

Chapter 10

Going Out on a Limb: The Implementation of the L.E.A.F. Model of Teaching and Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faculty and professional staff members engaged in the development, implementation, and practice of the L.E.A.F. Model of Teaching and Learning at Eastern Kentucky University in the campus 'Incubator Classroom' are working to define the qualities of "the ideal classroom" with the goal of addressing optimum and innovative student learning experiences. The L.E.A.F. Model, an acronym coined by Sweet & Blythe (2010), represents what is theoretically the "Learning Environment for Academia's Future," weaving together current research from education, instructional design, instructional communication, technology, and pedagogy to challenge outdated compartmentalized thinking about what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century. This case therefore represents a unique cross-disciplinary approach to the invention and use of "space" to accommodate this collaborative model while recognizing the complexities of teaching and learning in a fast-changing academic environment.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ROOTS OF L.E.A.F.

Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), located in Richmond, Kentucky, U.S.A., is “a regional, coeducational, public institution of higher education offering general and liberal arts programs, pre-professional and professional training in education and various other fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels” (About EKU). With an emphasis on high-quality instruction, scholarship, and service to its 22-county service region, EKU is known primarily as a teaching institution, offering numerous undergraduate and graduate programs from five distinct colleges, serving nearly 17,000 students. Central to EKU’s aligned mission, vision, and quality enhancement theme is graduating “informed, critical and creative thinkers who can communicate effectively” (QEP).

Teaching and learning experiences at EKU are largely traditional, although in recent years more faculty have recognized the need to develop additional knowledge and skills through the use of technology in the classroom. A number of online courses and online degree programs are also now available to EKU students, reflecting technological trends in educational contexts and the demands for technological innovation worldwide. As such, the Information Technology divisions and Instructional Development Center at EKU have expanded significantly in recent years, working with both faculty and students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the increasingly more technologically sophisticated environments present in today’s higher education.

This case stems back to 2003 when a partnership was formed between EKU’s Information Technology leaders and the Provost to address specific identified needs of developmental students and also to further the university’s retention efforts for students at risk of failing core Math and English courses. One million dollars was invested to address these fundamental concerns, generated through EKU’s student technology fee, and earmarked to pay for demolition and complete renovation of a space in the campus student center.

As is the case many times in campus construction projects which require time, additional funding, and patience, however, the retirement of the campus leaders who began the project and additional political and economic factors required IT to adjust the focus of this initiative several months later to expand the scope of the project to address needs of the general campus population, rather than just for specific student needs. Ultimately, from what remained of an old bowling alley in the basement of the campus student center arose a space named the “Student Technology Commons” (today simply referred to as “Tech Commons”), a facility comprised of a 45-workstation computer lab, a wireless lounge area with projector and interactive whiteboard technology, and a student-oriented print shop.

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