Chapter 8
School Librarian Experiences of Learning Management Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This case will describe a school librarian's experiences in assisting the faculty and staff of a public high school as they attempted to adopt school-wide learning management system. A compelling example of change management, this initiative describes solutions to challenges common to many types of schools and libraries. This installation served as a local and early solution in developing teachers' skill in online learning management and asynchronous communication with students outside of school hours. Details include the conditions and procedures of the Moodle implementation, the leadership philosophies which facilitated collaboration, and the change dynamics at the school which led to a successful outcome.

INTRODUCTION

The online learning management system Moodle was planned for installation at a small secondary school located in a typical suburban community on the East coast of the United States. The school served approximately 800 students of ages 13 through 18. This school year had been an especially difficult one for many staff members at the small, state-sponsored public high school of this case. Building construction and recent and impending changes in upper level administrators had combined to create an environment of frequent change unlike that ever experienced by this organization in the past.

While these events in and of themselves were not the source of any particular distress, their attendant decisions, results and direction have greatly impacted the overall organizational culture in obvious ways. An examination of the problems and issues implemented by teacher leaders, support staff, and school administrators in this case can help other schools considering initial use of an online learning management system. However, at times the school's staff seemed to become tired of frequent change, and started to display avoidance behaviors.

A school-wide technological tool ultimately became the solution which brought this group together, at least partially. The school librarian's experiences in influencing the administrators and participating on the implementation are described here in order to share them so that others find common patterns in behaviors and decisions which result in successful initiatives.

Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to describe a potentially familiar public school culture and context in which a learning management system was introduced for school-wide use. Details of the leadership philosophies which permeated the project, the tactics employed by the school librarian to provide professional development to the teachers and manage expectations of the students, and the reflections of those involved can help other schools plan and manage their own technology implementations.

BACKGROUND

Moodle is an open-source learning management system, installed on remote servers and accessed through a traditional web browser. It allows teachers to assign homework to specific groups of students via an asynchronous web portal, as well as to collect student work and grade it in an online-only environment. Like other learning management software, Moodle also allows teachers to create class web pages with announcements and files to share, and it provides a discussion forum for teachers and students to exchange messages on a series of both predetermined and spontaneously generated topics. Managed logins help to keep each course's content private among only those in each class or section.

Minimal literature exists on the adoption or implementation of Moodle or other open-source content management systems for this purpose, nor about the effects of Moodle in professional development of teachers' skills in these areas. Hepburn and Buley (2006) explain that many schools employ open-source packages for their customization features and cost savings only once awareness efforts have succeeded. They exhort that patience is required while open-source initiatives take hold slowly in places like public schools.

Despite its age, Moodle is still a viable free online learning platform, according to a variety of studies worldwide. Yildiz, Tezer, & Uzunboylu (2018) found via a valid and reliable student review that Moodle was a desirable learning platform even beside Blackboard and Canvas. Studies in the U.K. also explain that secondary schools' main motivation for testing and using open source tools was the cost savings (BECTA, 2005); positive results were sustained over time in this review as well. Ureda and Nakamura (2016) also found that robust performance was possible in a limited-budget environment using Moodle in Japan.

Likewise, the affordances of open source software for learning and website management are well-documented (Kumar & Sharma, 2016; Abbitt & Davis, 2010; Liang, Ward, & Xiao, 2008; Pfaffman, 2008). Many believe that open-source solutions will become increasingly more prevalent in public institutions in the coming years (Baumgartner, et al., 2007). The continuation of learning management use in college after high school is also becoming a common feature of students' experiences (Dolch & Zawacki-Richter, 2018).

Teachers' negative perceptions about online learning, or the debate about whether course content should move online, were not an issue in this case, since teachers were the ones initiating the search for a solution which would empower them to increase their individual web presences. However, issues of motivation among the teachers came up later in the process, as the time commitment to implement-

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