

Working Shops: Developing Authentic Use of Technology

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One of the most significant challenges that confronts those who wish to integrate technology tools in schools is how to create a meaningful, broad, and sustainable impact. In dealing with this challenge, researchers often overlook or undervalue the role of the teacher in the development and deployment of technology to support learning.

In order for teachers to guide and support their students in using educational technologies more effectively and meaningfully, the teachers themselves must be learners. They need to learn and assess the technologies, gauge the effectiveness of these technologies in various learning situations, and, in light of these experiences, rethink how to approach the processes of teaching and learning. But for this complex and difficult process to occur, the school itself must be reconceptualized as a learning organization -- one in which all members are actively engaged in a learning process rather than separating learning from teaching.

Through the collaborative work of teachers at New Vista High School in Boulder and researchers at the Center for LifeLong Learning and Design at the University of Colorado/Boulder, a model of organizational learning called the Working Shop has been developed and is being implemented. Drawing on other successful organizational learning models (e.g., apprenticeships, artists' studios, and scientific laboratories), the Working Shop envisions and supports learning as an integral element of doing work and creating educational products. Working Shop processes include regular, continuous work sessions, collaborative learning, mastery and application of tools, mixed levels and kinds of knowledge, and making use of diverse experiences and ideas, all of these focused by the goal of creating projects and curricula (the educational products of the Working Shop).

With modest grant support New Vista and the L3D Center, joined by the School of Education at the University of Colorado/Boulder, have undertaken a one-year project for implementing Working Shops. Learning teams, each consisting of four to six members from the three institutions, will work throughout the year to design and experiment with the projects and curricula they create. We believe this work will demonstrate an effective strategy that not only obtains meaningful and sustainable integration of technology in schools but also re-shapes the fundamental nature of schooling.