



Nomination for Premier's Award
for Innovation and Excellence in Education:

Learning Facilitators in Prairie Spirit School Division

*The Learning Facilitator: a reflective practitioner
and a collegial, collaborative colleague*

Goal of the program:

In Prairie Spirit, the focus is on learning for every member of our learning community, including all adults and all students. A core Prairie Spirit belief is that adult learning that is embedded in the classroom (with the teacher and their students) will provide the greatest support to strengthen classroom practices. This will, in turn, lead to significantly improved student learning.

The goal of the **Learning Facilitator** role is to improve and support adult learning at the classroom level to improve and support student learning in Prairie Spirit schools.

Prairie Spirit School Division

Prairie Spirit School Division is the learning-centered rural and urban school division surrounding the City of Saskatoon. Prairie Spirit covers a wide geographic area: north to Leask, south to Hanley, east to Colonsay and west to Perdue. The school division includes nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. Prairie Spirit includes towns, villages and the new cities of Warman and Martensville.

The Division's 11,000 students are served by a team of over 1,200 dedicated professionals and support staff. Led by our dedicated staff, our students are achieving at high levels and our graduation rates are among the highest in the province.

Board Chair:	Larry Pavloff
Director of Education:	John Kuzbik
Vision:	Learners for Life
Mission:	Learning without limits in a world of possibilities

Supporting teachers to support students:

Learning Facilitators in Prairie Spirit School Division

In Prairie Spirit, improving student learning is at the heart of everything we do. Our core belief is that supporting ongoing adult learning will positively impact student learning.

Teaching is one of the most complex, challenging and rewarding professions. According to feedback from both our classroom teachers and professional research, the most meaningful professional development for teachers is ongoing, school-based, supported by administration and includes observation of actual classroom methods, with an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and have conversations about research, planning lessons, and reflecting on what is working and what is not. There is greater efficacy when professional development is part of the actual work.

Over the past several years, Prairie Spirit supported adult learning for teachers by offering classroom-embedded professional development opportunities. This classroom-embedded professional development was offered to teachers throughout the Division and was very well received. Teachers had the chance to visit other classrooms, watch another teacher's practice and have professional discussions with colleagues. Although this form of adult learning was very effective, it didn't reach all Prairie Spirit teachers.

"...the greatest effects on student LEARNing occur when TEACHERs become LEARNers of their own TEACHing..."
- John Hattie

Because of the current professional research and our own experiences and successes with providing classroom-embedded teacher professional development, Prairie Spirit created the **Learning Facilitator** position in our schools in 2015/16.

The Learning Facilitator is a teacher who has a portion of their time allocated to supporting other teachers to try new approaches in the classroom, based on a learning philosophy of inquiry, engagement, student choice and side-by-side learning.

As teachers are supported in their professional growth, we anticipate improved student learning and more engaged learners.

Taking this approach for teacher professional development encourages teachers to explore appropriate instructional approaches together. It also provides an opportunity for teachers to open up their classrooms and practice, which decreases isolation. This fosters collaboration and trust among teachers and encourages reflection and analysis of teaching practices. Teacher practice and capacity is strengthened and developed as a result.

The role of the **Learning Facilitator** is:

- to work side by side with staff to develop a common understanding of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC)**
- to reflect with staff on their practices
- to provide feedback for the purpose of teacher reflection and growth

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As a school division, our most important responsibility is to collaboratively develop system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices that include inquiry, discovery, creativity, assessment for learning, relevancy, innovation, risk-taking and meaningful learning. In Prairie Spirit, these characteristics are embedded in the **My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC) document and in the elements of the workshop model.*

My Prairie Spirit Classroom is a guiding document for the Division that describes an optimum learning environment. MPSC describes how instructional design for engagement, rigor, relevance, relationship development, assessment for learning, and creativity may look in our classrooms. This document is included as part of this nomination package.

- to support teachers to identify and teach towards the big ideas
- to support teachers to gather and share evidence of student learning
- to model and/or co-teach in classrooms
- to build relationships
- To work alongside Principal and Vice-Principal to lead learning

Criteria for a Learning Facilitator:

Rigor

- I understand the philosophy of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom*.
- I attend and apply PD at the school level.
- I have knowledge and can apply specific strategies for learning improvement that promote risk-taking.
- I understand that change is a process.

Relevance

- I model and facilitate learning in a way that is personal and purposeful.
- I understand the school and community context.
- I understand how our school work aligns with the Division.

Relationships

- I work side-by-side teachers in classrooms.
- I build relationships.
- I create collaborative learning environments with administration, teachers and Division Office

Assessment:

- I support/coach teachers as they reflect on feedback/data.
- I understand and use assessment for learning strategies with students.
- I am a reflective practitioner.

Learning Facilitators have been strongly supported by the Division as the role has been introduced and developed. Learning Facilitators attended regular Division professional development throughout the 2015/16 school year and will continue to meet monthly throughout the 2016/17 school year.

The meetings include: deepening understanding of beliefs and how they connect to *My Prairie Spirit Classroom*, engaging in strategies, reviewing exemplars to build capacity, supporting coaching conversations with staff and networking with other Learning Facilitators. Learning Facilitators are provided with professional reading, Division support and release time to work with other teachers.

We are very excited about the potential of Learning Facilitators in our school division. We believe that high levels of adult learning, inspired by high expectations, collaboration and engagement, will positively impact our students.

Criteria for Premier's Award for Innovation and Excellence in Education

Evidence of direct Board influence and participation in the innovation

The philosophy behind the Learning Facilitator role in Prairie Spirit has grown from the Board of Education's strategic plan and beliefs about the desirable conditions to facilitate learning. In the Board's strategic plan, the focus is on "learning for life". This learning is not limited to students, but also includes all adults in the school division. As reflected in its budget plan, the Board is committed to supporting adult learning.

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education is extremely proud of the work and leadership of Learning Facilitators in our schools and classrooms.

Innovative nature of the program or project

In the past, the traditional teacher professional development model has included attendance at a conference or seminar outside of the classroom and the school.

For the past several years, Prairie Spirit has had a focus on providing classroom-embedded professional development for interested teachers. Creating and supporting the Learning Facilitator role took this philosophy further, providing the opportunity for *all* teachers in the Division to intentionally reflect on their practice in collaboration with their school colleagues.

Research has shown that teachers successfully implement new teaching strategies learned in a professional development workshop about 15% of the time; but if the professional development is instead coaching for specific classroom instruction, in the classroom, this number reaches 85%.

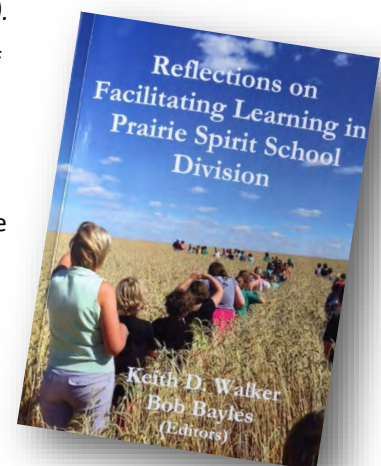
(Cornett & Knight, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Michelle Prytula, the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, has presented supporting research regarding learning facilitation for Prairie Spirit administrators. Her presentations have highlighted the innovative nature of Prairie Spirit's Learning Facilitator role. She referred to research by Eraut & Hirsh (2007) that found that learning occurs when professionals work alongside others, engaging in the processes of questioning, information gathering, observing and exchanging feedback.

Over the past year, Prairie Spirit has been asked to make presentations about the Learning Facilitator role at both provincial and national education meetings. Information about the Learning Facilitator role has also been shared with other Saskatchewan school divisions.

While other school divisions may have learning coaches, the Learning Facilitator role is unique in that the facilitator is in a "side by side" role with colleagues in our schools.

Prairie Spirit's administrators and Learning Facilitators spent a day together in January 2016 examining the Learning Facilitator model, specifically through developmental relationships (mentoring). Dr. Keith Walker and Bob Bayles, Prairie Spirit's Superintendent of Human Resources, led the workshop. The result of that day was a book entitled *Reflections on Facilitating Learning in Prairie Spirit School Division* (see graphic above). The book compiled the energy and focus of the workshop and is available on Amazon.



Sustainability of the innovation within the present system

The 2016/17 school year is the second year for the Learning Facilitator role. There has been significant positive feedback about the Learning Facilitator role and its effectiveness, from both administrators and teachers. This role will continue to grow, evolve and succeed as it is supported by the Board of Education, administration, school leadership and teachers.

Cost of the innovation related to benefits achieved

The Learning Facilitator role is considered part of each school's staffing. Each school has a designated Learning Facilitator, with their time allocated to the role based on the school enrolment and other factors.

John Hattie has conducted research on influences on student achievement. His research has determined that professional development has a significant impact (.62 effect size) when it:

- Includes observation of actual classroom methods
- Occurs over extended period of time
- Challenges prevailing discourse and conceptions about learning
- Provides opportunities to talk with other teachers
- Has support of in-school administrators

Because the Learning Facilitator model for professional development meets these criteria, we believe the Learning Facilitator role has a meaningful and compelling impact on student achievement. The benefits derived from the Learning Facilitator role support the associated costs of the innovation.

Client support for the innovation

Administrators and teachers have been asked to provide feedback about the Learning Facilitator role. This feedback reflects a strong support for the role of Learning Facilitator and support for the model of professional development at the school level.

Comments from administrators, Learning Facilitators and teachers at the end of the 2015/16 school year include:

"Learning Facilitator (LF) work is the greatest learning opportunity. They helped move the learning agenda forward. Staff worked with the LF to set goals that met their needs."

"The opportunities created by the Learning Facilitator position in our school have had a major positive impact on my learning and the learning of my staff."

"This is the best PD I have ever seen in my years of teaching. Improving student learning is at the base of everything we're doing."

"The LF is really about continuous quality improvement."

"A culture of strong adult learning will translate into better results for students."

"This approach has been transformational."

"Education is a community event, not an individual activity. It's an ongoing process that never stops."

"I just want to learn more."

"We're growing as a community of learners."

"Instilling lifelong learning in our students starts with us."

Evidence of improved student achievement

This is the start of the second year of the Learning Facilitator model. We accept the significant research that has determined that teacher professional development embedded at the school level has a compelling impact on student achievement.

When teachers feel more supported and confident in their practice, student achievement will be positively impacted.

- “The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years — collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students.”
(Michael Fullan)
- “...the biggest effects of student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and students become their teachers.”
(Hattie, 2009, p.22)
- “The working relationships that teachers have with other adults are closely connected and deeply consequential for the teaching and learning relationships they in turn have with their students.”
(Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p.41)
- “We know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers.”
(William, 2011, p.162)
- “Teachers and students go hand in hand as learners or they don’t go at all.”
(Barth, 2004, p. 23)



My Prairie Spirit Classroom

is diverse in worldview, culture, language, gender identity and interests and this is how we learn together.

In my classroom, 20% of the time consists of whole group teacher talk and 80% of the time is student talk (whole group, small group and independent self-talk).

All students participate in side-by-side learning opportunities with me several times a week in each subject area. Side-by-side learning opportunities include descriptive *next steps* feedback or reflective conversations.

My instruction includes opportunities for **all** students to construct knowledge, have choice in learning and experience explicit teaching and modelling of learning strategies that students can apply while exploring new ideas and concepts.

Learning opportunities for **all** students are characterized by high expectations (rigour), personal and purposeful application (relevance), collaborative learning environments (relationship), risk-taking to consider alternative instructional approaches (innovative) and student choice (engagement).

Formative assessment and various forms of feedback (e.g. self, peer, adult, parents) strengthen and inform my classroom practices and support **all** learners in their progress toward their learning goals.

My teaching begins with big ideas, sharing them with students and teaching and relating parts (knowledge and skills) to the big ideas throughout the learning process. **All** students understand, articulate and can provide evidence of their growth towards the big idea.

At least once a month, I have opportunities to discuss the *next steps* in my personal learning efforts. This can occur through learning walks or collaborative learning with colleagues.