

THE LIBRARY TRANSFORMED INTO A LEARNING COMMONS:
A LOOK AT THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE

by

Carrie A. McDonald

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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ABSTRACT

by

Carrie A. McDonald

School libraries are facing many challenges today and in answer to those challenges, the learning commons has been created. This literature review looks at those issues facing libraries and the ways in which a learning commons might help save library programs whether they are public or academic institutions. In addition, this review looks at the components of the learning commons, and what types of changes are needed to make the learning commons a reality.

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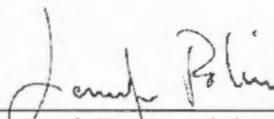
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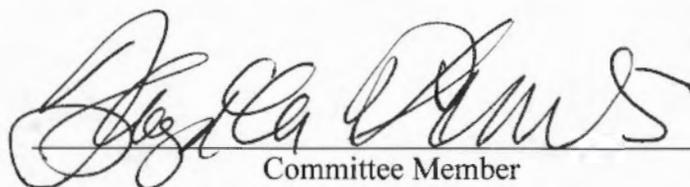
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

With budget cuts looming and technological advances on the rise, where do school libraries fit in and how do they remain relevant? One movement within library circles is to transform the library into a learning commons. The learning commons is a place where social interaction, educational research and design, and technology can come together to create a place of learning for students and faculty. This literature review looks at those issues facing school libraries, what the learning commons is, and how it can make a change within a library setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to look at the many issues facing school libraries and whether the transformation to a learning commons is the answer to saving them. Also, in this time of budget crunching, it is necessary to think about whether or not a library overhaul is even plausible. This paper will take a look at those challenges facing libraries across the country. It will also look at the components that make up a learning, knowledge, or information commons and how these components might look at work in the library. The paper will also address the importance and use of technology in the commons setting and the benefits of using that technology for not just the students, but also for the staff and community. Finally, it will look at what changes are needed from library staff to make the learning commons successful and how this new format can revitalize a library program. This paper is meant to provide a quick look at what the

transformation to a learning commons can do and is doing around the world. This research demonstrates that the shift to a learning commons can have a positive impact on libraries, librarians, and their communities.

Research Questions

Simply renaming a library a learning commons is not the answer. There are many issues to look at first and many questions that must be asked and answered. The questions can be narrowed down to four major points and each one will be addressed within Chapter 2. The following are the questions that guided the research presented within the paper:

1. What are the issues facing school libraries and how would a learning commons help overcome these issues?
2. What are the components of a learning commons? What makes a library a learning commons, and how does it look?
3. What is the importance of technology in the learning commons?
4. What impact can the learning commons have on a library program, a school, or a community?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include the limited number of peer-reviewed articles available through databases. Most of the research information was collected using two databases: *Library Literature and Information Science Full Text* and *Academic Search Complete*. A variety of search terms were used, but most commonly “learning

commons” and “information commons.” The results of this research are meant as a review of literature based on the subject of the library as a learning commons and cannot necessarily be applied to all library programs.

Definition of Terms

Blended librarian—A blended librarian seamlessly combines 21st century skills, instructional research and design, and technological skills into their existing library program. Through these skills, the librarian is able to make more and better connections with faculty, students, and patrons.

Learning commons—The learning commons is a redesigned library space that is meant to enhance social interaction and learning outside the classroom. It is the center for learning for students, staff, and the community as a whole.

Electronic whiteboard—An electronic whiteboard is an interactive whiteboard which allows teachers to use Web sites, videos, and pictures for hands-on lessons. An example is the SMART Board.

USB—USB stands for Universal Serial Bus. A USB is technology for attaching devices to a computer to assist with a faster exchange of data.

Research Design

Research for this project was guided by the research question stated above. The research relied upon previously published journal articles about the subject of the library as a learning commons. No new research was conducted. The information for this literature review was found using two main databases: *Library Literature and*

Information Science Full Text and *Academic Search Complete*. A variety of search terms were used including: “learning commons,” “information commons,” and “blended librarian.”

Conclusion

This study is comprised of three chapters addressing the subject of transforming a library into a learning commons. It used information that pertains to school, university, and public libraries. The next chapter is a review of literature and chapter three offers answers to the previously stated research questions and recommendations based on the research.

CHAPTER 2:
THE LEARNING COMMONS

Issues Facing Libraries

Libraries across the country and around the world are facing tough times. With budget cuts libraries and librarians are often the first areas where cuts are made. Motoko Rich offers changes in the Mesa, Arizona school district as an example of these times and how they are affecting libraries. The largest district in Arizona, Mesa has eliminated certified librarians from many of its schools. In addition, Rich writes about Spokane, Washington, where parents fought back, successfully, when the district cut the hours of its school librarians. According to Rich, less than two-thirds of American public schools employ full-time certified librarians (par. 10-11).

Budget cuts aren't the only challenges facing libraries and librarians, though. The growth in technology and the increasing use of the Internet have also moved libraries in a new direction. With the arrival of the "Google generation," the question has been asked, "Are libraries needed anymore?" In a 2010 article Ross Todd discusses some of these issues, including the many studies that show that students are using libraries less than ever before and that search engines are the first stop for most that are doing research ("To Be" 16). Sharon Weiner, Tomalee Doan, and Hal Kirkwood argue that the changes that are occurring are bringing about the need for a new direction (194). The popularity of the Internet, as Ross Todd mentioned, is one such change; but also many students are coming to the library as digital natives. They are used to working with technology and might be more adept at it than the library staff or their teachers ("To Be" 17).

David Loertscher writes more about the Google generation and their skills with technology. He urges librarians to find a way to include the technology skills that this generation already possesses into their school work. He talks about the need to update the school Web site, making it interactive, and mentions that today's students are used to social networking. They are looking for that same kind of feel from their library and especially from their library Web site ("If They Build" 23).

Many libraries are trying to move to a more client-centered commons where the needs of the patrons come first. Many patrons want a place where they can comfortably relax while searching the Internet, meet and chat with friends, or read a book. Libraries are rising to meet the needs of patrons who want to use the library in different ways. When Robin Cicchetti transformed her school library into a learning commons, she focused on students' needs and student services, as well as teachers' professional development, thus making her learning commons client-centered (53). Loertscher went so far as to say that it is necessary for librarians to make a "180-degree switch" ("Flip" 47). He said librarians need to start thinking like patrons; they need to look at the needs and expectations of their students as they plan the learning commons. By looking at what the students need first, the learning commons will be the students' creation as much as the librarians'.

In another article Loertscher mentions the importance of listening to students' needs, especially in urban communities. He states that library policies often ignore the needs of "young men and women who attend high schools in these (low-income) communities [who] are often the targets of well-meaning but mistaken assumptions about

their needs, or of vicious stereotypes about their behavior, attitudes, and intellectual capacity” (“Urban Youth” 50). He goes on to say that these beliefs often cause policy makers to make ineffectual or even negative policies. Assumptions are made that simply because a student comes from a low-income family, they have no experience with technology, or they won’t know how to behave in a library, or know what resources to use. When students know what types of stereotypes they will face upon walking into a library, they are less likely to walk through the doors. By listening to the voices of library patrons, many of these problems can be solved before they even start.

Another problem, according to Ross Todd, is that in many cases, school libraries have not been seen to have had much impact on school reform. He mentions that libraries and librarians are not seen as key figures in the work to reform schools and improve student achievement. In many cases librarians have not pushed collaboration or demonstrated their importance when it comes to literacy or technology initiatives in their schools (Todd, “There is Knowledge” 55). With budget cuts, the technological push, and librarians lack of collaboration, there is no doubt that if libraries are to be saved, changes need to be made. Not just changes to the physical space, but also the virtual space, and with the library staff as well. Many librarians have embraced the idea of the learning commons to revitalize their library programs.

Even with budget cuts looming, librarians find a way to meet the needs of their clients, specifically that Google generation. Many school libraries are moving towards the learning commons as an answer to their problems. The components of the learning commons are simple and yet involve a lot of hard work and a willingness to change.

There's also a heavy reliance on technology in the learning commons, which can be a big change for many libraries and librarians. The benefits, though, far outweigh the struggles involved.

Components of a Learning Commons

To make the change from a library to a learning commons, one must first know what a learning commons is and what components go into building a working learning commons. A learning commons is many things, but at its heart, it is: “the showcase for high-quality teaching and learning—a place to develop and demonstrate exemplary educational practices. It will serve as the professional development center for the entire school—a place to learn, experiment with, assess, and then widely adopt improved instructional programs” (Koechlin, Zwaan, & Loertscher, 10). In this section, these components will be presented and examples given for how they look and work within the commons as a whole. Throughout this section, there will be mention of academic, school, and public libraries as well as school libraries. The learning commons movement is growing throughout all types of libraries, and there is much libraries can learn from each other. By making this a library-wide movement, students could move seamlessly between their school and public library, always getting the help and guidance they need.

When talking about the components of a learning commons, it is important to look at both the physical space and the virtual space. A successful learning commons encompasses both worlds. For the physical space Steadman and Carroll mention that their commons is a quiet, peaceful place in their school, but it is also flexible enough that when it comes time for workshops, furniture can be moved to accommodate whatever

groups show up to participate (59). In Stedman and Carroll's commons, students are welcomed in during lunch or recess to work within this workshop style. One week they might be studying dinosaurs by examining fossils, the next week, they could be studying gardening and planting their own flowers in the library. The purpose of their library flexibility is that space can be made for these hands-on learning activities. The commons must be prepared if one student shows up or thirty students show up.

Ron McCabe argues for the necessity of wireless Internet access, so that students can access the web from anywhere within the learning commons (297). This increases the flexibility of the learning commons. If a class is working at the computer stations, a lone student would be able to work online away from the noise and distractions. Having wireless laptops available for student use would also be a benefit, as would putting library printers on a wireless network for ease of printing anywhere within the commons. Students should be able to move effortlessly throughout the learning commons without interrupting their work. If they are distracted in one area of the library, they should be able to move to another area without disruption in their wireless service or loss of their work.

In 2010 Ross Todd said that the "school library as a common learning space needs to be flexible, fluid, even providing opportunities for students and teachers to create their own learning space-customizable learning spaces—where there is immediate access to furniture, technology, facilities, and expertise" ("To Be" 19). Middleton, in her article from 2010, also talks about making allowances for students to work collaboratively. At the library at Oregon State University, they removed their old computer workstations,

which only allowed seating for one, and replaced them with workstations that were designed so students could work together. Also, simply by replacing their chairs with chairs on wheels, they were able to encourage collaboration between students (11). They created a flexible work environment to meet the needs of their clientele.

This flexibility also allows for more social and community involvement in the learning commons. Uta Hussong-Christian and her co-writers stated that when the Oregon State University library began its transformation, staff and administrators were forced to take a look at “changing attitudes about what were legitimate uses for library spaces” (278). Rather than imagining the library as a place that must always be quiet, where food and drink are banned, and fun is not allowed, they had to take a look at how students actually wanted to use the library. They needed to make it a comfortable place where students would actually like to be, whether working or in a more social capacity. This allowed them to better envision the changes for their library.

Valerie Diggs (2009) describes her school’s learning commons. Trying to bring more students into the area, Diggs created a coffee morning in her commons. Once a week before school, she invites a local coffee shop to come in and students and staff are invited to come in, have a cup of coffee, a pastry, and some good conversation. She even installed seating booths to further the café feel. Through this simple plan, Diggs was able to create a social atmosphere in her learning commons. Her old library where students and staff were not likely to hang-out was transformed into a social coffee shop where students and staff can relax and prepare for the day (34). According to Stark and Samson in their 2010 article, it is important to take into consideration how the space

might be used and include things that would create an atmosphere of “conviviality,” or students having a good time in a fun atmosphere. Creature comforts like chairs, sofas, and even booths can create a more inviting atmosphere where students might like to stay for a while (264).

In addition to her coffee mornings, Diggs also collaborated with her school’s fine arts department to create “Listening Lunches,” where students come together for lunch and to hear their peers share poetry, music, and drama (35). The flexibility of her space allows her to accommodate these events whether one person or many people show up. The mobility of her furniture allows her to clear space for whatever kind of event she wishes to hold in her learning commons. These lunches were also an opportunity to bring more staff members into the library, thus opening the door for more possible collaborations in the future. Through Diggs’ coffee mornings and fine arts lunches, she was able to give her space something that is another essential aspect of a learning commons, a relaxing atmosphere.

Cynthia Sargeant and Roger Nevin wrote that their learning commons was a place where their at-risk students could feel comfortable coming (44). For students who, for disciplinary reasons, spent time in the office where they were not free to work, speak, or share ideas, the library became a refuge. Many of these students were “disinterested and unmotivated,” which often lead to them acting out and ending up in trouble with administration (43). The learning commons provided an inclusive atmosphere, rather than being a place where they did not feel welcome. The comfortable atmosphere allowed these students to discover reading materials, and activities that they might have

otherwise missed. Sargeant and Nevin set out to make their commons comfortable and inviting to reach their at-risk students, but the relaxing atmosphere can also draw in other students, staff, and the community.

McCabe mentions using his commons space as a meeting place for everyone from teens to adults (296-297). McCabe works in a public library, so his challenge is meeting the needs of both a younger and older clientele. He offers Guitar Hero and Rock Band competitions, as well as movies and crafting events. He moved most of his adult services upstairs, so adults who were bothered by the younger patrons would have a quiet place to work. He also moved his young adult collection upstairs near the adult collection, because he realized that teens would rather browse with adults than in the children's section. By having separate areas for these events and these collections, he's able to offer that relaxing, classic library feel, while still making the library a community spot that is open and welcoming to all.

A flexible space is important, but a flexible school library schedule is equally as important to the success of a learning commons. The flexibility in the schedule of the learning commons allows it to be used for whatever purposes are needed. If a class needs to come in to do a research project, the commons is ready for that. If teachers need to come in after school for a professional development event, the commons is ready. And if students need a place to come to read or share ideas, the commons is always open and ready to accommodate them (Cicchetti 56). A flexible schedule is key to making a learning commons work. Having extended hours and open time during the school day

where a class could pop in for a project, would encourage more students and staff to take advantage of the space.

It is not cheap to transform a library into a learning commons. Diggs needed to write grants to obtain the money for her library makeover, because money was not available from her district (36). Loertscher recommends starting small, by taking a look at the library floor plan and moving things around to open up the library space. Small steps can lead to big change (“Flip” 48).

With these components, the learning commons can begin to take shape and answer some of those concerns including becoming client-centered and increasing collaboration. However, that technology piece still remains. A learning commons meets students and clients at their level technologically and then maybe even takes them a little further.

Technology in the Learning Commons

David Loertscher explains that the learning commons is not just a physical, but also a virtual space (“If They Build” 22). The true learning commons extends beyond the library walls and is accessible from anywhere via the Internet. An important component of a learning commons is 24/7, year-round access. Through the library Web site, students will be able to access the resources of the learning commons from home. These resources, according to Loertscher, can include e-books and databases as well as content created by students. Rather than the Web sites of yesterday, in which information flows in one direction from Web site (or school) to a student, the virtual aspects of the learning

commons allow students and staff to be participants in the learning culture. It creates an ever-changing landscape of learning and sharing of ideas. Even when students are not in the physical commons space, they can be a part of the learning commons. In 2009, Loertscher describe it this way, “the virtual learning commons replaces the one-way stream of information library web site, usually ignored, and replaces it with a giant conversation” (“If They Build” 23).

In describing their learning commons in New Zealand, Stedman and Carroll mention their wiki, which they use in place of a classic Web site. All of the experimental learning that takes place in their learning commons, including those hands-on workshops, can also be accessed through the wiki. Their workshops are all online with step-by-step instructions, so that parents, students, and staff who could not attend a library workshop can still perform the activities (60). Programs like the fossil hunt or the gardening piece can be complete at home, and thus parents feel like an integral part of the learning commons. Wikis and blogs are something that Loertscher encourages librarians to use as they transform their virtual learning commons (Kirkland, 28).

Christopher Leeder took an in-depth look at 72 different information commons Web sites to see whether they were meeting the needs of their patrons and of the library staff. He looked at everything from the most useful and useless feature to the commonality in language and word usage amongst the sites. He found vast differences from one Web site to the other. He also found that some sites were so complex that students, and even staff, would have to search to find the tools they needed. His findings suggested that it would be helpful to have a set of standards for information commons’

Web sites. He also suggests simplifying content, structuring the Web site based on user needs, rather than on administrative or staff needs, and using a user friendly design (545).

Marc Bayer suggests creating an information commons to go. He proposed this idea to his library staff and they all agreed that it needed to be low-cost and easy-to-use. They decided that they will offer their students the use of a simple USB (universal serial bus) device known as a flash drive. This memory storage unit is technology already familiar to the students. The USB device would allow the student to literally take the commons with them. When they insert the device into their home computer, they will have accesses to the main Web site, web resources, templates, and applications that were before only available within the library walls (25). What is created is a convenient, easy way for students to use library resources after hours and to keep them coming in during library hours. This might be particularly useful in communities where high speed Internet access from home is not available.

Accessibility and equity of services is an essential part to any learning commons or library program. In a 2010 article, Ross Todd discusses the role that equity and access play in libraries, saying that libraries are in the position to offer not only an extensive collection that will meet the needs of a diverse population, but also the technology that will allow equity of access to children with special needs. Libraries can also even the balance socio-economically, offering services to students who might otherwise be denied access to information and technology (“To Be” 18).

Jamie Seeholzer and Joseph Salem state that much of the success of their learning commons is due to, “taking advantage of new opportunities and technologies” (296). To

reach that Google generation, the learning commons needs all the bells and whistles. In a 2006 article, David Loertscher talks about the technological library. He says that in schools with an abundance of technology, “when faced with creating a learning experience, teachers and teacher-librarians experience a transparent technological foundation upon which to build. The concentration is on learning rather than on the machine or software itself” (“What Flavor” 9). It is important to not just use technology for technology’s sake, but rather to focus on the lesson rather than the technology used to create or teach that lesson.

In Robin Cicchetti’s learning commons, students and staff have access to a variety of technology. When students walk up to the circulation desk, they are greeted by a screen mounted above the desk that informs them of events happening in the school and in the learning commons. Students have access to iMacs, laptop carts full of MacBooks, and SMART Board technology. With all of this and more at their fingertips, students were able to create new media that enhanced their learning. Cicchetti also mentions that her school’s Internet filters were opened. This allowed students to more freely find the information they were looking for without battling the frustration of finding useful sites blocked. Loertscher talks about students having the ability to download e-books (Flip 47). Rich mentions students being able to debate classroom topics on social networking sites. With access to all of this technological, librarians have the ability to teach students the crucial technology skills that they will need in the future.

In addition to suggesting the “180 degree switch,” Loertscher says that librarians need to be ready to share technology with their students. Karen Ramsey turned her

students into a technology training squad. When Ramsey's secondary school in Canada was supplied with SMART Boards, she quickly saw the frustration on her teacher's faces and the excitement on the faces of her students. While talking with some of her more tech savvy students and their teachers, she realized that students did not get as overwhelmed figuring out how to use this new technology as their teachers did. She proceeded to create a youth tech committee where students would meet after school with teachers who wanted SMART Board training and ideas. She quickly saw a shift, "teachers who were using the SMART Boards as screens were now excited-no, I should say ecstatic-about the SMART Boards," she also saw her school transform from "teacher-focused learning to a shared community of learning" (29). By including students in not just the usage, but the training for technology, they are given a sense of ownership and responsibility with that technology.

Embracing the technology students use is an important part of creating a successful learning commons, but the librarian has to be open to the changes. A new kind of librarian needs to emerge to meet the needs of the learning commons. Bryan Sinclair talks about emergence of the "blended librarian." A blended librarian is defined as a, "librarian who combines the traditional skill set of librarianship with the information technologist's hardware/software skills, and the instructional or educational designer's ability to apply technology appropriately in the teaching—learning process (504)." Sinclair urges librarians to no longer just sit at their circulation desk waiting for someone to come ask them for help, instead they have to look at what the patron needs and find a way to give that to them.

The blended librarian looks at the curriculum as a whole and finds a way to include the learning commons and information literacy goals into every facet of the curriculum. He or she is also always ready to help staff members use technology in their lessons. These librarians work to meet the learning goals not just of their students, but of the faculty as well. They are also open to learning from students and staff members. The idea is for learning to be a shared experience, and the blended librarian embraces that idea (Sinclair 504). According to Janice Wolfe, Ted Naylor, and Jeanetta Druke, “communication and collaboration are key elements that must be fostered and respected at all levels” (112).

Robin Cicchetti went so far as to rewrite job descriptions for her new learning commons. She created a position called student services specialist, whose main job was to focus on the needs of students, thus helping to create a student-centered learning commons. She also put more emphasis on information and media literacy within her own job description thus enabling her to become that “blended librarian,” integrating information literacy and technology skills across the curriculum (53).

With these components, and a new role for librarians, a library can be transformed into a learning commons. There are many benefits of a learning commons. Taking the leap can have a positive impact on a library program and student achievement, but in these days of economic hardship, creative means, such as those described in this section, must be found to make the commons a reality.

Impact of the Learning Commons on the School or Community

The quest of every librarian is to get students or patrons in the door, but more importantly they want to keep them there. The learning commons will bring students in the door and they might never want to leave. Ed Wittenberg describes the learning commons as an “academic hub” where students, staff, and the community can come together to learn and share (par. 1). Thomas Benton compares the learning commons to the new “village green.” It has become a place where people come together to share and collaborate (par. 25).

Valerie Diggs got students in the door of her library not only by creating her coffee mornings and fine arts lunches, but by ensuring that students felt invited. Ross Todd describes Valerie’s learning commons as a place where everyone feels welcome. He mentions the sign that hangs in the commons with the quote by John F. Kennedy, “We set sail on this sea because there is knowledge to be gained.” He says that this quote lets everyone know that the learning commons is a place for learning with many different resources; it is a place where they are free to seek out different points of view. Through Diggs changes, students found a place where they could comfortably hang out and share ideas with friends and staff (Todd, “There is Knowledge” 55).

Cicchetti kept track of the effects of her library’s transformation. The number of visits to her learning commons increased dramatically after the changes took place. There was also an increase in circulation, making it apparent that the students are coming in the door and liking what they are seeing. There was also an increase in staff usage of

the library, which shows her that the changes affected more than the student body's perception of the library (55).

That increase in staff involvement can also lead to an increase in collaboration. Cicchetti mentions in her article that it was not always easy to get teachers to collaborate. She says that during the first year, she bribed the teachers with cookies to get them through the door. Once she did get the teachers through the door, she showed them opportunities for collaboration across the curriculum, and also showed them databases that they could use in their subject area (54).

Another way to get an increase in collaboration is to offer to help teachers with technology. Sinclair writes about the blended librarian who supports and provides guidance for teachers who seek to use new forms of multimedia in their lessons (504). In Koechlin, Zwaan, and Loertscher's learning commons, "administrators, specialists, and classroom teachers frequent the center as they plan, implement, and assess the various program components" (10).

According Dawn Frazier, collaboration can offer many benefits. It can make librarians and teachers both aware of information literacy and technology standards and how to use those standards across the curriculum. It can offer teachers a chance to work with technology that they might otherwise not have been exposed to, thus creating a richer learning experience for their students. One of the key things collaboration can offer to a library program is the opportunity to put that program in the forefront and show that it is relevant to student achievement and to school improvement. With more staff coming and going through the learning commons, the learning commons becomes the

center for professional development. It is the learning center for the school. The increase in collaboration and professional development also impacts on the curriculum. Through collaboration, teachers and librarians can integrate information and technology use across subjects, thus making information literacy skills merge seamlessly while teaching content area standards (34).

Knodt talks about the lab, or workshop style in the learning commons, which allows students to learn about topics that interest them at their own pace (45). Through this workshop style, students can spend their lunch period learning about volcanoes, or animal habitats through hands-on activities lead by a teacher or a librarian. This is the style that Stedman and Carroll use in their learning commons in New Zealand. Their idea of open-inquiry learning can be applied to any learning in the learning commons. These collaborative lessons include the students as well. They are student-led lessons where the classroom teacher and the librarian help to guide students through the learning process. An open stream of collaboration allows for richer learning experiences like these.

Besides getting students and staff through the door, another benefit of the learning commons is community involvement. Having parents and community members involved in the school improves the learning of students and creates an atmosphere of togetherness and sharing. Koechlin, Zwaan, and Loertscher talk about something as commonplace as parent volunteers. They say that parent volunteers can help the learning commons run more smoothly for everyone (10).

In Valerie Diggs learning commons, the community has been a great support. When her learning commons had its grand opening, there were plenty of community

members who were willing to speak, and community members volunteered their time, food, and their money to help the commons succeed (38). This kind of community involvement helps students to learn that there is a greater picture. It gives students a feeling of involvement in their community and the idea that their community cares about their school and the students.

Bernie Trilling talks about community involvement in the learning commons, or as she calls it, the “learning libratory.” She says that the learning commons offers the community, “a comfortable place at school for presentations, talks, demonstrations, performances, discussions, forums, teleconferences, telepresence meetings, and so forth” (45). She mentions her learning commons offers a wide spectrum of learning opportunities for community members while becoming a part of the students’ learning. The community will help teach the students, while the students are teaching the community in return. For example, students could teach basic computer classes helping those in their community who aren’t as comfortable with technology as the students who use that technology every day. It gives students a venue to showcase their talents and their achievements and allows outside people to come in and see what’s happening at the school. Through community involvement, student involvement, and collaboration, the learning commons can revitalize a library program.

David Loertscher states that libraries and librarians don’t need to be revised, they need to be reinvented (“Flip” 46). He goes on to say that if libraries want to remain relevant they need to rethink how to look at library programs. Librarians and library administrators need to make the “180 degree switch” and look at their library programs

and services through the eyes of their patrons. In her 2010 article, Vicki J. Carter challenges the notion of “out with the old, in with the new,” but states “the union between traditional approaches with innovative method can be slow and painful. To be successful, “those involved must draw upon traditions while exploring the excitement of the future” (15). Is the learning commons the only answer to revitalizing a tired library program? No, but it is a step in the right direction. It is a place where technology can come together with the best teaching practices to increase student learning. It is a community space with a relaxing atmosphere, a place where students want to be and want to learn. The learning commons is always up-to-date and ready to accept and share everyone’s newest ideas, not just of fellow librarians, but of the students, the local community, and the global community. It is constantly changing and growing to meet the needs of those it serves. The learning never stops in the learning commons.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

As this paper describes the benefits and importance of transforming the library into learning commons raises some questions. What are the issues facing school libraries, and how would a learning commons help overcome these issues? What are the components of a learning commons: what makes a library a learning commons, and how does it look? What is the importance of technology in the learning commons? And finally, what impact can the learning commons have on a library program, a school, or a community?

Issues Facing Libraries

With the turn in the economy over the last few years, libraries are feeling the strain. With the increase in budget cuts due to the economy, many schools are removing certified staff from school libraries. Public and academic libraries are feeling budgetary pressure as well.

Another issue is seen in school libraries, where it can be a challenge to keep up with students where technology is concerned. The Google generation, is in many ways ahead of their teachers and of the library staff when it comes to the use of technology. Librarians have been forced to find a way to meet students at their own technological level or take the chance of falling even further behind. This ties into making the library client-centered. For too long some librarians have ignored or overlooked the changing needs of their patrons, insisting that changes and advances in technology will not have an

impact on their jobs, but now is the time when they need to take a good, hard look at what the patrons need and want from the library. If patrons are to keep coming through the doors, they need a reason to walk in.

A big issue for school libraries is that, in the past, librarians have not been seen to have much impact on student achievement. Often they have not created opportunities for collaboration or sought out teachers with whom to collaborate. Librarians need to be seen as educational leaders within their school community to validate their salaries and the existence of their programs.

The learning commons can address these issues and more. Technology being a major component, the library staff can, in many instances, join with the patrons to make sure technological needs are being met. When more patrons are coming into the library, especially in a school setting, there will be an increase in collaboration. When teachers and administrators see the increase in collaboration and what the learning commons can do for student achievement, when it comes time for budget cuts, they might look the elsewhere. Many of the changes needed for a learning commons can be achieved inexpensively, which also helps when it comes time to cut programs.

Components of a Learning Commons

After taking a look at the why's of a learning commons, it is time to take a look at the how's. What are the components that make up a learning commons? Also, how does a learning commons look? A learning commons can look like many things. Throughout the research there are varying examples of learning commons which each look and feel

completely different. The changes can be as simple or complex as needed by simply adding comfortable chairs or booths where patrons can relax and socialize, or by completely redesigning the library from the floor up making separate areas for teens and adults in a public library. Each of these programs has some key things in common.

Flexibility is a major component of the learning commons and is essential to making the commons work. A flexible space is important to meet the needs of students, staff, and patrons. The commons is a comfortable, fluid space that can accommodate a single student or a classroom full of students. It is able to be used for a workshop or for quiet study time, or for both at the same time.

Wireless Internet access is a must. Students will be able to work comfortably from anywhere within the learning commons and will be able to move throughout the commons without losing their work. A learning commons will also be able to provide wireless laptops to their students if the need arises, and will have computer workstations where chairs can be added or removed based upon need.

The learning commons will be comfortable and inviting. Whether it is like Valerie Digg's coffee mornings, or Sargeant and Nevin's restful place for at-risk students, patrons will feel comfortable walking through the door and staying for a while. A learning commons can also be a place where collaboration and professional development take place in a school. In short, it will be able to meet the needs that arise. It will be a moveable, fluid space that meets the needs of students and staff.

As for time, a flexible schedule is also a must. A learning commons could have extended hours in the morning or the afternoon. It will have a flexible schedule where students can come to work when needed without having to schedule a month in advance.

Technology in the Learning Commons

Technology is an essential component to a successful learning commons. One of those issues facing libraries is trying to keep up with the next generation and their knowledge of technology. The learning commons is where technology can be found and where it can be used to its best potential.

Through technology, the learning commons can give a student 24/7 access to resources. A good library Web site is an extension of the learning commons. It offers students and patrons access to library resources like databases, e-books, and student-created content, no matter the time of day or night.

Another important aspect of technology in the learning commons is that it gives everyone accessibility and equity of services. Through technology students with special needs have access to the same resources that other students have. For instance, with computer programs and equipment children with vision problems have the same access as other students. Students who do not have access to computers at home will at school. This gives them the same access as their peers. It creates an even playing field for everyone involved.

To master technology and share it with students and staff, a new kind of librarian is needed. The blended librarian is one who seamlessly blends research skills and

curricular needs with the new technology. He or she meets the students at their level. The blended librarian allows students to create, or help teachers create, lessons that use technology without being about technology. Blended librarians are an essential part of making a learning commons successful.

Some librarians have bridged the technology gap by letting students be their very own techsquad. By putting the students in a position where they can train teachers and staff on technology usage, students have more ownership over their school and their library. This also relieves some of the demand on the librarian to help teachers with technology. No matter how the technology is used, it is an essential part of the learning commons.

Impact of the Learning Commons

So what can the learning commons do for a library program? What kind of impact can it have on a school and community? For some, the learning commons has become the new “village green,” or the place where the community comes together to share, learn, or just to relax. For others, there has been an increase in the usage of their libraries. The learning commons attracts increased visits from students, patrons, and staff.

The increase in staff usage at a school learning commons has other benefits such as increased collaboration and opportunities for professional development. The learning commons can become the center for learning in a school, not just for the students, but for the staff as well. It can also bring in more people from the community to share with

students and open students' eyes to a wider world of learning, while allowing students to share their technology and information literacy skills with community members.

The impact on the library program far outweighs the cost. In these tough economic times, it is imperative that the library programs show the impact they are having and that they make every penny count. Many of these changes can be made quickly and cheaply and can have lasting benefits.

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