Library as well as the majority of school libraries regionally. But for the students at Ruth Hill, something had to change. So, the transformation of the library began.

Purpose: To create a cataloging system which will enable students to locate books of interest in a more efficient and effective way.

Set-Up: Both fiction and non-fiction books of like content are now grouped in one of 6 Learning Portals (see Portal section above). Each section is labeled on the bookshelf with the name of the category and each Learning Portal has a specific color label for the spine of each book. The library set-up took approximately 2 weeks.



Challenges: Separating picture books into categories were a challenge because they could be grouped under more than one Learning Portal. Moving the bookcases was difficult as well because the proper tools were not available.

Results: Book checkout has doubled since last year. Students are much more independent in selecting books. Students are taking an interest in other books within the same portal.

Additional Resources Needed: Be sure to establish a “Think Tank” consisting of 1 teacher from each grade level, a couple of students from each grade level, and a group of parents who are willing to be active. Having a “Think Tank” is critical to the success of the project. Not only is help needed sorting the books, but you will also need help with the creative process as well as getting feedback from both students and teachers of what is working and what is not working. (More detail on Think Tank partners can be found below).

Community Partnerships

A robust set of partnerships has been integral to the success of the Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library. Below is a description of the types of internal and external stakeholders that would be valuable to engage when beginning the journey of bringing a Launch Pad Library to your school. Also included is a list of the current partners working with Ruth Hill.

Internal Stakeholders

Within the school system itself, the school administration and the teachers are the most important groups of stakeholders. Administrative support is a vital first step in a change of approach from a more traditional model to an innovative one. The administration is also necessary for initial funding and guidance on how to proceed with implementing changes.

Teachers are critical stakeholders who need to feel a sense of ownership of the library and buy into the innovative organizational model. Teacher input is important for organizing the book collection and helping to set up the layout for the space. To ensure adequate and continued teacher input, the Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library established the Think Tank, a steering committee comprised of one teacher from every grade level plus a few additional interested teachers. The Think Tank meets every couple of months and



provides input and feedback on all aspects of the project, from establishing mission/vision to design and layout of the space to curriculum and educational design.

The next important group of stakeholders is the students themselves. As the users of the library, their experience and input are vital to determining whether or not the endeavor is a success. Ongoing student feedback is useful for making adjustments to layout and program implementation to ensure that the library continues to provide an engaging and meaningful experience for students.

External Stakeholders

Having community and business leaders involved allows the library to broaden its focus and provide critical external validation for the Launch Pad concept. Engaged community leaders also provide a valuable source of learning experiences for students. The two primary external stakeholders for the Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library consist of the Advisory Team and the Portal Experience Partners.

The Advisory Team serves as an informal external board for feedback and input in much the same way as the Think Tank offers for internal stakeholders. The team meets a few times a year and offer suggestions and connections to possible community partners. A strong Advisory Team of community influencers can serve as a library's strongest advocate in the community. For the Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library, the Advisory Team consists of the following community members:

- Mark Whitlock, CEO, Central Educational Center
- Amanda Fields, Director of Existing Industries and Workforce Development, Coweta County Development Authority
- Cynthia Bennett, Vice President, Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce
- Schwanda Jackson, Director of Instructional Services, Coweta County Schools

One of the more effective ways to share the vision and concept of the library is with an Open House, where leveraging the connections of the Advisory Team can help to bring in the right local community and business leaders to experience the library firsthand.

The Portal Experience Partners (PEP) are organizations within the community who lend their expertise within the subject of a portal to enrich the learning opportunities for students. Partners are recruited from the community in order to develop and implement hands-on learning activities for students. PEPs are asked to provide activities



periodically throughout the school year, usually every couple of months. Current PEPs for the Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library include the following:

- Learn from the Past: Newnan Coweta Historical Society
- Stay Fit & Healthy: Summit Family YMCA
- Investigate Nature: Coweta UGA Extension Office
- Express Yourself: Nixon Centre for Performing and Visual Arts
- Discover a Solution: West Georgia Technical College, Newnan Campus
- Travel the World & Beyond: Uniglobe Travel Partners

In addition to involving stakeholders in the activities of the library itself, corporate sponsorships are a good way to help solidify support within the community while also securing funds to bring the innovative vision alive. Sponsorship funds can be used to provide updated books and materials as well as to make improvements to the learning space, including portable furnishings and newer technology. Having a defined set of sponsor requests, both in terms of dollar amounts and specific needs to be supported tend to make it easier for a company to say “yes,” as they have a clearer understanding of how their contribution will support the effort. The Ruth Hill Launch Pad Library established sponsorship levels as follows:

SUPERSONIC Sponsorship- \$6,000: Sponsor a Learning Portal

Choose one of our six learning portals to cover the full expenses of that portal. The company's name will be prominently displayed in the portal and will be included in press releases and social media whenever activities or events connected to that portal are featured. Companies will cut the ribbon for the Blast-Off ribbon cutting ceremony for that portal.

STARBURST Sponsorship- \$5,000: Purchase one large piece of technology

The company's name will be prominently displayed with the technology and will be included in press releases and social media whenever activities or events connected to that technology are featured.

INTERSTELLAR Sponsorship- \$3,000: Sponsor 1/2 of a Learning Portal

The company's name will be displayed in the portal and will be included in media releases. Company will be featured in our Blast-Off ribbon cutting ceremony for that learning portal.

CELESTIAL Sponsorship- \$1,000: Sponsor the outdoor component of a Learning Portal



(Examples- Fitness station for Stay Fit & Healthy, greenhouse for Investigate Nature, Newnan history panels for Learn From the Past, mural for Express Yourself, rocket for Travel the World & Beyond, etc.) The company's name will be displayed on the outdoor component and will be included in media releases. Company will be a part of our Blast-Off ribbon cutting ceremony for that learning portal.

BOOSTER Sponsorship- \$500: Sponsor a fiction or non-fiction shelf of print resources

The company's name will be displayed near that shelf in the Launch Pad Library. Company will be a part of our Blast-Off ribbon cutting ceremony for that learning portal.

Why should I consider this?

If you are reading this it is highly likely that you desire to see more children grow in their love of literacy and you are trying to figure out how you can do something like this in your community. You may be asking, "Do you have any early results that I could take back to my team?"

We have two key indicators that the Launch Pad Library is beginning to work at Ruth Hill Elementary.

Indicator One:

Circulation of Books

Last year as of 5/3/18: 8,101 books were checked out at the Launch Pad Library

This year as of 5/3/19: 11,362 books were checked out at the Launch Pad Library

Indicator Two:

English Language Arts Performance on Milestones Test for 2019

- 3rd Grade- on grade level reading increased 13.18%
- 5th Grade- on grade level reading increased 15.58%

Students are more engaged and desiring to read and the numbers are starting to match what we see on a daily basis.

To learn more or to join the movement, check out LaunchPadLibrary.org for more details and to contact Anne Graner to set up a time to visit.