

Valuable Lessons from My First Makerspace Year

By [Diana Rendina](#) on [08/25/2015](#) • (6)

When I first started my makerspace at Stewart Middle Magnet School [back in January of 2014](#), I was figuring everything out as I went along. The term was still brand new, I couldn't find any maker sessions at conferences, and there were only a handful of other school libraries sharing about their makerspaces. Armed with a couple of books on the growing Maker Education Movement and a



dream to create an engaging environment in my library, I gathered some supplies, put them out there, and waited to see what would happen. My ideas and philosophy were constantly growing and evolving as we tried new activities and formats at my school. Some experiments worked; some failed miserably. But I learned from each and every one as our makerspace grew into an integral part of our library culture. Looking back on the last year and a half, I've realized that there's several essential lessons I've learned in getting our makerspace going. Hopefully they can help save you some stress (and reassure you that everything will be awesome).

Look for inspiration everywhere

There's so many amazing examples of school library makerspaces out there, and there's so much to be learned from all of them. But don't limit yourself to school makerspaces as your sole source of inspiration. Visit public libraries, non-profit hackerspaces, children's museums. Go to a Makerfaire. Watch how a group of children engages in pretend play on a playground. Read books, not just on Maker Education, but on creativity, design, learning spaces, art. Go for walks and look at the space around you. Keep a [Pinterest](#) board of ideas and inspiration you've found. Take photos of everything that moves you. Many of my best ideas have come from the most unexpected places, like a picture of a LEGO wall in a child's

room, chalkboard street art under a bridge in Philadelphia, a magnetic marble run at a science museum. You never know when and where inspiration may strike if you are open to it.

Let others know what you're up to

If no one knows that you're thinking about starting a makerspace, no one will offer to help you. Last year I spoke at a local event about how our makerspace has transformed our library. One of our teachers was at the event. She came up to me afterwards and told me she was so excited about what we were doing; she had no idea all of these activities were happening in our library. And this was after our makerspace had been around for a year! Clearly, I was not communicating to all of my teachers what was going on in the library.

It's vital to share your vision with everyone, including administration, teachers, students, parents, community, etc. If you make your passion contagious, others will want to help you reach your goals. You might find yourself with donations of LEGOs, or a parent volunteer who wants to teach the kids to solder, or an administrator sharing about your program with the district. But none of that will happen if you keep your ideas to yourself.

Listen to student voice from the beginning

You need to remember that the makerspace doesn't belong to you; it belongs to your students. Let them have voice and input from the very beginning -they may have ideas you've never even thought of. You want to create a space that will support their passions and interests. One student told me of his idea to have a wall where students could paint pictures all day. We talked about whether or not we could get a place like that to work in our space, and eventually, I found out that the student was mainly desiring a space to create art. That conversation eventually lead to painting an entire wall with whiteboard paint so that students could doodle and draw. It wasn't exactly the original idea the student had, but it lead to an amazing creative space for our students.

Make it unique for your space

Since I began sharing about our makerspace, I frequently receive well-meaning requests for a list of supplies to purchase when starting a makerspace. And while it's fine to seek advice on

different types of tools and materials, I fear that some of these requests are simply looking for a cut-and-paste makerspace, a shopping list of tools that will instantly create innovation in their schools. A makerspace should be unique to its school. No two makerspaces should be exactly the same. There's so many factors to consider: your student population, your school culture, your curriculum, what types of learning and activities you want to support. All of these things need to be considered in planning what to stock your space with. It should be as unique and one-of-a-kind as your school and your students.

Don't wait until you are ready

You will never have the perfect budget. You will never have the perfect space layout or exactly the right supplies. Don't let yourself use the excuse that you aren't ready yet. It's perfectly okay (and maybe even ideal) to start small. Maybe you just add an arts and crafts center for now. Or a tech take-apart station. Maybe you put some donated LEGOs out on a table. You don't have to make a giant supreme commitment to start a makerspace in your library. Start with what you have and work from there. You'll learn so much along the way :)