

THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING A LEARNING COMMONS

by

Sheila L. Blake

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
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August, 2015

ABSTRACT

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This paper is a literature review of the challenges of creating a learning commons in a school library setting. It focuses on three areas of challenge in implementation and possible ways to address each one. These areas involve gaining support from the local and school community, space and furniture design, and funding for implementing and sustaining the learning commons.

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APPROVED:

Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Robins

Committee Member: Dr. Patricia Antrim

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The term of learning commons was introduced in 2004 by Donald Beagle as a concept derived from the information commons library model (Heitsch and Holley 65). The name change addressed the focus being shifted from a place to get information to a place to create learning. Scott Bennett expanded this concept to change the focus to reader-centered and include technology services (Heitsch and Holley 65). As the learning commons has evolved the model also includes social activities, group collaboration, and a variety of learning opportunities. The shift from a standard school library to a learning commons can cause some challenges for implementation.

Statement of the Problem

As schools move towards student centered learning and collaboration, school libraries search for ways to join that movement. Budget reductions and the switch to higher technology use has led to many libraries losing their funding because they are not considered necessary or relevant. Libraries must update their programs to meet student needs and support faculty in meeting school goals. This requires a library to be more than just a quiet place to find information, read a book, or study for a test. It requires integrating quiet spaces with a new flexible space for learning activities and collaboration, updated technology, and opportunities for students and faculty to create their own learning all in one place. The transformation of the library to a learning commons is one way to not only stay relevant, but become the learning hub of the school. However, the learning commons concept is relatively new and the implementation can be a challenge for those with no prior experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the literature outlining how librarians have already successfully implemented the learning commons concept. The study focuses on common obstacles encountered when transforming from a traditional school library to a learning commons. This paper provides examples of these challenges and possible ways to overcome them for a successful implementation.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research. The questions were researched as the review led to three common areas of challenge.

1. How can school and community support for a learning commons program be obtained?
2. What functional design and equipment needs are most beneficial for student use?
3. What types of funding are available to implement and sustain the LC program?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include the limited timeframe available for this study and the availability of peer-reviewed journal articles and texts from individuals with learning commons experience. The current learning commons concept is less than fifteen years old and not yet widespread. This limits the amount of research available for study. There is also little research on the challenges to implementation, rather than the broader scope of designing the commons. The scope of data collection included journal articles and websites dealing with implementation obstacles and their solutions.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the paper.

Chromebooks – A laptop that operates on Chrome OS and is designed to utilize the Internet for all applications and storage.

Dewey Lite – A modified version of the Dewey Decimal System where books are placed in interest categories chosen by the library to make them easier to find by patrons. The books retain their original Dewey classification within those categories.

iStaff - Volunteer students trained to assist in the library with clerical tasks and technology issues. They may instruct other students in technology use.

Learning commons (LC) – A library media center that supports student and teacher learning, collaboration, and knowledge creation with access to technology, learning activities, and information resources.

Research Design

The research study collected previously published information pertaining to learning commons implementation. No original research was conducted. The existing literature was reviewed for the purpose of this study. Search terms included “learning commons,” “learning commons challenges,” “learning commons design challenges,” and “noise in the learning commons.” Articles were retrieved from the Internet and from the databases accessed through the John C. Kirkpatrick Library at the University of Central Missouri. The databases include the following: *Academic Search Complete*; *Education Research Complete*; *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text*; and *ProQuest Central*.

Conclusion

This research study has three chapters that outline the challenges of a learning commons and ways to overcome them. The second chapter is a review of the literature on the topic of challenges. Chapter 3 contains the answers to the research questions in the first chapter and a conclusion to the paper.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research explores the challenges associated with beginning and sustaining a learning commons. It looks at three major areas for librarians to consider. First, the challenge of gaining and retaining the support of the community, both in and out of school, is presented. The review then describes the challenges of space design, zoning, furnishings, and technology requirements to accommodate the learning commons. Finally, considerations in regards to securing the funding necessary to implement and continue the learning commons concept are discussed.

Support of the Community

Gaining the support and participation of the school and local community is a necessary step for the implementation of a learning commons (LC). Support from the school community begins when librarians encourage collaboration with faculty to gain interest in available resources and showcase learning possibilities. Challenges, such as fear of a different environment and new technology, are addressed as implementation continues. The librarian takes the role of a school leader to offer professional development and assist faculty with curriculum that can be best implemented in an LC. Aligning LC program goals to support the school mission is a way to gain the support of the administration. Community support is established when parents and community members are asked to participate and are able to share in the success of students.

Some teachers might initially oppose the transformation of the school library to a learning commons. Unless they know about other possibilities, faculty members may not be accustomed to students doing anything in the library other than quietly checking out

books or studying. To overcome initial resistance, classroom teachers can be introduced to the resources and technology available and invited to collaborate with librarians over possible uses of the LC. A common method of beginning this collaboration is by mass emailing or sending out surveys that ask all faculty for a response. Questions might include what projects they will be working on this year, what resources are required, what services they could benefit from, and how the librarian could assist in developing lessons as well as co-teaching. Survey results could be used to present the solutions an LC offers over and above what the school library offered.

Koechlin believes the learning commons only becomes a success when faculty and students take ownership of the space and make it their own (30). Librarian Joan Ackroyd recommends that teacher ownership of the commons be cultivated as much as student ownership. She began the year at her library with a staff orientation that had faculty rotate through the commons' various spaces to learn more about available activities. This allowed faculty to begin thinking of ways that use of the LC could benefit their students and curriculum (27). Librarian Christina Bentheim began the school year with a presentation and a teacher toolkit containing an intro letter and helpful library documents. Then she provided socializing opportunities in the LC to build rapport and invite collaboration ("Continuing the Transition" 30).

The transformation to a LC can appear intimidating to faculty because of the focus on technology and student collaboration. They may be reluctant to participate because they lack experience using technology or new teaching methods. Bentheim reported that faculty found the technology in the LC motivational and engaging for their students once they started using those resources with the help of the librarian ("Looking

Back” 52). Librarian Valarie Diggs made it a priority to promote collaboration using teaching methods that encouraged inquiry learning using technology resources. The lessons were organized around question development to make them meaningful to individual students (37). Faculty can also be trained and encouraged by library staff to use technology resources for personal advancement as part of the commons’ mission and goals. Both Ackroyd and Diggs comment on the need to create an environment where students and faculty are expected to question, think, and create (Ackroyd 5; Diggs 38).

As transformation to a learning commons progresses and students begin to fully participate, faculty may see the LC as appearing too noisy and chaotic to be a beneficial learning environment. Ackroyd stated that faculty continued questioning student learning because of the perceived chaos, but eventually realized students were on task and completing their work (27). She found they began using the commons for classes because they noticed students were comfortable there and found the space promoted a less adversarial relationship than regular classrooms at times (26).

“The number one factor in converting a library into a learning commons is the strength and vision of the professional doing the transition” (Loertscher & Koechlin, “Climbing” E5). Research supports the principle that strong librarian leadership is vital for meeting the challenges of implementation. Heitsch and Holley state a library commons will not function effectively without a strong leader (74). Bentheim feels it is impossible to transition to a learning commons without the librarian becoming a school leader (“Looking Back” 53). She states, “We have to be relevant to our school districts, administrators, teachers, and students” (53).

The learning commons has the opportunity to build support in the school community by encouraging staff involvement and achievement. Librarians may develop and promote a faculty professional development section to encourage and support teaching ideas and methods. They lead teacher professional development in technology use as well as curriculum development. Librarians encourage achievement by helping faculty with professional expertise and LC resources to create and implement successful student lessons (Bentheim, “Looking Back” 50).

The librarian ensures the LC is aligned with district and building missions and visions in order to gain support from school administration (Bailey & Tierney 3). Developing goals for the learning commons program that support school goals is a way to promote the necessity of the LC and its certified staff. School budgets are limited, so to gain continued support from administration the librarian will show that the program contributes to the school’s success meeting state standards, such as Common Core.

Community support is a valuable asset in the transformation of a school library into a learning commons. The education of parents and community members on the benefits of changing to a LC is another challenge to be addressed. Parents can see increased student engagement and success, along with improved testing scores, after implementation has progressed and data is collected. Parents see students interested in activities offered by the commons as a positive factor and a contribution to student success. Bentheim held a LC lock-in for a group of students, many who were considered at-risk, to build empathy between students and promote an environment of respect. Community members were happy to be involved when they were invited to participate in the lock-in (“Bumps” 26). Several adults volunteered to supervise activities, share skills,

and give presentations. Diggs states a sense of community pride and excellence can be established with student activities. She believes when parents see the accomplishments and learning that happens in a LC it builds community support (38).

Space Design

Transforming a traditional library, designed for individual work and resource storage, to an LC space can be a challenge for successful implementation. A learning commons is considered a space where students and faculty collaborate, communicate, and create their own learning with multiple resources. Some challenging aspects that have been noted in the research literature are finding more spaces for non-traditional activities, zoning to support all the purposes of the library, furnishings, and technology aspects.

The LC finds spaces for non-traditional activities such as makerspaces, digital publishing, music production, study groups, performances, gaming, group collaboration, and classroom work areas. Caniano discusses the definition of the LC as including a user-defined space that allows students to transform the space into whatever they need at the time (2). A user space that is accommodating might be a large open area that allows for flexibility of use. Ackroyd aggressively weeded her book collection to reduce the number of shelves needed in the LC, allowing for more floor space than a previous arrangement (26). Bentheim cleaned out old storage spaces and her office to provide small enclosed spaces for noisier activities, such as music production (“Doing the Legwork” 30). Graves weeded out old encyclopedias that were never used and placed the remaining reference books in the nonfiction section to free up space (37). Switching to laptops when possible reduces dedicated space required for stationary desktops and allows students to move

about as desired. Hyman reports that work spaces are sometimes changed daily, depending on student needs' for small or large group work (19). Allowing the students to self-manage their spaces and decide configuration of furnishings for maximum use is beneficial when possible (Bailin 349).

The LC space also accommodates students who come to the LC for traditional library activities, such as studying, researching, or reading in a quiet area. The collaborative activities can be noisy and distracting as students work together and move around. Computer, phone, copier, and printer noise are also considered, as they are not only disturbing but can also create adverse physiological effects for students looking for solitude (Yelinek 42). Gayton states it is vital to provide a quiet area for those students who come to the LC for individual work (65). Hyman changed the focus in her LC from all collaborative spaces to a more balanced design with an increased number of quiet areas. She realized that many students were avoiding the commons because they required a calmer environment to succeed with their work (17).

Quiet areas can be planned into the design and use of the space. Seating can be placed in a way to minimize noise transfer. An example would be small sitting spaces provided among book shelves and in corners for individual reading or studying (Kay 26). Ackroyd was able to use glass walls and arrange shelving as sound buffers in her re-design (26). Hyman utilized sound absorbing materials in some areas to lower the volume of certain activities (17). Palin changed to the "Dewey Lite" organization system for her collection, arranging some books in genres. Each genre has its own section, which usually results in shelves being divided into smaller areas. The smaller spaces utilized for separating genres provided areas with less traffic for individual sitting areas (21). A

commons can also provide “quiet rooms” where students know they are to share space silently if choosing to sit there (Turner 28).

Noise is part of any school, including the LC; and students have become used to constant activity and multi-tasking. This means they may have a different opinion than librarians do of what is an acceptable noise level (Shoham & Shemer-Shalmon 9). In their study, students would still choose central seating to work alone because they felt the noise was not distracting to them (10). They preferred to sit in central locations facing the entrance so they could watch traffic in and out of the library and keep an eye on other activities, while still doing their own work (12). Other students who wanted to further limit distractions would sit with their backs to the entrance, but still not necessarily in a quiet zone or corner (15). There were study carrels available but rarely used because the students did not like the closed-in feeling or separation from the social aspect of the LC (12). In Bailin’s study many students actually preferred some noise while studying, or at least believed it did not distract them (354).

There are still students who prefer an environment that provides quiet and solitude for studying. A quiet environment can be addressed on an individual level according to student needs. Kay recommends providing headphones to computer and audio users to prevent their noise from disturbing others (26). Kappus provides free disposable ear plugs to students to provide an even quieter environment when desired (9). Palin provides a sound machine with soothing rain sounds or music in one area, and an inexpensive music player with a speaker in a smaller area to help students mask noise (19). Students might be allowed to use earbuds with their own devices to block out unwanted sound with personal music choices if policy permits.

Zoning is reported as a common way to control challenges of traffic and use of space, as well as noise level. If enough square footage is available, areas are divided into zones by levels of noisiness, such as group collaboration or individual study, to control volume levels. “However, zoning only works if students follow guidelines and seat themselves in the appropriate zones” (Yelinek & Bressler 46). These zones are designated by things such as placement, furniture arrangements, type of furniture, color coding, moveable wall dividers, floor treatments, and signs.

The entrance to the library is normally designated as the “Help Zone” because this area usually includes the librarian’s desk for easy access of circulation needs and student assistance (Bailin 354). Noise levels would be high here as traffic flow is busy when students move in and out of the commons or ask for help. The non-traditional collaborative activities that require large, flexible spaces and librarian supervision are placed close to this zone. The remaining space would be divided according to student needs and space availability. The LC contains quiet zones for individual work and louder zones for collaboration. The louder zones would be closest to the entrance or in specific rooms that are closed off to control sound. Palin places the quietest zones for individuals as far from the entrance as possible to minimize disturbance from traffic flow and group activities (19).

Zones, and their accompanying expectations, should be clearly designated for students. Kay collected librarian management tips that included making volume expectations in each area clear by using signs to designate zones and the user expectations for each (26). Effective signs are professional, concise, easy to read, and specific to announce the sound level of conversation that is acceptable. Yelinek and

Bressler state the policies behind the signs should be consistently enforced by staff to ensure student compliance (48). Research by Bailin suggests the noise levels are self-regulated by users when zones are obviously marked and expectations made clear (356). Students in quiet zones might regulate themselves and also regulate other students who might be disturbing them with a look or reminder of the expectations (Massis 397). Turner relates that her students choose the type of work to participate in each time they enter the LC by the zone they choose to sit in (29).

Furnishings and equipment are a major expense for any librarian to consider when maximizing efficiency and use of space. Furnishings and seating arrangements help define the appropriate atmosphere in a zoned space to promote group collaboration or individual study (Chow 73). Budget restrictions dictate existing furniture be utilized as much as possible, but consider recycling these pieces into new uses. New furniture and equipment is selected on not just durability or one specific use, but flexibility and versatility, with multiple possibilities for use. With experimentation and multiple attempts at configuration over time and with experience, the LC will evolve and transform into a useful environment even with limited space and budgets.

The commons is no longer a storage space for old equipment, books, and building miscellaneous (Hyman17). Weed old equipment and furniture to see what can be salvaged or repurposed, and then make room for new things. Bentheim replaced a rolling whiteboard kept among her book shelves with a hanging screen to free up floor space and prevent shelves from being blocked. She also found old shelving and furniture in storage that she was able to clean up and repurpose, which also made more room in her storage area (“Doing the Legwork” 33). Holland’s article suggests painting existing surfaces with

whiteboard paint or chalkboard paint and covering tables with Plexiglas to make editable creative spaces without taking up more room (30). Ackroyd used old computers and free software to make a music production studio in one of the repurposed storage rooms (26). Hyman recycled old computer desks into individual study areas that allow personal space within a community space (20). Waskow had too much furniture and discarded some to make a more open and flexible space. She purchased small beach chairs for her elementary students to use in group reading areas that took up less room than previous furniture (20). Used furnishings donated by other classroom teachers, parents, friends, or community members can be recycled when possible.

Furniture and equipment selected for the commons are best utilized when chosen for flexibility of use and ease of movement. Shelving, tables, chairs, and other equipment placed on locking castors add to flexibility and ease of use when students need to create new spaces. Chairs and small tables that are stackable and tip resistant ease movement in open areas and save space when not needed (Hyman 17). Comfortable chairs with durable fabric, especially if on castors, create cozy spaces for individual reading or can be pulled together for group discussions. Floor cushions and area rugs offer flexible seating for elementary students, but are not suggested as much for older students (Hyman 17). For example all furniture at The Bridge LC is moveable, including large bean bag chairs, to accommodate and encourage various activities and establish new zones when necessary (Shaw, Flynn, & Barnett 4). A San Francisco middle school chose moveable white boards and upholstered ottomans and lounge chairs so students could easily form and rearrange their own spaces (Stephenson & Stone 48).

Finding virtual and physical space for technology is the fourth challenge in the design of the learning commons. The digital natives that a commons serves require technology options that are easy to access, on trend with the newest applications, and with a variety that serves individual interests. Librarians consider technology access in the physical commons space as well as the virtual commons space to satisfy demands of students and faculty. They are also responsible for ensuring all users are educated in use of the technology they offer.

Technology use begins with the basic challenge of computer access, such as the number of computers or having enough electrical outlets to keep equipment charged and running. Newly built spaces are designed with these things in mind, but older spaces are usually not. The change to laptops or Chromebooks allows the equipment to be stored in one area with electrical access, but used anywhere in the space once charged (Palin 17). Librarians in a LC with a small budget can begin with old desktops and free software and slowly upgrade as the technology budget allows or as they receive grants or donations (Bentheim, "Evolution" 26). Steele received used iPads and smartphones through a donation campaign of a local church (16). Librarians often have to begin the transformation with whatever they have because of budget restrictions (Diggs 38). The lack of up-to-date technology resources is not an excuse to prevent the implementation of a learning commons, but can slow progress.

The students currently being served by learning commons are considered digital natives, but with varying degrees of experience. All students are invited into a LC and encouraged to participate and create new learning. Even though most students grow up with a phone or some sort of device, not all students are educated in basic computer skills

and capable of competently using technology resources (Heitsch & Holley 71). Even though it is common today, not all students have Internet access or computers at home to work with. Heitsch and Holley stress the need to reach these students with LC resources to prevent the “digital divide” from increasing as students progress through school (71). This can be addressed by placing technology close to the Help Zone, or allowing the librarian the flexibility of freely moving about the commons to offer help for any in need. Volunteer students can be trained to be peer tutors without cost. Students with less experience could eventually become peer tutors themselves with training. Turner trains student volunteers to be part of her “iStaff” (30). They are a free resource for peer tutoring, classroom assistance, and library aides to help her, the classroom faculty, and other students. She is also allowing them to create their own technology classes in the LC to assist interested peers in learning about the use of new technology (30). Bentheim utilizes volunteer students to be aides in the LC and help other students (“Continuing the Transition” 32).

The virtual presence of the commons is considered an extended part of the commons space and another access point for students and faculty. “The LC website and its presence online are a large part of the accessibility and utilization of the library” (Turner 31). Niegaard explains the transition to digitally transmitted information and services continues from the physical space to the virtual space to allow access 24/7 to LC patrons (174). Loertscher and Koechlin define a learning commons as a physical and a virtual learning space to improve learning and transform learning and teaching (“Virtual” 20). They state a virtual space can promote a sense of ownership to everyone in the school with their participation online (“Virtual” 21).

The virtual space of a LC is developed to reflect the transformation of the physical space to provide opportunities to better serve the school community and promote creativity and learner engagement. The virtual space allows constant access and updates to LC information, but should also showcase student work completed in the commons and online with the technology resources provided by the commons. Loertscher & Koechlin believe creating a safe and empowering virtual learning space is a proper extension of the physical learning commons (“Personal” 23). The virtual space should be interactive for students and faculty to share their knowledge and culture if a learning commons is to develop its full potential (Loertscher & Koechlin, “Progress Report” 11). Adding interactive components to the website, such as student/teacher blogs or discussion boards, extends the collaborative environment to the virtual LC.

Funding the Learning Commons Program

The funding for implementation of the LC concept, as well as continued maintenance and upgrades, can be a challenge. The learning commons transformation begins with a vision and the librarian’s ability to lead the program toward that concept. Building relationships and gaining community support for the transformation is the first step in securing financial resources. Funding can be found from a variety of sources, but support is not always monetary. Donations of time, expertise, and resources can be found through school and community supporters. Grants can also be acquired as a way to purchase new technology. Innovative ideas to expand the learning commons’ equipment and materials are needed as gaining funding is an ongoing process for a successful implementation of the LC program.

Diggs advises to build the program first, and then the funding for physical upgrades and technology will be found later (38). Hyman states relationships are built with a good program and that is the key to building community support, the community is then more likely to provide ongoing funding (20). Bentheim created a brand for her new LC to build support and promote her program to the school and public community. She designed a new logo for all LC items, created a website, and made professional posters and signs to advertise the new brand and promote the learning commons concept (“Continuing the Transition” 32).

Funding does not always have to be financial. Consider donations of supplies, equipment, and time from local supporters. Hyman works with local bookstores, public libraries, and cinemas to get promotional materials and create literacy events to promote public relations (20). She enlists parents, staff, and administrators who donate their time and expertise for various project needs (20). Diggs utilizes the fine arts department as a volunteer resource to help with the creativity part of events and programs, such as signs and artwork, which also helps build support within the school community (35). Waskow signs up on DonorsChoose.org to connect with people online who are willing to make donations. She also maintains a wish list on Amazon.com for local supporters. She recommends shopping in flea markets and garage sales for cheap furnishings or accepting donations from helpful parents and community members (14). Use personal contacts whenever possible to spread the word, find volunteers, and gain support for the program.

Grants offer funding opportunities, especially for technology needs. There are usually local community opportunities for grants and donations. Diggs received a grant from a local technology firm to supply new laptops several years after beginning her LC

(37). When her school would not budget a remodel, even after remodeling other libraries in the district, she invited the town manager to visit her LC program and see the progress students were making. The manager was able to budget major capital funding dollars from the city for her LC after seeing the physical condition of the commons. When she held a grand opening ceremony after remodeling, there were many community members she had built relationships with in attendance who also donated to the program (36). Steele funded his library's transformation with fundraising activities done by parents and the Parent Teacher Association (17).

There are many challenges as well as benefits to creating a successful learning commons. The transformation begins with the librarian who creates the vision and allows student and staff success to promote the LC and build relationships within the community. Librarians who have made a successful transition from library to LC use creativity when exploring possibilities for funding and resources. They recommend that other librarians continue trying new ideas and designs until the LC fits student and faculty needs.

CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSION

Librarians considering the change to a learning commons (LC) face several challenges. Awareness of the challenges and ways to overcome them can expedite the implementation of an LC and contribute to its long-term success. Chapter 3 provides answers for three questions to be addressed in planning the successful transformation from school library to a learning commons. How can school and community support for a learning commons program be obtained? What functional design and equipment needs are most beneficial for student use? What types of funding are available to implement and sustain the LC program?

Obtaining Support

Students and faculty can collaborate with librarians to make the learning commons a vital part of the school community. Gaining support for the LC from school staff and administration is a challenge that begins with student involvement. Learning commons events and activities motivate the students to be successful participants. Faculty will come to recognize the potential of collaborating with the librarian to implement new technology and teaching methods that improve student engagement and success. Staff will see the librarian as a school leader who guides professional development and supports their curriculum needs. Aligning the purpose of the LC with school goals to improve student and staff achievement is a way to advocate for administrative support.

Community support includes parents and other community members. Parents who see students interested and engaged in learning activities at the LC will support their children and the LC. Parents and other community members may volunteer their time and

knowledge when they see new learning possibilities happening. Some librarians use marketing strategies to promote the program to people and local businesses and to grow public awareness. As community support widens it increases school support and raises possible funding avenues, which increases sustainability for the learning commons.

Design Challenges

Learning commons accommodate several forms of activities that are not traditionally held in a library. LCs incorporate collaboration, social activities, classrooms, games, and makerspaces as well as traditional quiet spaces for individual work. Coordinating all of these activities in one area creates a design challenge. The space use requires flexibility to meet student and staff needs. Zones are utilized to designate various activities, especially between noisy activities and quiet study areas. Quiet areas are enhanced further by use of earbuds and sound machines, as well as placement of seating and shelves. The transformation from library to LC is a time to weed out old furniture, equipment, and books to make room for new activities and uses.

There is a common theme in selecting furniture and equipment to meet design challenges. Flexible furnishings that can be moved easily, folded up, or used for more than one purpose are popular choices. Items that are easily moved and rearranged by students allow them to choose the structure of their spaces as needs change.

The challenge of technology is an expensive one. The digital natives now served in schools expect the newest equipment and software. Easy access and mobility are major concerns for students to be able to move throughout the zones according to use for the moment. Laptops and tablets maximize movement and require little space, except for

charging. It is recommended to start with whatever technology equipment is available and slowly trade-up or expand as the budget allows.

A virtual presence is a vital part of the new learning commons and a challenge for most librarians. Patrons expect LC resources to be available 24/7 and user friendly. Experts recommend making the LC Web presence more interactive to mirror the physical presence students and staff are accustomed to. An interactive website allows students and faculty to share learning experiences completed in the LC and encourages further student engagement.

Funding Challenges

Building relationships and promoting a program is usually the first step to the challenge of securing funding. Inviting parents and community members to participate and see the new things happening in the program builds relationships. A marketing strategy to brand the new learning commons and promote its activities is a good promotion tool. Seeing school and community engagement encourages financial support to improve and continue LC programs.

Continued funding is a challenge, but necessary to sustain and continue improvement of the LC. Grants are usually available on a local, state, and national level for new technology and innovative programs. Local businesses are a possible source of funds and donations for equipment and materials. Parents, faculty, and community groups can provide donations of resources and time when invited to support their students. Sustained funding for the LC is a creative process, unique to each commons.

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