

STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

A New Twist on Technology

As told by Michael Jay, Educational Systemics, Inc., Bellingham, WA to Suzie Boss

Children are often our best teachers when it comes to understanding how technology can best support learning.

An inner-city school in Columbus, Ohio, offers an excellent example. This is a technology-impooverished school, where students and teachers have had limited access to computers. Through a demonstration grant, one classroom was outfitted with technology. Each student was given an all-in-one desktop computer with an external hard drive.

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Again and again, technicians had to be called in for repairs. The problem was specific and perplexing: the cable between computer and hard drive kept failing. Technicians at first couldn't figure out what was causing this problem. But by observing the class at work, they discovered that students were lifting their computers and twisting them to share what they were doing with fellow students.

When teachers realized what was happened, they changed their instructional approach. Once they recognized the importance of sharing and collaboration for student learning, they had to refine the way they integrated technology into lessons. They began encouraging students to work collaboratively, to critique one another's work, and to team up to conduct online research. Sharing their work was an intrinsic part of students' learning. For teachers, this meant a change in pedagogy. The standard teacher-student relationship had to be redefined and classroom responsibilities had to be negotiated anew.

This episode reminds us that technology poses no barrier to collaboration. Indeed, it's hard to prevent students from sharing what they are learning. Collaboration needs to be encouraged and leveraged to promote student engagement. This means applications for schools need to build the capacity for collaboration into core functionality. Teachers need to plan for this inevitable exchange of ideas and develop learning activities and assessments that will leverage collaboration to make the most of potential benefits.

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ISTE provides leadership and service to improve teaching and learning by advancing the effective use of technology in education.