

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Site Strategy

Preparing for the Summer

While most members of the general public believe that teachers are well paid (i.e., teachers make more than they do), and that teachers receive three (3) months of paid vacation; we know that teachers spend the summer gearing up for the next school year (without compensation).Sidebar Even though some of our colleagues are able to take Caribbean Cruises or travel Europe (London, Paris, Moscow or Rome) and take tax deductions for a portion of the trip spent in study, and spent in the development of instructional materials; the general public thinks that all teachers get paid to spend all three months in leisure-based activities.

And, if teachers are lucky enough, school district and campus administrators keep their promise and assign them to the same grade/ content area that they were expecting (meaning that the work done over the summer wasn't wasted).

A wiser (risk mitigation) strategy is to build generic, modular, multi-level strategies during the summer…to provide the flexibility (and luxury) of being ready for any assignment for the next school year.SidebarClassroom Toolkit presents our evaluation of the year in review at the end of each school year. An honest assessment of what went right, of what went wrong, and of where we can improve is best completed as soon as we can catch our breath following our project year.

Classroom Toolkit's publication year coincides with the calendar year, but our focus parallels the school year.

Classroom Toolkit Summer StrategyClassroom Toolkit has evolved into a "multiple-personality" movement where…Our Website Provides…

Basic classroom planning information

Reusable modules

Graphic Organizer starter kit

Our Newsletter provides…Teacher empowerment

Stress Management information

Teaching Tips

Self-Help information

Bargains and Resources

Satirical commentary about the politics of education

Rants against NCLB, and appeals to get the odious law repealedClassroom Toolkit "Tells it like it is" and we keep the political rhetoric confined to our Blog and Newsletter.The Good, the Bad and "Needs Improvement"Positive…

Classroom Toolkit's content continues to blaze trails in honest and practical strategies for teachers. Our modular approach to Open Source instructional materials continues to provide unique value.

Negative…

Some of our articles are too political (or controversial) for teachers to share with campus or district decision-makers…a sharing that would benefit students if those administrators launched realistic, adequately funded, instructional improvement projects.

Some of our articles describe the "behind the scenes" And, there is some measure of stress involved for teachers who learn that the causes of many of their problems are school system generated. Teachers who learn how the problem can be resolved; but, who cannot do anything about the problem because "the system is the problem.quot; may experience un-needed, undeserved stress.Needs Improvement…

The major difficulty with the "body of knowledge" that Classroom Toolkit has created is that finding focused information among the webs of threads (articles, pages, postings) is difficult on a limited time schedule, i.e., the kind of schedule that teachers face in their daily marathons.

In addition, as the materials were written over a period of time, they represent a huge amount of material, i.e., 108 articles per year in the Newsletter, alone. And, our articles are lengthy, often academic.

One other issue emerged…many of our Website visitors come to download our creative materials [e.g., Daily Oral Language Samples (DOL), Daily Oral Math Samples(DOM) and Daily Oral Vocabulary Samples (DOV)].

This means that we are spending more time (writing our newsletter) than in creating more of the materials (instructional content) that teachers are looking for.Volunteer DisconnectClassroom Toolkit was designed to be a volunteer effort in the same way that programmers volunteer to create Open Source software packages.

But, we have not enlisted any volunteers. One volunteer would allow us to produce twice as much, three volunteers would allow us to produce four times as much, etc. Without volunteers working on our materials, the development of usable content is slower than we planned.Sidebar

Of course, this "volunteer disconnect" is exactly what keeps many teachers working at an effort level that is more time consuming and stressful than needed.

What we are referring to is the "volunteer spirit" where teachers pitch in and work together. Teachers working together (collaborating), sharing the labor and distributing the load is the easiest, non-technological, non-budgetary strategy for increasing teacher output (productivity).

Of course Classroom Toolkit's strategy of standardizing materials and building reusable modules drives high levels of teacher collaboration…even from other states, countries or continents.

If teachers want to decrease the amount of work in order to increase personal quality time, then working together is the quickest real strategy. And, starting this summer is just the time to take action. Classroom Toolkit's Summertime Focus Our summertime focus will be on updating our Website to…

Provide a drill-down overview of our materials
Make finding materials easier

Make sifting through our article repository easier This full site update will take two months and we will have to learn some new programming skills. The goals of the site update include…

Easier access to online teacher tools (our toolkits)
Easier online access to our eBooks

Links to…

Tools
Resources

Reviews

Promotions
Self-Sustained Hosting Our site is now financially self-sufficient after the move to a different Web hosting company. The cost of hosting the site is low enough that small amount of money that our Google(TM) ads generate covers the hosting fees.

Volunteer Now! If you believe in our Open Source for free instructional materials project, and if you have some writing skills; feel free to volunteer to share your materials with the world.

Sidebar Please be sure to check with your employer to make sure that you can legally share materials that you create, even materials that you create at home, on your own time. This restriction may not be fair; but, it will probably take federal and state legislation before our country comes to understand that the materials that are developed by our public schools belong to "the public."

Until then, please check because many school district administrators, living with intense "poverty consciousness" and the "budget-shortfall blues" react in a very stingy way…even for things like employees sharing teacher-created instructional materials that the school district that they work for don't "ethically" own.

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