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## Memorial Junior High School Palermo Library Learning Commons

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Talk about a revolution and you can count me in. David Loertscher's November 2008 *School Library Journal* article, "Flip this library: School Libraries Need a Revolution, Not Evolution" expresses the need for school libraries to be reinvented in order to remain relevant to today's students. I began the revolution at my school library when I started an after school Cyber Café. Serving up cappuccino, hot chocolate and snacks with laptops and reference assistance has improved student perception of the library and significantly increased library usage. A flip of the library facility could only continue to yield positive results.

Memorial Junior High School is in a first-ring urban suburb of Cleveland. Almost one third of the students receive free/reduced lunch and are considered economically disadvantaged. Students in the seventh and eighth grade performed below state standards in all areas in 2008-2009, the year before the LSTA grant was received. The library facility was dated, poorly laid out, lacking in technology and not fully ADA accessible.

A "180-degree flip" could provide the school with a technologically up-to-date environment in which students could develop 21st century skills. I learned in March 2010 that Memorial Junior High School had been awarded an LSTA Minigrant. I approached the school district administration with a carefully thought-out and documented plan of attack for a library mini-renovation and asked them to consider providing additional funding for some items not covered by the grant, but integral to the proposed plan. They were fully supportive of the project. Before the end of the school year, custodial staff set the renovation in motion by cutting some tall 84" shelving down to 42" and removing some shelving from the interior space of the room. This small step yielded big results by opening up sight lines and allowing light to flood the library. Staff and students were wowed by the new spaciousness and were anxious to see what would happen next.

The result was revealed at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. The library to learning commons flip was wildly successful. The space is comfortable, open and flexible, as well as ADA accessible. Laptops and computers with flat screen monitors are available to accommodate various collaborative groupings. A SMART interactive whiteboard and document camera support the district's "Digital Academy." The changes made to the physical and virtual commons combine to produce a flexible, technology-rich center that focuses on collaboration, inquiry and emerging technologies.

During the renovation, a quote by author Sharon Draper was applied to one wall. The author visited the school in February 2011 and participated in a library dedication. At the conclusion of the event, she climbed a ladder and signed her name beneath the quote: "...don't be afraid to dream beyond where you can see." The LSTA Minigrant was vital in giving Memorial Junior High School staff and students the ability to learn, experiment, collaborate and dream beyond where they can see.

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