

Friday, October 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

The "90% Solution"

Teachers complain that they want a 100% solution because they can't leave any child behind (bad pun intended).

They also note that administrators frown on leaving any child (or group of children) in the lurch, and focusing upon only the students that are close to passing the high-stakes test offers a disservice to every other student. But the "90% Solution" is not about students at all. The "90% Solution" is about perfecting your abilities and becoming a Master Teacher.

And, the "90% Solution" is not more of the "You have to give 110% to your job, to accomplish more" motivational "trash-talk."

Implementing the "90% Solution" in your teaching actually streamlines your workload and focuses your efforts; giving you more time for your family and other quality endeavors.

What is the "90% Solution?"

The "90% Solution" is a strategy of perfecting one important teaching skill at a time. The "90% Solution" is learning to implement one technique very well&hellip;practicing until you are an expert at it.

Of course, you maintain your level of quality performance in everything else that you do. You just single out one strategic area and do what it takes to improve in that one area. Sounds Easier than it Is The idea here is to concentrate, focus&hellip;easy for teachers, right?

But, other inviting strategies (distractions) must be ignored. New "magic bullet" solutions, even those high-prices speakers and acclaimed authors&hellip;concepts and innovations with promises that fire you up with enthusiasm. You must ignore them. Maybe you can implement these later, if you need to.

And, the professional development training that you are ordered to attend, if you cannot incorporate parts of the course into the professional skills that you are targeting for self-improvement; you must be abandon these&hellip;at least for now.

The "90% Solution" is about doing what it takes to become good, "expert-level good," at one teaching skill.

And, some skills may take a long time, maybe a couple of years to perfect.

But, you will never become a Master Teacher by following your current path of "trying everything" and repeating only the "stuff that works."

Distractions and diffused talents leave you standing in the "dunce corner as a master of nothing," instead of in the Master Teacher Winner's Circle. Antidote for Activity-Driven Teaching Activity-driven teaching is the teaching "strategy" that 80% of your colleagues employ.

Activity-based teaching means following the textbook as a lesson planning framework, and finding worksheets, projects and lesson plans that fit in&hellip;so there is enough work to keep students busy.

Activity-driven lesson planning maximizes the amount of work that teachers must do. Activity-driven instruction is the polarity-opposite to the strategic and streamlined systems that Classroom Toolkit advocates.

Sidebar Links to previous Classroom Toolkit Newsletter articles on teacher planning&hellip;

Application and Performance: The "Flip Side" of Planning

Planning Backwards: The Quickest Way to "Full Steam Ahead"

The Twelve Worst Planning Practices

Create a Master To-Do Log/ List System

How to do More in Less Time: Why do More when Doing Less gets Better Results?

Over worked and ineffective teachers invest time in scattered activities, like bees flitting from flower to flower in a garden. But even bees know better than to sample rose juice here, daffodil nectar there, tulip pollen over yonder&hellip;because this conglomeration of ingredients produces substandard honey.

Instructional results from an activity-based strategy tend to be of low quality.

The problem is that in doing so many things, time isn't available to examine the nuances, details and intricacies needed to perfect the requisite skills.

In other words, teachers need to become "geniuses" at one thing. In this case, "genius" means the ability to know everything there is about a specific strategy. What to Choose to "Get Right" There is "doing" and there is "doing it right." What the "90% Solution" focuses upon is "doing it right" (i.e., executing perfectly, taking action at the highest skill level) so that 90% of the time, execution is very right.

The biggest obstacles to the "90% Solution" include: Impatience - teachers want every student to learn everything by whatever method the teacher decides to adopt

Frustration - teachers see that a technique didn't work and blame the technique or the students

Acting First, Thinking Later - Focusing on getting through the day instead of doing things in a better way each day

Clumsy Execution - "Getting it right" was more difficult than imagined

Taking the Road of Least Resistance - teaching the easy stuff first, but maybe never getting to the challenging, long-lasting, important stuff

Using the Incorrect Benchmark - targeting student outcomes instead of looking to see how your own strengths can be made more effective

Wrong Goal - targeting the goal of keeping students busy instead of targeting how to perform better as a teacher

Measuring Outcomes based upon Colleagues Performance - colleagues are perfecting different skills of their own.

Besides, they cannot be trusted to share the challenges they overcame when they brag about how successful they are

Lack of Confidence - forming, "Since results were mediocre, the problem must be with me" options about your performance

Avoiding the Hard Thinking of Planning - taking the easiest path instead of analyzing what will produce the best results

Believing in "Working Smarter" or believing in "Working Harder" - neither approach delivers. Working more creatively, artistically, and skillfully are the correct targets

Choosing what to Become Good At Teachers focus on improving the wrong skills because their professional training teaches them to look for errors to remediate. This is the wrong approach for improving personal performance!

Choosing start with our weakest areas for teaching success is fallacy. Instead, start with strengths and perfect talents based upon those strengths. Compensate using strengths and bypass weaknesses. Use what we have with passion.

Sidebar See the Classroom Toolkit Book Review, *Teach with your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire their Students*

Not Back to Basics but Back to Fundamentals A few years ago (before the high-stakes testing craze), there was a "Back to Basics" fad; the purported solution to low student achievement.

But, teaching the basics targeted a "left-handed, sinister" approach; a distraction.

The correct approach: Perfecting teaching fundamentals.

The "Back to Basics" approach was sinister because it distracted from the real question, the question that no one dared ask, "Which teachers are skilled and which teachers are not?" Or, "What do the teachers of students that excel do differently than teachers whose students stagnate?"

Besides being an "off-limit" topic for investigation (especially in teacher union dominated states), the question was never asked because discovering the answer would be too costly (or too embarrassing) to find out.

On the face of it, to the untrained, casual, or twice-a-year formal (district administrator) observer; the Master Teacher and the seasoned, but ineffective teacher are doing "almost" the same thing.

Sidebar The observer would have to be more skillful than the Master Teacher (unlikely), and the teacher would have to brief the observer before the observation concerning what to look for (also unlikely since the teacher would not want to clue the observer about what might need to be improved during the lesson delivery).

The benefit of most teacher observation exercises is to weed out those teachers who lack basic teaching competencies.

These systems are not designed to assist teachers in perfecting unique and personal talents. Myth of the "Magic Bullet;"

Teachers look for the "Magic Bullet" Method that will "really work." But this is a "wishful thinking myth."

The reality: "What you Choose to do Doesn't Matter" (that much).

The real issue is "How you do it."

Master Teachers, if ordered to teach using specific materials or administrator-pushed methods, will "tweak and alter" those methods so that students excel. Teachers of lesser caliber will struggle (and students' performance will be mediocre), no matter how many high-quality materials and support resources they can use.

If teachers have a smorgasbord of materials, the approach of the successful teacher is instructive.

The Master Teacher chooses a few materials from the stockpile, and uses them skillfully. The less effective teacher continues to swap materials, always looking for the one "special solution" to those "low-learning outcome ills."

The difference is in execution, not quality resources.

The Master Teacher can teach, no matter what what the challenge. Summary The "90% Solution" is about doing the right teaching strategies "super well." This means perfecting individual skills in one area at a time, adding to the repertoire only when the first skill area reaches the 90% level of effectiveness.

Hopping from one strategy to another distracts less-skilled teachers from focusing on a single area of improvement.

Instead, these teachers languish in a "sea of luke warm" mediocrity.

But, don't look for someone else's "Magic Method." Look at your strengths, and ask students how those strengths could help them learn.

Pay attention, then execute, observe and assess, execute, observe and assess again.

It is the "Execute-Observe-Assess" Cycle, repeated with the intention of improving instructional management and instructional delivery that enables teachers to perfect their skills.

Attention to the littlest detail, that is the mark of "genius." It is the mark of a Master Teacher, too.

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

**Rapport Building: How Personal can your Professional Persona Be?**

Rapport is the degree that you are in harmony with the people around you. For teachers, building rapport with students is crucial. But, rapport is more than getting along.

"Getting along" is like playing chords on a guitar, piano or organ. The right notes seem to fit, while the wrong notes grate and irritate.

But "rapport" is like the hum of a tuning fork. The tuning fork vibrates at the same frequency as the note, and the tuning fork even sets up a sympathetic vibration when the correct note is sounded. A "Tuning Fork" Listening Mode with your Students The idea here is to connect with your students on a frequency that is in harmony. This is accomplished by attunement at an unconscious and at a higher-consciousness level. This can be described as an "intuitive level."

Of course, you must like your students and respect them, or the rapport that you building will be short-lived and backfire. Faking rapport is worse than being mean and disagreeable with your students. You can be forgiven for being "uptight and an ignoble \_\_\_." (four or more letter words could be inserted here).

The reason is that faked rapport leaves an unconscious discomfort, and the unconscious mind is slow to forgive.

It is possible for the conscious mind to rationalize away distrust and "give the rapport-deceiver the "benefit of the doubt."

But, the unconscious reaction retains a pure memory and remains unswayed by rationalizations. Intuitive Listening:

More than Reading Between the Lines" Intuitive listening with the intent to build rapport separates "winning-circle"

Master Teachers from come-in-later, bringing up the rear "also rans."

Some teachers use this skill without practice, and their colleagues believe that the rapport builder has a "magic formula" that accounts for their success.

Other teachers might describe the observable part of what the Master Teacher does as "charisma."

But, charisma is a kind of rapport. And although rapport can not be earned, it can be lost. First Gain Rapport, then Lead Some fearful and confidence-lacking folks may object that building rapport is dangerous because the teacher could lock in to the negative thoughts and emotions of damaged and disturbed students.

But, this fear is groundless if the teacher is grounded in their own self-esteem.

Of course, a teacher that lacks self-esteem and holds a diminished self-concept should not be in the classroom, anyway. There are far easier and less rigorous ways to make a lot more money than to teach. And, our children deserve teachers who are people at their best. Sidebar It may be against employment laws for school district Human Resource Officers and Interview Committees to ask about emotional handicaps and mental illness, but mental health is a prerequisite for classroom teaching success. What the teacher does once rapport is established is to move from where rapport is established to a more mentally healthy, more harmonious, more functional level of awareness. The teacher moves to this level within himself or herself, and students follow suit.

If rapport is solid and firmly established, then students will move along to a more healthy level, drawn by the internal focus of strength and confidence that the teacher holds. Sidebar This process is similar to the Mutual Storytelling Technique, only the rapport process remains non-verbal, silent and below the conscious level of student awareness while the Mutual Storytelling Technique is verbal and rational. For a description of the Mutual Storytelling Technique, see. If the Strategy is not Conscious and Rational, Can it be Professional? Teachers have a subservient and unfettered trust in academic, cognitive, concept-oriented thought. It almost seems to be "blasphemy" for a teacher to espouse an intuitive strategy that bypasses the conscious mind. Worse, it seems sacrilegious to trust in a professional concept that does not rely on a "theory."

However, feel free to attach whatever theory you wish to your rapport building practice.

Your supervisor and colleagues are better left to form their own opinions about your stellar success with your students. Let them believe that you are a "born leader" or an outstanding coach. It is too difficult to explain that you just care about your students and that you trust in non-verbal, intentional communication.

Besides, the implied imperative at work creates difficulties with your colleagues.

Sidebar Here is how the implied imperative functions to impair collegial relationships. You describe just how easy it is to care about your students and how easy it is to trust in the basic goodness and personal capacity of your students. Of course, your colleagues are achieving less than quality results with their classroom management, "Don't smile before Christmas" approach. So, your describing the ease of the rapport building strategy is bound to irritate them because they will assume that you are "putting them down" by claiming that rapport building is "easy" when they are encountering so much difficulty. Keep these rapport-building secrets to yourself. They are secrets, not because they shouldn't be revealed; but because you should not reveal that you are using them. Caution: Never Tell Students that you are Building Rapport The same logic and rationale holds about explaining the rapport-building process to your students.

You must never tell your students what you are doing. Revealing the process to your students allows the conscious minds of your students to begin making excuses, building rationalizations, generating doubt and inculcating fear into

your relationship.

Rapport building must be kept "out of sight and out of mind (the conscious mind),"&hellip;the more secretive to the conscious minds of your students, the more professional the practice.

So, intend to build rapport on non-verbal, unconscious and higher-consciousness levels by listening to the trust and harmony between you. Let the vibrations be connecting you to your students be like a tuning fork, intuitive. And hold the intention to connect to your students until these vibrations or intuitions are well established and solid. Then, move your consciousness in a positive, caring, loving, friendly and supportive way toward the best self-concept that you can muster.

In the process, you may also become amazed at what your students have to teach you.

Positive rapport is a two-way street.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 05:00

Sunday, August 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

### **Build an Invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit**

Teachers encounter stressful situations, often minute-by-minute.

Sometimes this is the result of student activity, sometimes the byproduct of colleague interaction, sometimes the stress is set off by parents' protests, sometimes a response to a principal's foibles or pathology.

But, teachers need to remain calm, composed and in control. These stresses are inevitable. Friction generates from so many teachers and students brushing closely; rubbing fur the wrong way, stroking feathers, scraping scales, scratching slime, pricking on another person's quills.

So many peculiarities, so many wants, so many unmet needs. Wishes and intentions come into play to create an environment ripe with conflict, stress and tension.

Every school day does not need to lead to an "emotional meltdown." Each day can be exhilarating, joyful and fun.

The key: The invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day suit that repels stresses and disintegrates tension. Think:

Water bouncing off a duck's back; in the water, but never getting wet. There are three keys to a Well-Fitting Invisible

Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit. The three keys to safe and secure external reaction to the daily stresses of teaching include:

Making a stress-controlled day a personal choice

Distancing yourself from the fray by dissociating any personal involvement, i.e., don't take it personally

Making a game of it. Make the day fun. So, building an invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day suit is part choice and part taking responsibility. But, avoid overdoing this dynamic. The old saw, often attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt (no pun intended) of, "No one can upset you unless you first give them permission," overstates the roles and importance of cognition and choice.

But, why permit the abundant hassle and challenges of a normal workday to steer your mood towards a downhill direction? Even more, why allow upset to stalk you into the next day, or the next week?

The challenge is to get off the "One-Way-Street" of passive, "It's happening to me and I have to control it," and on to the "I take greater charge of my attitudes and control my emotions each day; sometimes, less so; but the trend is for more control and more enjoyment."

**Self-Talk - Nails, Spikes or Daggers: Avoid Puncturing Holes in your Invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit**

In fact, it is possible to dance sweetly through an incident, then "pound and pepper" yourself with negative self-talk once you "figure out the meaning" of what happened. What occurs in this "post-incident assault" on your sanity, peace of mind, and happiness is an incursion into "self-inflicted" scrapnel wounds.

So, why face the original "incident" unscathed, only to scratch, stab and wound yourself afterwards using negative self-talk?

Why allow your self-talk to churn, flood and surge on the inside when you are protected from the outside? Summary: Peace of mind, calm, enjoyment, happiness and fun can be part of your workday; if you work at it.

Building an invisible Teflon®, flack-Jacket, stormy-day suit means protecting yourself by emotional distancing.

And your follow-up task is to manage and control your self-talk to avoid shredding the self-protection that you enjoy.

The benefit of such an approach to self-protection is less stress, greater enjoyment and a more professional demeanor.

Build in all the self-protection that you need, and enjoy the added confidence that you experience when you face workday situations with your invisible Teflon®, flack-jacket, stormy-day suit.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 04:00

Thursday, July 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Peep through the Eyes of a Principal and Broaden Your Perceptions

Teacher open their perceptions to the viewpoints that students carry to school because great teaching hinges upon: Communicating in the language that students understand

Explaining concepts by using relevant examples from students' experience is sound instruction

Sharing appropriate real-life experiences so that students develop the "The teacher was once like me" attitudes

Reframing ordinary experience to a more mentally healthy and emotionally mature interpretation creates a climate for students' growing up But, teachers need to step into the stress-filled world of principals to develop an understanding of the oft-times "war-zone world" of campus administrators. Captain of the Ship-- Struggling not to "Go Down" with it The campus principal is in charge of a couple of dozen, to more than a dozen dozen faculty and staff members.

And, most of those, the faculty members, are found with a independent bent, folks who spend most of their at-school hours in their own quadrilateral fiefdoms.

Teachers are difficult to control, even when their supervisor has them in sight and under thumb; but once they close the door of their classrooms, only the loud wails of (legitimately) complaining students rouse a principal's nose for snooping.

Sidebar The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a weasel-in -the-hen-house law that seeks to prove that our public schools are ineffective. The purpose of this charade is to allow vouchers to be used to pay for students to attend church schools.

Showing that our public schools produce poorer than acceptable results reflects poorly upon the person at the helm, the principal. It is this pressure on the campus principal that teachers must take into account to overcome the natural tendency to place the principal in the "enemy or adversary" category.

Span of Control "Out of Control" The span of control for our schools is out of control. And in the profit-making world, companies that implemented a similar system would fail.

The Span of Control is the number of folks that a supervisor directly supervises. In the business world, this is generally "maxed" out at seven. Sidebar Come to think of it, the span of control for the students that teachers supervise, i.e., class size also exceeds the span of control by three to four times industry standards. What needs to happen is that the "report-to" pyramid needs more layers, so that seven (or less) folks report to the principal...and seven or less people report to each layer.

But, the span of control has to be real.

For example, supervisors must be able to hire and fire, make decisions, and be held accountable for their decisions.

So, a system of department chairpersons and grade-level leaders, acting as title-only lackeys&hellip;responsibility without authority&hellip;figurehead puppets&hellip;achieve no desired, positive outcomes.

This means that principals have authority over too many folks to guarantee effective supervision.

This also means that the number of hours that a campus principal must work each week eclipses the 65 hours that the average teacher works. The missing rungs of the span of control ladder explain most the principal's workload (overload).

First Teacher Reality Check: Principals spend more hours working than you do.

Competitive Edge Since few staff members understand just how much work that principals do, lots of folks would like to become principals.

What this does is put a job replacement pressure, similar to the pressure that teachers feel, on principals. Principals have to produce to keep their jobs.

The real competitive edge should be to help teachers perform better. Unfortunately, competition for the principal's job comes from...Home schooling, Independent schools, Charter Schools

NCLB's threat of vouchers (given to allow students to leave and enter private schools)

Competition for limited funds within the district

Competition with other principals to display (test) results

Competition to get the better teachers to transfer into their campus School Status Quo and School Reform Probably every principal in the nation would agree that school reform was an important goal, if reform meant that teachers would perform better and student test scores would increase.

But, a far fewer number of principals might agree that school reform starts with the principal mending ways, changing tactics, working smarter.

But school reform also means: Content area standards for every subject

Curriculum frameworks and curriculum standards

High quality, relevant professional development

Specialized programs for Special Populations of students

Specialized progress reporting to parents Second Reality Check: Principals face pressures on every side that conspire to prove that they are inadequate, pressures similar to the pressures that teachers face.

Corollary: Principals experience pressure to learn more (participate in professional development) to learn: More about

Technology Integration and using the Internet for instruction

National and State standards that affect the teaching of each content-area subject

Methods to communicate with and to involve parents in their children's education  
Dependent upon the Efforts and Performance of Others to Show Competence  
Principals depend on high-performing teachers to spark students to ever higher levels of performance.

This means that principals have two levels of dependency, while teachers have only one level of dependency to be accountable for.

But, where a teacher depends upon only 20 to 30 students, a principal may depend on 120 teachers and 1,200 students...and each must show improvement so that the collective, measurable progress paints the quality of the principal's supervision in a positive light.

Final Reality Check: The principal depends upon the performance on two dependency levels, rather than the single level that plagues teachers.  
Summary  
When teachers place themselves in the heavy duty work boots of campus principals, they discover that the pressures affecting principals are much like those that affect teachers...only heightened and more difficult.

This leads to the obvious question: "Why would someone want a principal's job with so much stress and so little control?"

The money isn't all that great, either since a software or network engineer without a college degree can earn more (in business and industry) after about the same amount of relevant experience.

And while individual motivations vary, we can be grateful that there are enough dedicated (or naive) educators that are willing to step up to the plate and face the major league challenges of campus leadership.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 04:00

Monday, June 30, 2008

## Teacher Survival Strategies

The Skills and Technology of "Getting Down on Yourself"

There is a skill and a technology for "Getting down on yourself."

What does this mean? First, "Getting down on yourself" is a kind of intrapersonal scolding that you perform to get yourself to do better the next time&hellip;

Or, to get yourself to do something that you failed to do&hellip;

Or, to get yourself to start something that you have been putting off, or avoiding.

So, what distinguishes "Getting down on yourself" from a "pep talk?"

"Pep talks" are positive, "You can do it," "It's a piece of cake," encouragements that you plant as you are attempting a task. Of course, the task must represent a challenge, otherwise, if the job is actually that easy, the only reason for the pep talk is because you don't believe in your abilities.

What distinguishes a "Getting down on yourself" episode is the harshness or severity of the internal dialog. The dialog also contains elements of a put down, complaint, criticism (maybe a reflection of the way your disciplining parent talked to you). (Maybe your reaction to yourself, now, is similar to to your reaction to your parents, then.)

These dialogs can be characterized by self-talk statements like&hellip;"How could you be so (stupid, dumb, idiotic)&hellip;"

"I can't believe you did that."

"Where are your brains?"

"You idiot, you should have&hellip;"

"You should have known better than to have&hellip;"

"What in the world were you thinking?"

"How in the world did you expect to \_\_\_ if you \_?"

Etc., ad infinitum&hellip;Side bar Come to think of it, this is the same language that has been heard in the hallway, spoken by teachers "kind" enough to scold students privately, or through the closed door for teachers that "Have had it" with one particular "thorn-in-their-paw" student.

Of course, this particular kind of incident is relegated to the "old days" of corporal punishment and "paddle to the seat of the pants" justice. Such scenarios would never be perpetrated in modern, enlightened schools&hellip;at least not when students (or their parents) can sue for infringements upon the student's civil rights. And, just like the berated, belittled, recalcitrant student will live to offend another day; unphased by the teacher's diatribe; so too will the stubborn and obstinate part of yourself "backslide, backbite, even backstab" and create problems for your future success.

Treat yourself kindly when you "Get Down on Yourself"

Treating yourself in a "mean manner" is ineffective (except for the devoted masochist, but that is another problem).

Mean, stern, harsh-discipline-type words and "get tough self-talk" fail to create the supportive internal environment that you need to motivate yourself.

One clue, "If you would have been embarrassed to say out loud to others what you are saying to yourself in private, then watch your intrapersonal dialog, too.

But, involve all parts of yourself, your positively and negatively motivated selves, in a productive, negotiated settlement.

Allow "win-win-win-win" management of your self, and gain the internal cooperation that you need to engage for your success.

Building a kindly attitude to all portions of yourself will "take the edge off" your "Getting down on yourself."

And who knows, you might come to like yourself as much as you like that loveable crew that you call your students.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Saturday, May 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Getting Classroom or Campus Grants: It's a lot Easier than you Think, If you "Think Like a Grant Benefactor" Grant writing and grant-getting (garnering grants) carries a mystique that prevents many "ordinary" teachers from going after the money. Of course, going after the money is what most folks think about, and this "narrow thinking" limits their grant acquisition success. Sidebar Some folks believe that grants offer "free money." This is far from true. What grants offer is plenty of extra, uncompensated work. And, if the grant funding amount is small, you might be able to earn more for your instructional program by flipping burgers, part time; at the nearest fast, pretending-to-be-food drive-through site. But, getting grants is easy, if you change your mind set, and if you think like the agency or foundation that is offering the grant. What you want to think about is what the grantor wants to have happen with their money. What beneficial end result is important to them? What will cause joy and happiness to burst out in the hearts and minds of the people that represent the granting agency. And, what brings joy to the folks that support or sponsor the grant organization? Answer: Results that further their agency's or organization's mission. The Grant-Giving Agency's Mission What then if the mission of those folks matches the work that you do in your classroom? What happens is that those money-laden folks can't wait to give you money and track the results that you achieve! Grant funding is that easy, as long as you stay in tune with the grant funder's mission. If you believe that garnering grants is difficult & think again. Why Grant-Getting is Easy Grant-getting is easy because most of your competitors (for the grant dollars) focus upon the money, and what tricks they intend to perform to get the money. This is similar to the child-like mentality that we see portrayed on television when "self-absorbed, one-track-mind" males pursue makeup-laden sex-objects in bistros, bars and clubs. Sure it is easy to make fun of these stereotypes, and their intentions are betrayed by their every antic. But, the "money-grubbing" antics of your competitors' "my needs are all I know" are just as transparent (and humorous) in the eyes of the grant-giver's staff. And remember, needs don't count & not to the grant givers, and not for your students. Everyone has needs. Your students are just as deserving as every other teachers' students. What will distinguish your proposal is that you offer solutions to problems! And avoid begging. Think confidence and strength. Portray an attitude of, "This idea is so good, and the time is so right, so somebody (agency, organization, foundation, benefactor) will be quick to see the benefits and sign on to this project." Avoid negative thoughts and statements. A "I have not gotten anywhere with the dolts that run the place where I work" attitude is a grant deal-sinker. Instead, gather support from every higher-up that you can. Get them to write letters of support containing something to the effect of, "This is the first project that our district would fund on our own, if we had the discretionary funds to do so." And never communicate anything negative about your school district. Grant agencies know that anyone that would "talk trash" about their employer would do likewise about them (the granting organization) whenever the grant project implementation turned sour. (And grant implementation always turn sour.) Projects never progress as planned. Grant projects turn out to be a lot more work than the grantees ever imagined. Etc. What to Do & Here are the guidelines that you should follow in order to receive lots of grant funding. Remember that success breeds success, and the more grants that you acquire, them more that you will receive.

Also remember that a real grant requires lots of uncompensated time that you have to spend on record keeping, paper work, purchasing, documentation, follow-up report writing & as well as the grant implementation itself. (Are you sure that you want to take on that much extra work for no additional pay?) And, oh yes, the rework (Plan B) that is required to squeeze any success at all out of the project. This is because successful grant projects are more rare than grant-giving folks like to announce. After all, they funded many projects, but only a few "pan out." To gear up for grant success & Show that your students are on the verge of success at whatever the grant-giver's mission is. In order to do this, find out what the grant-giver's mission is. Look at annual reports, Websites, brochures, previous grant recipients, anything with clues, etc. Research Grant Funding Agencies and Foundations. Know what the organization is backing, and what the agency wants to accomplish based upon its mission. There is no profit in completing a grant application for a grant that mismatches your curriculum situation. For example, if the grant targets Japanese students and you teach a bilingual class of Mexican-Americans and Central American immigrants, you are wasting your time (and the time of the grant reviewer that must attach a reject slip to your proposal). Then, once you find a grant agency with a good fit to your instructional program, read the grant's Request for Proposal (RFP) the way that a nuclear physicist reads a technical paper, i.e.; line by line, with margin notes, by creating charts and checklists, by building timelines. This is a time to "suspend" your speed reading skills & read slowly and deliberately. Read for clues the way that a Crime Scene Investigator reads clues. Avoid reading the way that an English teacher reads & i.e., set aside literary (and other) criticism. Another description of this process, "Do your homework as though you were the most paranoid person you know (except your supervisor)." Develop checklists that include every single requirement of the grant. Make sure that you can accomplish each of these. This is super-important. Don't ask for the money if you can't deliver on the grant project. Identify budgets and project partners, and check with them to ensure that they can 1.) work with the grant during the grant timeline, 2.) offer support and value 3.) add to the perceived expert status of the project team. Round up

evaluation help. Grant agencies expect that someone else, generally with a positive reputation and independent status will review and evaluate the progress that you made during the grant implementation process. Make sure that the grant evaluator has the credentials to perform this service. Prepare all Letters of Support, budgets, project plans, Scope of Work, project specifications, Requirements documents and other mandatory materials. Make sure that the project budgets include indirect costs, which are costs added to the project (or subtracted from the money you have to work with) to cover incidental costs such as electricity, extra janitorial service, delivery of project items, whatever&hellip; Be aware that partner organizations are likely to tack these charges on to their participation budgets, too. These costs can run for the teen-percents to large fractions. Be careful to check this out! Be prepared for site visits from the Grant-Giving agency, if these are required. Hidden Pitfalls You are undertaking a huge commitment, without financial compensation. But, also be prepared to give away any status credit that you earn to your supervisors and other higher-up school district executives. After all, they won't allow you to move a finger on any grant without their approval. And, in most cases, only the Superintendent (or designee) are allowed to obligate a school district (contract with the Grant-Giving agency). So, while you do the "lion's share of the work," you receive a "kitten's share" of the credit. Still, garnering grants creates a fabulous addition to your resume or curriculum vita. And grants that target fantastic benefits to your students are worth pursuing. When you find a grant that is a congruent fit for your instructional program, go for it!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Web 2.0: Do Teachers Dare Indulge?

Subtitle: Prepare for Web 3.0!

There is a lot of hype about Web 2.0. And, teachers encounter the gamut. Beliefs range from&hellip;Web 2.0 is the missing key that will allow technology to revitalize education

Web 2.0 is what students are already doing, and teachers will be left in the dust if they fail to capitalize on the resource

Web 2.0 is the key technology that will finally allow computers and software to replace teachers

Web 2.0 can "bring up test scores" when those lazy, shiftless, check-swiping teachers can't be trusted to deliver accountable learning outcomes for all students

Or, Web 2.0 is hype and a waste of time, just like the failed "Technology Integration" movement

In fact, Web 2.0 hype is just another attempt by folks who don't understand education to bring back the blighted technology integration world under new clothes

&hellip;On and on&hellip;

Whatever your take on Web 2.0, is it here to stay?Flip Answer: Web 2.0 will soon be Replaced with Web 3.0First question: What does "Web 2.0" mean?

Answer: Who know?

But, what the term Web 2.0 refers to is the ability of software that is run on some "Social Network" sites to attract visitors. Even more, these sites motivate visitors to connect, reveal personal and private details about themselves, upload pictures, leave comments, rate and evaluate materials, share links, and a bunch of other stuff that hasn't been invented or perfected yet.

Of course, the downside is that today's social site oasis dries up, and the hoards of thirsty caravans converge on the next fad focus-of-the-day.

The questions that teachers need to ask are:What measurable curricular outcomes have been tested and have been shown to increase with the use of these technologies?

What instructional targets and student learning are produced by these strategies that cannot be done better, faster, easier, more economically with other strategies?

How does this technology save time and effort for students and teachers?

If this technology is adopted, what technology and non-technology has to be given up?

What infrastructure is needed, and what infrastructure support is required to fully utilize this technology?

What could go wrong if these technology tools are adopted, and what plans are in place to ensure that adaptive and replacement strategies can be deployed before adverse outcomes are realized?

In short: What are the benefits and costs of hopping on the Web 2.0 "bandwagon?"

In fact, these are the exact, same questions that teachers need to ask about any instructional resource, even "dark-age tools" such as chalk, paper, notebooks and crayons.

Unfortunately, these are the questions that Web 2.0 advocates seldom answer. Instead, they talk a technology, rather than an instructional agenda.Prepare for the HypeAdvocates of Web 2.0 technologies will tell you that these new generation tools&hellip;Are so easy to use that they require no training

Are more engaging to students'

Make a greater impact upon collaboration

Enhance classroom communication

Are already in use in classrooms across the country, and

You should make haste to adopt before you are left behind

Sound important. But, these reasons failed to target and document solutions to the important questions about instruction (above) that you should ask.

This is called, putting the advocate's "feet to the fire."What are these Tools?Web 2.0 Tools include:

Blogs

Wikis

Social Network Software

Streaming Video

Any online service with a "Widget"

These tools seem common place. But, are they work the investment in time and money?

The Downside of the Tools and Technology

All is not bliss and delight in the "Web 2.0 Paradise."

Dangers lurk, and high profile issues emerge in relation to student safety, learning focus (instead of wasting students time) and teacher job security. (When things go wrong with anything educational, the teacher is the first to be blamed.

Possible dangers include:

Students are identified, lured into dangerous relationships on social network sites

Social network sites fail to control the "xxx" rated content and provide access to materials that students should avoid

Collaboration (with software such as Wikis) allows everyone to edit text. This is great for editing fiction, but not great when the accuracy and quality of ideas must be evaluated by everyone, then read, studied and reevaluated when multiple users make changes. These changes in the integrity and relevance of the information have to undergo constant scrutiny

Threats, bullying, intimidation can be conducted in an anonymous manner

Heightened expectations that this hyped technology will directly lead to enhanced, measurable and accountable student achievement and increased test scores when there is no direct relationship between the Web 2.0 technology and measurable student achievement

Increased expenditure on the technology infrastructure that is required to operate this technology, and a corresponding decrease in funding for other curriculum support expenditures

Increased pressure on teacher to undertake Web 2.0 activities because district decision-makers believed the hype about increased ease of use and student motivation, prompting them to invest money in the required infrastructure

Why Web 3.0 is Inevitable

Web 2.0 is hype and fantasy, but technology is real.

Just as E-mail systems replaced letters, phone calls, and take-home notes; so will usable technologies replace current systems.

But, time is not saved by E-mail, and the ease and speed promote stress and hurry.

But, no one wants to quit using E-mail and go back to stamped notes and postal worker intermediaries.

What Web 3.0 needs to go to is towards the gathering of "institutional knowledge" and the sharing of "best practices."

The problems with current models of classroom management and instructional delivery are that teaching remains an occupation of isolation from peers.

What Web 3.0 will do is open collaboration between competent and effective (master) teachers, and enable those with less developed skills and less elegant work habits to learn from and model effective best practices.

The problem now is that only students see what subtle changes in tactic and technique that master teachers implement.

And, there is no avenue for the novice teacher to learn the nuances, except "trial and flop."

Web 3.0 will place expert knowledge and model-best-practice skills in front of those who "need to know, practice and do."

The potential for Web 2.0 is unmet and advocates are focused upon ideas and issues that are not related to education.

Web 3.0 will be different. The technology will be mature enough to be both easy to use and useful. And, teachers who want to take the fast train to master teacher proficiency will hop aboard.

The Web 3.0 Train is on the horizon. Miss the Web 2.0 Train, and you will be well positioned for real benefit in a year or two.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Monday, March 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

### Dealing with Nasty People

You don't have to teach very long before you encounter a nasty person&hellip;student, parent, colleague, principal, administrator, school board member, ad nauseam.And whether this is because&hellip;You work in the wrong place

Your students come from the "the wrong side of of your belief system"

You work with the wrong class of people

You work with a "bunch of morons"

You attract "dark-mood" people

You have a bad attitude

You behave badly and bring these unpleasant reactions upon yourself

You stumble into negative situations

You don't have a clue&hellip;You have to deal with the situations that dealing with nasty people creates for you.

You need to determine what is going on during these situations, and you must also determine what role you are playing&hellip;inadvertent, by design, accidental bystander, whatever.

What you must do is prevent the nastiness from escalating into either:A Power Struggle

A One-Up-Person-Ship Ploy (Note: Politically correct but silly description)

Revenge

Mistake

Personal or Professional Slight

Depression or Mental IllnessDiffusing a Bomb, or Bombing Out?You encounter nasty situations from time to time. If you find that the people that cause this upset and turmoil are in your life every day (such as a student, or family member), then you need life skills and coping strategies that are beyond the scope of this article.

On the other hand, if these "nastiness binges" are infrequent, you might need to prepare so that your reaction is pre-meditated, professional and career stabilizing.

Miscalculate one of these "nasty numbers" and you can find yourself:Explaining (and giving excuses) to your supervisors

Providing endless pages of documentation of your recollection of the incident

Blaming yourself for being "stupid" and getting beat in the "one-on-one" game that the nasty person "sucked" you into

Ruing the lack of administrative support that you receive from folks higher up the chain of command

Seeking legal advice

Looking for another jobThe first task you face is to perceive "reality."Blame's the Name of the GameYou might think that you are in the "Right Corner." You may be right, and you may be able to prove it (at least to yourself, and to your long-suffering spouse). But being right often means loosing.

The reason that being "right" is most often "wrong" is that "dealing a loss" to the nasty person generally means a "rematch," often on a new court or playing field chosen by the nasty person, and on their terms.

But, avoid loosing, too. Loosing only encourages the nasty person to set you up again for another round.

So, the key strategy for dealing with a nasty person is to avoid laying blame in any direction.

This means readjusting your vocabulary, if not your belief system.

Can you see the issue from the other person's side? Does their point of view make sense, even if you think that it is in error?

Or, is the other person's point of view so "out of touch with reality" that you think that they are crazy. Guess what? They may be mentally ill.

But, if a person is mentally ill; you have "zero chance" of changing their mind and and even smaller chance of helping them to see the errors in their thinking, and a still smaller chance that they will accept blame.

Give up any pretense of convincing the mentally ill nasty person that you are right. And, if you believe that you can convince such a person that they are to blame; you are just as much out of touch with reality as they are.Tact and States-Person-Ship (Note: Another politically correct but stupid phrase)Whether the nasty person brings an "off the wall" accusation, or a dossier of substantiated facts that incriminates you; your response skill set must be pulled from the same strategy, i.e., a professional response with all the characteristics of a "guilty candidates spin on yet another revelation of wrongdoing."

You require tact, discretion, and valor when a nasty person precipitates an unpleasant situation. You must exemplify "courage under fire," even if the barrage and fusillade is verbal and accusatory. Your skill in dodging in an elegant manner prevents you from being "cannon fodder" that is pulverized by the nasty person's verbal pyrotechnics.

The techniques that you use to prevent gouging your stomach with an ulcer include:Identify common ground

Accept accountability, liability, culpability (but, only if you are responsible)

Keep the conversation focused upon what outcomes the nasty person wants and what outcomes the nasty person

would like see

Hear the complaint out&hellip;all of it

Come to some agreement&hellip;either a resolution, or the next step

As odious as this may sound, you gain the advantage by agreeing with the nasty person on some level. Agreeing creates a sliver of rapport, more than you had before the incident,

and more than you have if you disagree. Agreeing also gives you a slight negative reinforcement advantage; i.e., you now are in the "driver's seat with the ability to pull your agreement." Simple, Professional Techniques Here are some techniques for dealing with nasty and irate folks without stooping to their level and telling them that you hope they get hit by a truck and die!

You may find it useful to: Keep from "taking it personally." The nasty person will try to attack you at a personal level.

Don't take this bait!

Diffuse the situation with kindness (as much as you can)

Attempt to reschedule (when you can muster reinforcements or find allies, or at least witnesses)

Affirm (to yourself) that you do not need to tolerate abuse.

Picture your self-concept and self-esteem as strong and stable, like a seaworthy ship in a storm, pulling out just fine

Do what you can to accommodate (within reason)

Look for a way for the nasty person to save face

Keep "the customer/ boss is always right" in perspective, too. Don't allow this "sunny day" concept to "go to far"

Realize that this may not be your problem. If not, refer or get help

Don't fall for the "fear tactics" of "taking the complaint to your supervisor&hellip;or higher." Call their bluff, and ask to jointly invite the supervisor in on the discussion

Restate any threat to hire a lawyer as one that the nasty person has a right to do at any time, but that there might be other ways to arrive at a solution without the nasty person going through the expense of hiring an attorney and placing control in the slow mechanism of the legal system

Sometimes the nasty person is just looking for an easy target to subject to their frustrations, anger, hatred, resentment or mental aberrations. Don't be that "easy mark"

Listen to the ranting and raving, then respond kindly. Respond in a congruent fashion and state that you understand their frustration. Honestly relate that you want to work with them and resolve the issue. This step can often diffuse anger and release a rational human being. Of course, sometimes it won't.

Be prepared. Decide whether or not to seek help.

And know the boundaries of the situation.

For example, issues involving Emotionally Disturbed and Learning Handicapped children may require Special Education and Planning Committee meetings. Or, students may need to be referred to the Special Education testing program.

This means that you have allies, helpers, counselors and friends that can help you though some situations.

But, avoid any steam-frustration-valve releases in the Teachers' Lounge. Consider any statement made in the Teacher's Lounge to be as private as a post card or E-mail message. Final Advice And, though dealing with the perpetually nasty person, may be a fact of life for working professionals such as teachers; be sure that the grit and grime of the interaction stays at work. Keep the stress and pressure of the event or interaction at work. Don't carry any of this interpersonal grime home to contaminate the positive, loving, caring, trusting relationships you have with your family and friends with Keeping the issues and emotions at work means avoiding rehashing the incident at home. Do not use family and friends as sounding boards for your frustrations.

Your work environment may contain industrial-strength interpersonal pollution, but your home environment can be pristine. Keep it that way for your well being.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Friday, February 29, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Turn the "Winter Blues" into a "Rainbow of Delight"

Your mental outlook affects your feeling of well being. And, this is more important during the winter months at temperate latitudes because the absence of sunlight is known to affect mood. There are physical and chemical explanations for this "depressing" phenomena. (No pun intended&hellip; We didn't coin this term or acronym.)

The official term for the "Wintertime Blues" is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) (No pun intended).

"Feeling blue and depressed during the dark, cold winter months? According to a study published in the British medical journal, The Lancet (December 7, 2002; 360:1840-1842), this dip in mood may be caused by lowered levels of serotonin, a chemical in the brain. Serotonin levels are low in people with depression and also in healthy people during the winter (SAD)." Source: Tan Plus for Health <http://www.tanplusforhealth.com/news/january/blues.htm> Of course, Classroom Toolkit isn't promoting tanning salons. We are taking a professional spin on the topic. However, increasing exposure to winter light, by being outside, maybe removing your sunglasses, going outside (even in the cold) can help. "SAD is thought to be caused by decreased exposure to sunlight and causes symptoms identical to those of major depression from other causes. They include low mood, tearfulness, inability to concentrate, impaired sleep patterns, weight gain, irritability and even thoughts of suicide. In Alaska, over eight percent of the population is thought to suffer from SAD. Many other states have rates of three or four or five percent. Think about that: We may be talking about over ten million Americans." Source: Dr. Rock Positano The Huffington

Post [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw\\_b\\_85066.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw_b_85066.html)

Could the SAD epidemic be affecting you, someone in your family, or one or more of your students? Probably!

So, what are you to do?

Bright light therapy seems to help, i.e., exposure each day to a high-intensity light.

So, why don't school districts install these lights in each classroom?

After all, concentration and the ability to work; especially the ability to work with others in a pleasant environment, with an agreeable mood is crucial for maximizing everyone's learning and performance.

Besides, many states schedule high-stakes tests during the late winter, a time when the long-term effects of sunlight deprivation are most felt.

Answer: There is no panacea. Bright light therapy can have its pitfalls.

Sidebar There are drawbacks to high intensity light therapy: i.e., skin problems and triggering more energy in bipolar folks. "Bright light therapy isn't to be used by certain folks with eye conditions or skin conditions that prohibit exposure to high intensity light. They can also rarely cause someone vulnerable to bipolar disorder to experience too much energy and even manic symptoms." Source: Dr. Rock Positano The Huffington

Post [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw\\_b\\_85066.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw_b_85066.html)

So, school districts won't install bright light hotspots, even though these lights could improve the lives (and the performance) of between three and eight percent of teacher and student population. This is because of the threat of lawsuits.

What about the rare case of making people with eye or skin problems worse. What about the rare case of launching a bipolar student, teacher or administrator into a fit of energy?

Even though these lights could mean the difference between a school district making "Adequate Yearly Progress" on the high-stakes tests mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), "the fear of the few or the none" (to paraphrase a certain television and big-screen alien of the pointed-ears-kind) prevents our schools from taking definitive action.

High Intensity Solutions

Since the SAD problem is probably a symptom caused by a lack of serotonin in the brains of those people that are affected. are their other wayst to increase this brain chemical without providing additional exposure to high intensity light?

In particular, what about self-hypnosis, visualization, positive suggestion?

What about movement and dance therapy?

For a great online source, see&hellip; An Introduction To Medical Dance/Movement Therapy: Health Care In Motion" Book Review <http://tinyurl.com/2tx4jyl>ts a Continuum, Grumpy! Whatever solution that you decide to implement, the first step is your awareness that SAD is a real problem that affects you and your teaching.

You (or your students) don't have to cross over the line to "sub-clinical depression" to feel the effects of minimal sunlight during the winter months.

If you know that students, teachers, administrators, parents (even yourself) tend toward the grouch-grumpy side of the "Irritability Scale" by winter's end; you can take steps (no pun intended) to help everyone keep their distance from one another.

Individual projects (rather than group work) might be in order.

Also, help students by "providing less time when their teacher drones on;" i.e., talk less, give short instructions, and make allowance for everyone's lower frustration tolerance.

In addition, decrease stressors, limit test-taking practice.

Offer positive suggestions for comfort, friendliness, calm. Make life easier on everyone.

Remember: Even though three to eight percent of your campus population may be experiencing symptoms of SAD that reach clinical levels, almost everyone is affected.

Sidebar There isn't a classroom that won't be effected by even one clinically depressed student or teacher.

This is because of 1.) a process called entrainment, and 2.) because the chaos of the depressed person's thoughts and moods drives everyone else a little bit "crazy," too.

Since you know that the SAD "epidemic" strikes every year, and that the symptoms Peak during high-stakes testing time; develop strategies to compensate.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Thursday, January 31, 2008

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Dealing with the Mentally Ill: Whether Students, Parents, Colleagues or Supervisors

Mental illness affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and of all personal and professional levels.

People of all ages, genders, religions, and political persuasions can exhibit mental illness.

And, mental illness crosses all educational levels, racial and ethnic group membership. No group has a monopoly on mental illness, and no group is immune. Based upon the prevalence figures and demographic distributions, we can predict that one or more mentally ill student is placed in each classroom, and that at least one mentally ill employee will be found in a staff of 30 employees. Types of Mental Illness The categories of mental illness differ from children and adults because psychologists and psychiatrists wish to avoid labeling children unless the child's school work suffers. Mental illness is different than the Special Education Label of "Emotionally Disturbed." Sidebar There are 19 subcategories of mental illness, and Wikipedia lists 48 pages of diagnostic information

Source: Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental\\_illness\\_diagnosis\\_by\\_DSM\\_and\\_ICD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental_illness_diagnosis_by_DSM_and_ICD)

Diagnoses of mental illness can include psychiatric disorders or mental health disorders, and diagnosis can only be conducted by trained professionals (not teachers).

The major categories of mental illness include: Anxiety Disorders

Cognitive disorders

Childhood psychiatric disorders

Depression and Bipolar

Eating disorders

Memory disorders

Mental disorders due to a medical condition

Mood disorders

Personality disorders

Psychosis

Sexual and gender identity disorders

Sleep disorders

Substance-related

disorders Source: Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental\\_illness\\_diagnosis\\_by\\_DSM\\_and\\_ICD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental_illness_diagnosis_by_DSM_and_ICD) Diagnosis and Need to Know Teachers are not qualified to diagnose mental illness in students, colleagues, parents or supervisors. And, teachers seldom learn about the diagnosis of students because they are not authorized to know these personal details.

Besides, teachers are big "lounge gossips" and too many teachers reveal confidential information to (told directly or listening in) others.

Besides, teachers earned a negative reputation for suggesting that children with attention problems, hyperactive movements, and compliance issues require medication.

So many children were taking teacher-recommended drugs that the "prescribed drug-taking" by students has been called a national epidemic. (Of course, teachers were not the only culprit, but suggesting a body-mind-life-altering course of action to parents when the teacher does not have the professional training, legal prerogative or moral right is indefensible). General Traits Since teachers are unqualified to make mental health diagnosis, fine tuning teachers' mental health labeling skills is counter indicated (a bad idea).

What teachers need to do is develop a general model of reacting to mentally ill students, colleagues and supervisors based upon human relations and communications techniques.

And, as with all human communication, the proof is in the communication results, not the theory about what should work. Because the success of a communication is in the effect, result, outcome; an encyclopedic knowledge of the symptoms and classifications of mental illness proves to be a hindrance, rather than a help for teachers.

But, here are the general guidelines for dealing with the mentally ill... Ideas fail to match observable reality

Reasonable information, requests, arguments are not accepted

Responsibility is rejected, blame cannot be accepted

The "self-promulgated rationale" of the mentally ill is always "correct," no matter how illogical, irrational, or out of touch

Reactions are often the opposite of the way that most others react

Everyone knows that "something is wrong" with the mentally ill person

Friendships are odd, strained or weird, if there any friendships at all Since such a large number of people satisfy

categorization as mentally ill, master teachers understand that in dealing with large numbers of other people; i.e., students, parents, colleagues and supervisors; teachers should expect that daily contact with mentally ill people is "just part of the job." Second-Hand Mental Illness Teachers also must be aware of the tendency of mental illness to produce

second-hand mental illness in the lives of people who live in close proximity to the organic (the person with the real problem) mentally ill person.

The toxic mental environment that a mentally ill person creates is similar to the toxic physical environment surrounding a smoker.

And the mental health issue that is passed on to others in the environment that is dominated by a mentally ill person is "environmental depression."

Few people can take the stress, chaos, uncertainty, unpredictability, confusion, blame and irrationality that accompanies living with a mentally ill person without developing symptoms of their own.

Of course, if the person suffering "environmental depression" were to be removed from the toxic living environment, they would get better soon. Maybe! (This all depends upon how long, how deeply, how abused, how indoctrinated they were by the mentally ill person that captivated their life.)

The person that confides that "XXX is driving me nuts!" may be describing a basic truth in their lives. This statement might be an accurate description of the "second-hand mental health" dynamic at work in their life.

The implication for teachers of this "Second-Hand Mental Illness" paradigm is that teachers must&hellip;Take daily steps to manage stress in their lives

Take daily steps to decrease the stress in their students' lives

Find a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on and other sources of personal and professional support

Take special care of themselves, avoid overwork, eat well, sleep enough

Learn the art of positive self-talk and the art of affirmation

Learn techniques of suggestion and group dynamics that can be used to counter act the stresses that are heaped upon the living environment by the mentally ill student, parent, colleague or supervisor

General Patterns and Recommendations Teachers should be prepared to deal with mentally-ill-others since teachers will encounter these folks (young and old) on a daily basis.

And, teachers should discover "mental illness negotiation skills" that motivate, direct and influence these folks; even if these techniques seem strange and professionally suspect. (Remember, the mentally ill respond the opposite of normal, stable people. Sometimes you have to deal with them in their own world, not yours.)

Teachers should also avoid any "savior syndrome" behaviors and understand that they neither can make the mentally ill person "worse" by what they say and do; and, that they cannot make the mentally ill person better by all their acts of love, sacrifice, wisdom and professional intervention.

Teachers must also focus on their core strength, i.e., instruction. Dabbling into counseling, psychotherapy, or behavioral therapy is neither appropriate, insured with malpractice insurance, or sanctioned by the school district that employs you as a teacher. You are not qualified to provide mental health interventions; and not employed to do so, so "butt out!"

Sidebar "Butt out" is not a slogan for an anti-smoking campaign, but sage advice for protecting your "behind" from firing and lawsuits.

It is fantasy for a teacher to believe that the school district that they work for will support them in even a trivial way if the teacher exceeds the boundaries of their employment position.

(Note: School districts don't even support teachers that were following orders in issues of negative community reaction or financial liability.) Finally, a teacher should understand that to be the most value to their students, the teacher must take care of themselves.

This means following all the healthy living rules, but it also means protecting yourself from the "con jobs, jive-talk, and seductive manipulations" that mentally ill people seem to have a knack for.

Watch out for yourself, because the "game that the mentally ill person sucks you into" is only theirs to "win," but only yours to "keep from loosing."

Here's hoping that if you ignore these principles, that your learning encounters with mentally ill students, parents, colleagues and supervisors is of the mildly punishing kind; and that you learn these lessons quickly, with a minimum of stress, anguish and "second-hand" depression.

And at any early sign of "loosing your grip" on your thoughts, emotions, beliefs or attitudes; seek professional help.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Friday, November 30, 2007

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

"Don't Smile Before Christmas," Not!

In days of yore, a popular teacher "professional development" book title was, Don't Smile Before Christmas. Sidebar Don't Smile before Christmas: The Role of Humor in Education William and Mary: Don't Smile before Christmas: The Role of Humor in Education 'Don't smile before Christmas' and other useless advice to NQTs Link to Google Search for Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Note: Apparently this book is out of print, but references to it abound in the "public mind" and in the "Teaching Thought Space." The idea for this book was that an effective teacher was mean and "drill-sergeant tough. The teacher ruled (no pun intended) with a sculpted piece of wood in his or her hand ("Spare the board, spoil the school year.")

Despite this advice for Industrial-Age classrooms of the 20th Century, this strategy was a throwback to the days when a plantation overseer kept the involuntary and captive labor force in perpetual servitude and under thumb.

The philosophy underlying this strategy is "control at all costs," "keeping little fingers busy to keep them out of mischief" or, "quell fomenting rebellions in the bud." The "Smile-Adverse" Teacher's Role Besides masquerading in the role of plantation overseer, teachers of the "Smile-Adverse" ilk labored as planters. These teachers' mission was to plant potent seeds of knowledge in the barren, infertile minds of their students.

Of course, students had their own description of the fertilizer that spewed, non-stop, rat-a-tat-tat from the "noise-generating appendage" that seemed to dominate the teacher's face.

The teacher's goal under such a system was to "cover material," similar to laying tile; leaving no textbook page unturned. Of course, what the teacher was actually covering the floor with was the same fertilizer that less-than-reverent students joked that they needed "hip boots" for. Students' Motivation Since the "Don't Smile" philosophy assumes that students "don't want to work," the teacher that buys in to this belief system expects that "pounding learning into "walled-off student brains" will be an uphill challenge." Such a teacher expects that their authority will be challenged, and that student cooperation will be minimal. Since the teacher is the only force that puts coherent content together and disseminates it, the teacher expects to "hunker down" and do all of the preparation and development work by themselves. Finally, this teacher must battle students for attention time in class by squelching all disruptions. Only the teacher has a right to talk. Only the teacher recognize another speaker during class time.

The "Don't Smile" philosophy forces teachers to "go it alone," forces teachers to pretend to be experts in all content area subjects (sometimes even in the area of running a student's life). Advice giving without listening to a student's story is a hallmark of this approach.

Another relic of the obsolete "Don't Smile" approach is the "know-it-all, "expert-in-everything-I-survey" teacher. This "attitude-liability" came to a head with the advent of persona computers and the "technology integration dictum."

The Internet trashed the last vestige of this counter-productive mind set, since the knowledge-base of any student exceeded a lifetime of mind-cramming by any teacher with a few deft mouse and keyboard clicks at the Google Search or Yahoo Directory site.

Every pearl of wisdom could be cross-check in seconds, and relevant (even controversial) rebuttals could be launched against the teacher's "Know-it-all fortress-facade." The result: Walls of academic isolation by "knowledge superiority" tumbled.

The "Know-it-all" teacher, if one exists in modern, Internet-connected classrooms is a throw-back, and (no pun intended), that's what school districts need to do, i.e., throw them back, they are not "keepers." Today's Requirement: Real People, Real Listening, Real Partnerships Times, they are a changin.'" And, almost no one believes in the "Don't Smile Myth" nowadays.

The modern curriculum is project-based, cooperative learning, problem-solving and decision-making, creativity and communications oriented; exactly what students that hope to become employed in our Information Economy need to succeed.

Multiple Intelligences and Higher-Order Thinking are the new classroom learning modalities, and the integration of thinking in the building of knowledge is the new learning paradigm.

"Don't smile before Christmas, Not!" Smile when appropriate, and likewise frown.

Focus on what is good for students and what is good for teachers.

Listen to your students and get to know them as people. Talk to your students and let them get to know you.

Be real!

Be a keeper!

Today's education needs you for who you are, for your skills and for your abilities. Make sure that your attitude toward students is up to the task.

Believe in your students. Trust their abilities. Facilitate their learning.

Turn students on to learning and enjoy the roadtrip with them.

Smile!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

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Are you Automating Everything you Can?

Do you know any teacher that was hired to do less this school year than last school year? Do you know any school where there is a directive for teachers to slow down, back off the stress level, and only do what is reasonable? Is there a school district anywhere that recommends that teachers pace themselves, avoid stress and mental-physical-emotional strain, and do only what they are paid to do...within normal working hours?

Since work requirements are at less than sane, and since the needs of your students are open-ended and seem to be on a trajectory that approaches "bottomless" (and we are not talking about a lack of underwear), you have several choices:

Plan better, more strategically, modularize instruction

Prioritize, do the most important, highest-payoff tasks first

Delegate -- Let students take up slack for you

Drop essential, but low-priority tasks

Automate all levels of tasks, from the important to the urgent

The tasks that you can automate include: Materials Creation

Lesson Planning

Research

Grading and Grade Calculation

Progress Tracking: Yours and Your Students'

Parent Communication

Centers and Center Development

Software and Account Management

The tasks that you cannot automate include: Teaching: Your interaction with students cannot be replaced

Supervising Student Progress

Analysis of Individual Learning Styles of Each Student

Communicating One-to-One with Students

Counseling, Consulting with Students, Parents and Colleagues

Communicating your Personal Caring and Commitment

Creativity, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making There will never be an automated replacement for teachers.

"Covering material" does not constitute teaching or learning.

Teachers apply themselves in a personal and professional relationship with their students. Students are "clients" in the sense of being in our care. As such, our decisions must be based upon their needs.

Teaching requires modeling of the qualities that we would have students adopt. And, teaching requires the development of habits: abilities, attitudes, knowledge and skills that become so practiced and proficient that they seem like automatic responses.

But, this is not automation in the sense that we are using it here, as a time saver. What you are doing by automation is freeing up time and energy so that you can apply and develop personal skills that make you a "genius-level" teacher.

Too Busy "Teaching to the Test" to Automate?

You say that you are too busy "teaching to the test" and scrambling for materials to automate anything.

If you are stressed for time, you are not automating enough.

The effort may require self-discipline at first, but the payback will be additional time for the future. In a way, all of Classroom Toolkit is focused upon automation. The process that we share is one of modularizing instructional materials so that teachers can mix and match materials to instructional goals. Automation Goals (and payoffs) for automation include: Developing and Automating Presentations

This is done with templates and fill-in-the-blank data merges. Increase Efficiency

Automation increases efficiency with instructional planning, and instructional delivery with such tools as E-mail, Web form submission, surveys, parent communication, data integration, and classroom management. The use of automation makes tasks that would otherwise have been performed manually more efficient and time-effective. Streamline

Processes

Automation streamlines processes, especially if you bend the process to conform to the technical requirements of the automation software. For example, what if filling out a the campus form for each student is automated. Create your own form that looks close enough to the original, then automate the fill-in. This can save you hours. And, share the form with

your colleagues. You can save them hours of work, too. Increase Cycle Time/ Reduce Time on Task  
Automation speeds up the time that you can develop assignments and projects by increasing your efficiency. By automating everything you can, you communicate with parents and supervisors, develop materials and lesson plans, calculate grades, submit reports&hellip;tasks that you have to repeat can be automated. Tracking and Documenting  
Developing a "step-by-step re-use process" instead of a "one off, one-time-use" treadmill creates time out of "thin air."  
Targeting Behavior and Learning  
Collecting data and reporting progress can be automated. This is done by creating check-off forms using a database management system (database). Most teachers have one of these in the Office Productivity application that is part of their professional office suite software  
Unfortunately, the learning curve for mastering a database management system is steep, and most teachers never develop the powerful uses that this software affords  
Creating Learning Profiles  
Sorting and grouping students into fluid and dynamic project and task groups  
Measuring Results  
Unless you can measure what you do, you cannot control what you do. Without measurement; situations, serendipity, fate, crisis and accident are in control. With measurement, you take control.  
Getting Back more Time than you Put in  
Automation is like a magic box. You put in a little time, and you get back a lot more time.  
Automation Tools  
Tools that you can use to automate instructional planning, management and delivery include:  
A professional Office Productivity Package with merge features (for document files, spreadsheet files and database files). This is your automation workhorse  
For example, Microsoft® Office Professional  
Text research storage with one-button capture  
For example, InfoSelect®;  
Full page storage for online research  
For example, Surf later®; Vocabulary Mapping  
For, example, Visual Thesaurus®;  
Data Analysis and Display Program  
Inspiredata®;  
Mind Mapping Software  
For example, Mind Manager®;, Mind Genius®; Education or Inspiration®;  
Screen Capture  
For example, Snagit®;, or Instant Screen Shot  
Screen Video Capture  
For example, Camtasia Studio®; A Phrase Expansion Tool  
For example, Paramind®; Remember: Academic versions of this software can be purchased for a fraction of the list price or street price.  
Another trick is to purchase an older version on eBay®, then upgrade. This usually results in a huge cost savings.  
Online Tools  
Online tools that can streamline and automate your work include: Blogs, E-mail, Online Toolkits and Learning Management Systems  
Blogs  
Blogger  
Classroom 2.0  
Teacher Lingo  
Word Press  
E-mail Systems  
AOL Mail  
Gmail  
Windows® Live Hot Mail  
Yahoo Mail  
Online Toolkits  
For example Google®; Tools and Google®; Pack  
Learning Management Systems  
For example, Moodle!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Sunday, September 30, 2007

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Teacher Survival: Advice to New Teachers Here is a summary of teacher survival strategies... Root out Stress: Relax and Trust your Abilities First, get your stress level under control. When under stress, your thinking is less than it should be because the stress somehow causes you to use your least-preferred, least effective (of your Multiple Intelligences) for planning, problem-solving and decision-making.

Sidebar While limiting and decreasing your stress, be sure to do the same favor for your students. It's the System, Darling! Second, when confronted with the "craziness" about you, tell yourself, "I am capable and developing skills as a Master Teacher. I am fine. It is the system that is 'out of whack,'" And, be careful who you share your thoughts with. Exercise analysis and judgment in your decision to ask for help. Be "super, extra careful who you engage as your "mentor." Sidebar Inspect your mentor candidate. Look for results, not "big, brave talk." Avoid the seduction of "classroom control" and "test score reputation" as mentor selection criteria. Some of the absolute worst teachers are "subversive, hate and manipulate students, brainwashing technicians." These colleagues treat their students in the same way that enemy armies treat "prisoners of war." (POWs) Students in these classes seem to "love their teacher," but this is love in a distorted sense of affection and admiration... similar to the twisted feelings that POWs seem to have developed for the captors who were torturing them. Beware any learning that you receive from members of this group. They are poison to your relationship with students, and to your long-term career. Take care of Yourself Third, take care of yourself, and treat yourself well. Treat yourself as kindly as you would your most cherished student. (In fact, you are learning, and you are your most important student.)

You need to remain healthy and strong so you are in the best possible condition to help your students. Planning: Think Ahead, Way Ahead

As for planning, plan for the year. Map our large blocks... for grading periods, then for each week. Use this map to guide yourself past the tendency to be activity driven, i.e., scurrying to find enough to do for your class tomorrow. Sidebar Classroom Toolkit provides loads of tools for planning and classroom project management. Explore the site. There is no cost for any of the resources and materials you find there. You should find enough materials to keep you busy for quite a while. Modular Approach to Materials Handling A strategic, modular approach streamlines daily lesson management. Build a reusable library of generic materials such as Graphic Organizers. That way, you will be ready for learning opportunities that present themselves; and you can avoid the "What am I going to do tomorrow?" rat race. The Graphic Organizers on this site forms a foundation that you can use for a long time. Train your Students for Success Train your students, step by step, with what you want them to do. Show them one step at a time, then add to their repertoire. You will be amazed at how their ability to complete complicated tasks increases over six weeks. Use your Intuition College coursework, professional jargon are fine when discussing issues with colleagues. These benchmark communication skills provide a shorthand method for streamlining professional conversation.

But, for real progress, trust your intuition, your hunches, your "gut feelings." Only, be sure to test your interpretation of every one of these hunches, flashes of insight and bright ideas. Sometimes, your hunch is right, but your analysis is defective. Test everything in small doses and tiny trials before rolling out major initiatives in your classroom. Teachers who test the waters before leaping in gain the admiration of their students, but teachers with "egg on their face" gain little. Trust your Students' Abilities Your students have talents, abilities, and capacities that stretch beyond the narrow confines of our industrial age curriculum.

These abilities spectacular, and we miss them. Our expectations for our students are almost like taking a picture of a sunset with a camera that is loaded with "black and white" film.

Open your eyes to the melodies and music that your students sing, and see your students' talents with your heart. (Excuse the mixed metaphor) Survival Skill Summary Take care of yourself and take care of your students. Do what you have to to help everyone "Live long and prosper."

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00