

Saturday, March 31, 2007

News Nuggets

The High Cost of Dropouts: Rod Paige is Still the Voucher-System's "Front Man"

Politicians grandstanding to the media is not news. Neither is a politician who stages a public event to attract reporters and journalists worth the newsprint or air time that they receive. Sometimes the politicians pull off these events, sometimes the event is so contrived that everyone sees through the thinly veiled "hidden agenda."

What category of staged news event do you think that the latest Rod Paige (defunct Secretary of Education) pulled? (Hint: Notice that I didn't write, "pulled off." "The High Cost of Dropouts" Non-Event Rod Paige and a host of "NCLB Lackeys" conspired in a "wool-over-our-eyes" media menagerie.

Link to the news release that set up this media circus…

Out trotted the politicians of the "Let's bash public schools, again," ilk to show that… Dropouts (school leavers) place a drain on our society, i.e., cost money

Public schools can't pull their weight in this arena

Vouchers would salvage these "left-behind students, lost-national-talent-resources"

Vouchers would increase competition and force schools (and by default, teachers) to do their jobs

Public schools can't do the job as well as church schools" The NCPA is an internationally known nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute with offices in Dallas and Washington, D. C. that advocates private solutions to public policy problems. Hispanic CREO's mission is to improve educational outcomes for Hispanic children by empowering families through parental choice in education. We achieve this by providing parents with free information and resources, which help them become self-advocates for their children. CREO is a non-profit, non-partisan organization. "CREO is Spanish for 'I believe.'"

Based in Indianapolis and dubbed "the nation's leading voucher advocates" by The Wall Street Journal, the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation was started by Nobel laureate Dr. Milton Friedman and Dr. Rose D. Friedman in 1996 as a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the role competition plays in achieving real K-12 education reform." Source: The NCPA Press Release Link to the news release that set up this media circus… Flim-Flam Reasoning Dr. Rod Paige, political pitch man for NCLB, is a dedicated soldier who is willing to "take a bullet" for his Commander in Chief.

No doubt that Dr. Paige believes that public school systems need more testing (wrong), need to take better care of students (yes), and need more accountability (yes, but who should be accountable, and to whom should they be accountable).

"But there is a way to stem these costs, and help more students graduate, says Brian J. Gottlob, senior fellow at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and author of the study. School choice improves graduation rates and produces millions in public savings: School districts with more students in private schools have higher public school graduation rates; all Texas children would benefit from increased competition from private schools.

Even a modest school choice program, one that increased private school enrollment by fewer than 5 percentage points, would reduce the number of Texas public school dropouts by 8,720 to 17,440 per year.

That reduction would save Texans between \$27 million and \$53 million in tax revenue, Medicaid costs and incarceration costs every year.

The total savings from preventing these students from dropping out, over an expected lifetime of 50 years, would be between \$1.4 billion and \$2.8 billion." Source: Daily Policy Digest Article Link to the article… Errors in Logic: Perhaps these "Voucher-Hucksters" Need Test-Taking Skills Statement: "School districts with more students in private schools have higher public school graduation rates."

Error: Even if this were true (doubtful), correlation does not prove cause and effect. Perhaps the areas where there are more private schools are "wealthier"

Perhaps the private schools will graduate any student who is willing to pay, no matter what the competency level of the student! It is doubtful that private schools have any effect on… Early failure (in the first two grades)

Teen Pregnancy

Economic Hardship

Migrating Students Besides, these same Voucher Pundits are the folks that want to restrict or deny a public education to the children of undocumented visitors.

Another Error:

Hidden in this argument is the assumption that private (church) schools teach children in a superior manner. But research has shown that this assumption is bogus. Sidebar See our Newsletter Article, Research Shows what we have Known All Along: Public Schools are as Good as Private Schools! Bad Math Statement:

"… increased private school enrollment by fewer than 5 percentage points, would reduce the number of Texas public school dropouts by 8,720 to 17,440 per year… would increase save \$27 million and \$53 million in tax

revenue…

Error:

Why stop with only five percent enrollment increase if this is true?

Increase private school enrollment by 100% and save 20 times more money.

This puts savings at \$540 million to \$1.06 billion per year, or from \$27 billion to \$53 billion over 50 years.

If this is such an incredible bargain, let's go for it.

But…Would the church schools take all those students?

Do the church schools have the facilities to manage double enrollments?

Do the church schools pay teachers enough to attract twice as many teachers?

What happens to church-based instruction when the enrollment hits the point of 50% students who are members of that church and 50% that are not?(Note: In the bussing experiment, a 40% critical mass proved to be sufficient to keep minority students from being "ganged up on", while not diluting learning standards for the majority. Perhaps the Voucher Schemes are a disguised "parent-based reverse bussing" movement.)Thinly Disguised MotivesThe real intent of the "church school on the public dime" advocates is to separate and sanitize their children from the "riff-raff and heathens" that "infest" the public schools."

This motive needs to be drawn out in the open so the exposed hypocrisy can wilt and wither in the light of day.

The Classroom Toolkit philosophy treasures all children, supports drawing out their unique abilities, and helping each child become "all that he or she can be." We offer no solution or sympathy for folks who don't prize diversity and inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-class, inter-religious communication.

Segregation is synonymous with stagnation, and both the "segregatee and the segregator" are poorer because of the practice.

Communicating with diverse groups, exposure to viewpoints other than their own, a laboratory for working out issues with divergent others is a benefit that the money of private school enrollment cannot buy. Children that miss out on these experiences are poorer in interpersonal skills, less likely to be competitive in a interactive, "shrinking" world, and more likely to remain stagnant in an evolving, changing world.The Real SolutionIt is "un American" to deny people with money that right to buy whatever they want, including education. But, it is also undemocratic to siphon away public money, divide availability, and provide a lesser service to everyone, especially the "less than affluent" who deserve every opportunity to succeed.

The real solution is to provide more funds for public schools, not diminish the money that is available.

But the corollary to that solution is to empower teachers and place control of school district budgets in the hands of teachers.

Sure teachers will ask for more money to operate our schools.

And, reverse the "accountability blame game" and make principals, directors and superintendents accountable to teachers for providing the needed support for their classrooms.

Let's get the debate right, frame the questions correctly, and the solutions seem so, so obvious.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Short Article

Homework: Some Suggestions for Solving a Recalcitrant, Intractable Problem

Research fails to support homework as a strategy for improving instruction.

Of course, Classroom Toolkit has a unique slant on the practice of assigning homework.What is the problem with homework?Rhetorical Answer: What's wrong with a practice that…Students don't like

Adds to the teacher's workload

Adds stress to family life

Decreases children's play time

Fails to demonstrate that learning is increased in meaningful ways

Often seems like a punishment for working slowly (even meticulously) in school

Alienates teachers in the minds of students

Often is at the "frustration level" of the student, rather than the "independent level"Homework Hot PotatoHere are some (honest, but less than politically adoptable) slants on homework...

Suggestion #1.) Teachers should not have to take so much work home, either.

Pay teachers overtime for any training, paper-grading and lesson planning that they can't complete during the school day.

Suggestion #2.) If students can't learn enough in the regular school day, provide tutoring with qualified staff for every one of these students.

SidebarThe lack of tutoring is where No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is "backward." Instead of an "impersonal, data-collection-from-afar, punitive, unfunded-mandate" that can never work, let's provide an immediate, up-close-and-personal, hands-on solution that will work (individual tutoring for ever child).

Provide as much individual tutoring as each child that is "behind" needs.

Of course our sarcastic comment is that, if school districts were "forced" to provide individual tutoring for every student that is "behind," then school districts would find creative ways to measure students and find them "caught up"...in ways similar to how so many school leavers (drop outs) fail to show up on school district and state tracking lists. Why? School districts can't deliver tutoring "on the cheap."

Suggestion #3.) Extend the school day

If the school day is not long enough for students to complete their work, then extend the school day and increase teachers' salaries proportionally.

And, don't just add more of the same hollow test-prep and lifeless, mindless, drill to the school day.

Add art, music, drama, dance, sports, chess, debate and other missing ingredients of today's sterile, high-stakes testing environment.

Suggestion #4.) Remove any requirement for homework, and let children bring in anything that they choose to do for "extra credit." Then, give the children credit for their work, no matter how banal or how creative.

Sidebar(Note: This is the suggestion that you can easily do. Follow this suggestion and you will add delight to your school day.

Remember: When you punish students for failing to complete homework assignments, you are "classically conditioning" students to react to learning with negative feelings and emotions.

In "operant conditioning," that which is rewarded increases, that which is punished is avoided.

When assessment is "polluted with punishment," grading reflects compliance with work assignments, rather than progress toward testable learning targets. Punitive grading because homework was not completed confounds the reporting of actual student learning.

There is no limit to the amount of data that children could collect… fodder for meaningful math problems, charting and graphing..when they are at school.

There is no limit to how many creative ideas that children can devise, and no limit to their motivation to express themselves if someone listens to them.

And, there is a need for teachers to understand what the daily lives of our children are like. Thought Stoppers? The reason that thought and discussion of the curriculum stops at the classroom door is that the "work" often is boring, irrelevant, and insulated from students' experience. Sometimes this is because the content is lacking, sometimes this is because the presentation is lacking. Learning for the sake of achieving a high score on a test motivates only the same minority of students who willingly do their homework.

Children flourish when we start with their world and help them expand their thoughts and perceptions. Children stagnate when we shoehorn their thinking into lockstep and force them to trudge through benchmark and high-stakes testing ruts. Children learn by play and laughter. Memory connects best with joy and fun, and almost not at all with stress. Our schools would be delightful places if they were designed for children. But, our current factory-based school design doesn't allow for the messy, ad hoc, spur of the moment, catch a firefly, serendipity that typifies a real learning environment.

Our schools are too big and unmanageable. Immediacy and intimacy are structured out of the school day.

An Anachronistic Practice Geared for the Convenience of the Factory School

There are a minority of children that like academic work and are eager to complete homework assignments. For these students, the best thing that teachers can advise is, "Get a life!"

The reason that homework is for the convenience of the school is that it seeks to keep students in the grade-level, lockstep… supporting the fiction of "uniform, homogenized learning" and the "school-year, adequate-progress-month."

If children have to call a hotline, the homework is too difficult.

If family stress increases because the parents have to coerce their child to "do their homework," than the student has the wrong assignment.

But imagine the logistics and "grading nightmare" that the shop overseer (I mean teacher) faces if all students have different assignments.

How could such a flexible, built-on-student-choice-of-assignments, highly motivating, strategy demonstrate that all students are on track to meet the year-month-grade targets? Keep Workable Suggestions Under Wraps But keep the suggestion about individual tutoring to yourself.

Otherwise, the "behind" that will be left behind will be yours… because there is no room in a school district's political establishment for anyone who suggests an expensive solution to educating our children. The school district bureaucracy can't count on your loyalty if it spins the "nothing is too good for our kids" mantra, but you suggest a solution that the bureaucracy can't deliver, cheaply."

So, pretend that homework is important, secretly assign the right kind of homework where students think, create, gather data, dance, sing, act out, write, design… think. Assign the right kind of homework where students always succeed… homework that always brings their grades up.

Look at homework as the contents of a cafeteria tray, and don't insist that every student finishes everything.

A few changes on your part will transform homework from a divisive issue into meaningful learning.

"Backing off" on homework is the quickest strategy to making headway in learning.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Short Article at 10:00

Feature Article

Fast-Track to Patience

"Hurry up to achieve results!"

"Rush to meet current goals!"

"Push students to learn faster!"

"Make every instructional minute count!"

"Work smarter, not harder, and drive your students (and your) performance to the top!"

"Hold to high expectations, and demand top-notch production from your students!"

"Believe, motivate and achieve great things…no pain, no gain!" Stress-Filled Folly
The one thing that each of these "prescriptions" for success have in common is that the desired result is opposite the intention, and that these suggestions are counter-productive.

The other thing that unifies these "strategies" is that stress for both students and teachers is the natural result of forcing learning into an "unnatural" process.

Memory, creativity, practical application, and the integration of knowledge each suffer when stress is poured into the learning environment.

Sure, a bit of stress at the time of a performance, heightens perceptions and pumps energy into a person's system. But, the systematic over-straining of our physical and emotional machinery leads to mistakes, errors, hypertension, obesity and a host of ills.

But, maybe it would be worth the effort if students' instructional outcomes, performance results, produced and measured artifacts…even test scores…met higher standards of proficiency and knowledge. But these indicators don't demonstrate higher levels of learning productivity, accomplishment or achievement. "Catching Up" Takes Time
One source of the dismal results from teaching children from low-income families stems from believing that these children are not ready to learn.

When these children start kindergarten or first grade, their teachers believe…The children are "behind"

Drill and practice is needed to help the students "catch up"

The children are deficient in personal experiences that ready them for learning at the appropriate pace

The teacher has to work harder to achieve even meager results from this "unmotivated, unprepared" group of kids

That is isn't fair that a teacher of these kids is compared to a teacher of children from middle class families using the same test

These are all myths could be dispelled with evidence. And, all these "obstacles" could be overcome with patience. Dispelling the Myths
Here are some learning myths that are easily dispelled. (We wish that it were this easy to oust these methods from our school environment.)
Myth: The children are behind.

Fact: The children are where they are. It is the assumption of the "factory school theory" that every student needs to be learning the "exact same thing at the exact same time" that is the error.

Myth: These children lack experiences.

Fact: Unless the child was in a coma for an extended period of time, if the child is five years old, the child has five years of experiences.

Myth: These children are unmotivated to learn. Their lack of intrinsic motivation requires that they receive lots of drill to catch them up, and tangible rewards to bribe them into compliance.

Fact: Mastery and achievement are innate. And, these children have mastered their environment.

Myth: These children don't know how to learn.

Fact: These children are more honest about how little value teacher "lecturing" adds to the learning ledger. Really the middle class children are only pretending that the "talking teacher" is responsible for the learning that they demonstrate.

Myth: Drill and practice are needed to help these students catch up.

Fact: Drill and practice is great for subversive control, but lousy for learning. These children need practice communicating, talking, expressing, describing what they are doing as they participate in stimulating, richly rewarding experiences.

Myth: Teachers have to work harder to teach these children.

Fact: Teachers need to work differently, but not "harder" to teach children from low socio-economic households. Mainly, teachers need to exercise active patience, believe in the innate abilities of children, and provide a "rich environment."

Providing opportunities for learning

Myth: These students have to work hard to catch up.

Fact: Students from low socio-economic homes catch up, even outdistance some of the children from middle class homes if they start with their own life experiences, communicate and explore in an engaged, hands-on environment.

Myth: Drill and practice accelerated remedial learning for students of low socio-economic homes.

Fact: Drill and practice comprise the most sterile, lifeless methods of instruction. Drill and practice competes with

"teacher talk" for the title of the "most boring" and ineffective school day strategy. One Size Fits One Student As far as learning is concerned, every student requires a "tailor-made," "designed-only-for-me" course of study.

But how is a teacher to create 22 to 35 tailor-made programs (in an elementary classroom); double that for team teaching), or 180 to 220 individual programs (in a secondary classroom)?

Here are the steps: (Note: Of course this process requires patience.) Communicate with each student on a personal level

Ask questions about the process that the student uses to think

Pay attention to the senses that the student uses, i.e., the relationship of thinking to "Multiple Intelligences"

Categorize each student (in your mind) in terms of primary and secondary learning styles

Begin to create personas (stereotypes/ characters/ story plots) of the top patterns

Check these patterns in particular… Hands-On/ Visual

Visual/ Hands-On

Hands-On/ Auditory

Visual/ Auditory

Auditory/ Hands-On

Auditory/ Visual Enrich the classroom environment with hands-on and visual materials

Enrich the time that the teacher talks with hands-on, visual and auditory descriptions

Make these story-like, if possible use stories and dialogue to share lessons…

Use language that is tailored for multiple learning styles Hands-On: Get the feel for, get in touch with, get in contact with, get a sense of…

Visual: See what the information is about, see the relationship, look at the big picture…

Auditory: Hear what this is about, talk it out, debate the issue, describe in detail… Group students by major processing preference to start

Later, group students by mixing (integrating) students into groups so that the major patterns are available for each group

Come to see each particular processing pattern as a resource for the others Focus on project assignments that

require multiple patterns Case Studies Case studies demonstrate that many methods are capable of taking students that arrive "behind and not ready" and bring them to "catch up, mastery and accelerated" levels in a couple of years.

But the components of each of these successful systems include: Children are prized and respected

Teachers are confident that learning will "catch on"

Students are encouraged and their self-esteem is nurtured

The environment is kept "stress free"

Teachers are patient, and let the learning happen The message for teachers to share with the forces of ignorance that

want to drive classroom management into a stress-filled frenzy is, "Our students have abilities, intelligences and

motivations that surpass our expectations of them. If we start from where our students are and if we help each student

achieve in their own way, our students will outdistance the students who are yoked to the "factory school model"

curriculum. In fact, they will "skate rings" around the lock-step students because they won't be shackled into learning in a way that does not match their learning style.

There is a wisdom in taking our cue to how we deliver instruction from each student. And a road map of how that instruction is implemented is "patience."

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Featured Article at 09:00

Quick Tips

Before you Insult or Put Down a Student: Count from One to the Value of your Salary

Interacting with students can be exasperating, trying, frustrating… anger generating… as well as rewarding, joyous, fun, exhilarating, happy. But, some students continue to tamper with their teacher's emotional interface, methodically manipulating their teacher's "emotional-equilibrium-thermostat," and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

Perhaps you encounter such a student in your classroom. Perhaps that student "ticked you off" today.

You run a lot of descriptive comments, labels, evaluations of this student through your mind… almost all negative.

And, you generally keep these to yourself. When the Temptation Presents Itself But, at those choice moments when the sarcastic, biting, "now's my chance to get back at him" inspirations hit; think twice, think better about what you are about to do, think.

While opportunities to insult, put down, diminish your student in a cute, unique, funny, double-meaning-kind-of-way present themselves. Can you defend your comments to your supervisor when you face a complaint from the student's parents?

While you can have the entire class laughing at the "trouble making, thorn-in-your-paw student;" don't.

Don't do it!

Use a variation on the "count to ten" technique, and count from one to the sum of your salary.

But this could take a lone time (although with the size of your salary, not nearly as long as it should, because your salary should be a much larger number).

Maybe it will even take until tomorrow to count this high, but, don't lose any sleep over the incident. Do the math. The math supporting the "super-high-count" is a delay tactic that pays off because the math in this situation is "bad." And, if you can't overcome the "bad numbers," don't "do the deal."

The numbers resulting from sarcasm, put downs and insults to students (even veiled, sneaky ones that you can get-away-with) are like the interest numbers of a "payday loan."

If you can't repay the payday loan on payday, don't do the deal. The interest for a delay will end up costing you. But, quick, glib, negative comments "zinged" at a student will cost you because the cost has a payback plan that is worse than the repayment of a payday loan.

While your six seconds of revenge bring a smile, even a veiled smile, to your lips. The "put down" student will smolder, fume and retaliate. At a later date, in a few minutes, tomorrow, maybe for the rest of the school year other students may laugh, even applaud (because the trouble maker irritates them, too); but their "guard hairs, hackles, feelers" will be sensitized; and they will (at an unconscious level) be alert and ever vigilant for when you might turn on them.

No matter how you try to pay off the "usury-style interest" charged by this insult-based incident; no amount of kindness, rapport, good words, will cancel the "charge against your reputation" that the moment of spite generated.

School-Based Urban Legend The "Don't Smile Until XMAS" myth does not apply in this case.

You're not a "burned out, disgruntled, control-jockey" just drawing a (meager) paycheck.

This "Don't Smile Until XMAS Urban Legend" never worked, never had any place in education, never rose to the level of "professional" behavior.

You are a highly-trained, focused, dedicated professional.

You hold yourself to high standards. In this case to a standard as high as the physicians' "First, Do no harm."

In this case, counting from one to the value of your paycheck offers a double payoff. The strategy of waiting before firing off a negative comment does no harm to your student, and does no harm to your reputation and does no harm to the rapport that you have developed with your students. Avoiding a double negative (the irksome student and a retaliatory teacher response) creates a positive, and you maintain a positive reputation with your students.

More importantly, as you express yourself in a professional manner, you get to think (and feel) good about yourself.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Top Tips

A Teacher's "Bionic Brain:" The World's Best Super Computer

Imagine that the school district that you work for decided to install a "super computer" that was geared for education and success. Imagine that this computer didn't require cords or daily battery recharging, had a human interface, and functioned with visual and auditory programming.

Imagine that this computer had social programming and functioned with multi-sensory inputs i.e., visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, proprioceptive, olfactory, gustatory.

Imagine that this super computer had a build-in guidance system that could home in and track targets even when the targets were elusive and not visible at times.

Too Good to be True?

Even better, this computer is available for take home and it processes even when you sleep! It this computer can output answers that are new, creative leaps in associations.

And this computer learns, multi-tasks, automatically completes complex tasks, and completes background processes automatically. Your Mind: Supercomputer Extraordinaire Your mind is the super computer that we are describing. It is so much better than you believe, and much better when you believe. Your mental processing capacity is tremendous.

Consider that all the intellectual prowess that you boast is only "surface scratching."

But, you have to know how to use this biological marvel of complexity and processing might.

Unfortunately, the brain's operator's manual is not published, and this "how-to" is not something that you learned in school.

In fact, if you focus on the narrow range of skills that comprises high-stakes test-taking, you will miss most of the extraordinary capabilities that you and your students possess. Multi-Sensory Programming The way that your super computing brain is programmed is through your senses. And, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, definitions, suggestions plus remembered sounds, mental pictures are all learning are registered by connections that are created.

Later, these connections become pathways. Still later, these pathways are collected, chunked, modularized, and automated.

When we say that all your intellectual power "just scratches the surface," we mean that much of the processing that this super computer brain accomplishes occurs under the surface, i.e., unconscious processing.

Sensory-Based Operating System

Your super computer operates on chemical and electrical energy, so some of the processes take longer than a silicon-based computer.

But, the processing power excels in depth, intricacy and associations to make up for what the processing lacks in speed. The analogy is something like this. That speedy new computer that you just disposed your disposable income to purchase is like a third grade student playing a plastic recorder. The super computer that you manage in your brain and nervous system is like a philharmonic orchestra. The layer, texture, richness, flavor, timbre and color of your thinking out produces, out creates, out anticipates, out recognizes…out performs a slick new hardware device, hands-down.Excess CapacityNot only that, but your personal operating system contains several unique capacities.

These are: Dreaming

You can think, image, feel, sense and perceive in fact and fantasy

Incubation

You can set up a problem for analysis, ponder solutions for a time, then allow the process to continue on its own. The answer will "output itself" some time in the future

Creativity

Associations, connections, perceptions come together in novel, unique and "ah ha!" kinds of ways for fresh solutions

Unconscious Processes

Complex tasks, once learned, can be operated without much attention. Reaction time and skills are integrated. You can drive a car, listen to the radio, and scratch your ear at the same time…all without taking your eyes off the road or one hand off the steering wheel

Belief

You can stretch beyond obvious sensory information and connect with possibilities. You can also hold this confidence about the learning and success potentials of your students, and be the catalyst that brings these talents and abilities "to the fore" in your students' expressed and observed capacities

Self-Esteem

Related to the capacity for belief is the capacity to believe in yourself, and to treat yourself and others with kindness and respect.

Self-Actualization

The maturing of the innate desire and capacity for "mastery and achievement," your super computer is geared to assure your success in becoming "all that you can be"

Creative Imagination

Creative Imagination is the process of picturing, feeling, sensing a desired outcome as already happened, and trusting that your actions and reactions will conform to "make it so"Integration: Putting all your Capacity into Action: Application and Performance

SidebarFor an in depth exploration of the Application and Performance Model (AnP), refer to our article, Application and Performance: The "Flip Side" of Planning.

The integration of your brain's super computing abilities is your ability, without stress, to…Communicate with your students

Store countless "chunks of relevant data about each student"

Focus upon success (with Creative Imagination) for your students

Focus upon success (with Creative Imagination) for yourself

Believe in your students' capacity to learn and find boundless supporting evidence

Believe in your ability to teach and demonstrate this capacity, minute by minute with your ideas, performance and artistry

Say, do, move, gesture, signal, smile, reinforce and exhibit communications with your students with flawless timing

Succeed as a teacher because your students succeed as learners, doers, creators, inventors, craftspersons, writers, orators, etc.You can track all 22 of your students' on 139 high-stakes test objectives, without stress, integrate the connections and reinforcements in the proper sequence, and effortlessly achieve success.

And, you can do this while supporting your students as unique and precious, while coaching and mentoring their artistic and creative capacities, while enjoying the moments that you share with your students…but this is a story for another article.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Top Tips at 07:00

Teacher Resources

Free Microsoft™ Clip Art and Media

Besides the free tutorials that we described in the last issue of Classroom Toolkit, Microsoft™ offers lots of "clip art and media."Link to the previous Microsoft™ free eLearning article…In fact, the Microsoft™ site states that there are 150,000 items available for download!

Link to the Microsoft™ Clip Art and Media Download page…

The resource library contains…Clip Art

Pictures

Sounds

AnimationsThe download process is better, faster, cheaper than just finding images through a search engine, then trying to determine if you can legally use the images. If you have a copy of Microsoft Office, you can use these resources.

Even better, you can search page after page of images and other resources, simply click a "check box" to add the images to a "shopping cart," and download a huge selection of these files, all at once. Tips on Using Clip ArtMicrosoft also provides online help on how to make the best use of this media resource.

Link to the "Tips on Using Clip Art" page

The one problem with downloading a lot of images at one time is that the images will have names such as, "j0402101.jpg" or "jo4ii781.jpg". But, this is how they download from digital cameras, too.

You have to rename the images to make them usable. Just remember to keep the correct "three letter extension" when renaming the resource files. What's the Catch? This is Microsoft, and Microsoft wants to promote their products.

This means that free comes with a catch. What is the catch?

In order to download the pictures in a time-saving, easy to use manner, you have to use Microsoft's "Clips Manager."

This "Clips Manager" is found only with licensed copies of Microsoft Office

The good news is that You probably have the "Clips Manager" installed on a computer at home or at school

You can just select a large number of images, sounds, anything else; place these in a shopping cart; and download the entire collection

The collection will then be found in the "My Documents/My Pictures/ Microsoft Clips Organizer" folder (directory)

Once you have the picture in the Clips Organizer Directory, you can search on a topic and all the pictures that are located on your computer will be available.

(Note: This is the reason for keeping the files with their "strange names" in this folder (directory), and simply moving a copy to another location and naming it with a meaningful name.)

(Note #2: If you use the images on your Web pages, and you want to add extra relevance in Search Engine analysis of your page, you will name your images to coincide with your page content.) Sidebar If you have an older version of Microsoft installed on your computer(s), you may find that the folder names are slightly different. Also, for multiple computers, it would be quite a chore to keep all computers updated with the same clip art and media. There are a lot of possibilities for using these resources, i.e., burning a collection to a CD, storing a collection on a USB drive, saving the collection to a shared volume on the network, having students save the images that they use to their home directories or portfolios, etc.

Delving into all of these possibilities is beyond the scope of this article. Consult with your school district's IT Department for the strategy that best suits your situation. The bad news is If you use an Open Source browser, such as Firefox, the Microsoft site starts to get suspicious, and starts asking you questions to make sure that you can legally use the Clip Art. Microsoft and Open Source

Microsoft is recognizing the value of the Open Source Movement by developing business alliances with Open Source vendors.

But, while these images, sounds and other resources are free (for MS Office users), they are not Open Source. In fact, Classroom Toolkit received criticism for our article last month because we identified a free, Microsoft professional development resource.

The criticism went something like this, "How can you claim to be an Open Source Movement, and share information about Microsoft?"

Of course the answer is easy Classroom Toolkit is a movement for providing "Instructional Materials for Teachers"

We promote free and low-cost options for teachers, and are unbiased about where teachers find resources

Our focus is on saving time for teachers, reducing stress, and helping teachers understand that they are not the cause of the mess that modern education finds itself mired in

Teachers want resources that they can use, today, without complexity. Teachers do not care to enter a debate on Open Source "purity," nor, do teachers want to tinker with the technology. Teachers just don't have the time to experiment to get another computer platform configured and running

The fact is that most Open Source software provides a Windows version, and promoting Windows makes the most sense

Our focus is on empowering teachers, and eliminating the negative side effects when outsiders (whether politicians, judges, or Linux server IT specialists) try to dictate what is "best for education" (Note: It doesn't matter if these outsiders are "well meaning" or not. [Although in the case of politicians meddling with education, the odds are that their "murky" agendas are automatically suspect.] So, check out all the free resources that Microsoft provides.

These resources are easy to use, and that is the message that Open Source advocates need to learn. (It's the old Apple Computer mantra.

Teachers focus on instruction, and any layer of difficulty in applying technology distracts from that focus. The reason that some Open Source products just won't be used is that those products are too much trouble to use. Products that are not "one-click" easy just are not ready for prime time, real-world, teaching.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Resources at 06:00

Book Review

Waiting for your Cat to Bark? Author: Eisenberg, Bryan and Eisenberg, Jeffrey ISBN: 0-7852-1897-1 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2006 Publisher: : Nelson Business Pages: 225 Cost: \$19.99 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$3.95 (new) - \$4.99 (new) at eBay(TM) Subtitle: Persuading Customers When they Ignore Marketing Why are we reviewing another "business book" for teachers? Answer: 1.) Because the authors describe streamlined processes that teachers need to employ in improving instruction. 2.) The authors describe thinking and methods that clarify ideas and issues that teachers face. 3.) The ideas that can help teachers are presented more clearly in this book than anywhere else. The Books' Topics: This book contains 29 chapters and a lot of ideas that the authors present with a unique slant. Substitute the word "teaching" for "marketing," and the ideas become important for education. Substitute the word "students" for the word "customers&, well, you get the idea. We've taken the liberty to do this transformation for you. These include: The Fiction of the Student Experience Why Teaching is Simple but Hard Students in Control Personalizing Learning Accountable Education Topics that we didn't transform words to describe: Maintaining Persuasive Momentum The Design of Persuasive Systems Disclosing the Necessary The Human Operating System Wireframing as an Interactivity Map Persuasive Architecture: a Six-Step Process The central themes of this book are: The age of control (in education or business) has passed. If we want to reach all our audience, we need to develop different ways of persuading, teaching, communicating We must understand that simple and simplistic mental maps (idealized theories, academic constructs) fail to provide guidance in how we relate, communicate and persuade We become more successful if we… Look at our clients, customers, students as several (distinctive) personality types Create "scenarios" that describe the major types of clients, customers, students that we serve Perceive motivation as a series of steps, instead of an "all-or-nothing" single step Assess, pay attention, ask a lot of questions (and test to find out the answers) and map our strategy in concrete, specific, measurable terms Results increase as we personalize our services, target our performance to individual needs and motivations, and adjust our activities to the real-world, not the the world that we wish we worked in Keywords: Personas and Personalization Persuasion Architecture Topology of Knowledge Wireframing and Mapping our Application Path Storyboarding and Prototyping Service Delivery Scenarios Main Idea: Students, clients, customers fall into two general types… Dogs: trusting, obedient, willing to please Cats: aloof, disdainful, could care less what you think Of course, there are more types, but this categorization allows you to break the "fantasy-wish-delusion" that people should be different, somehow better, so that you could produce on your job. Assessment and an open mind, matched to a flexible, willing to change course when observable, measurable data indicates that our results are stagnant, going in the wrong direction will put us on the path to success, but will not guarantee success Mapping unique and individual strategies for each group of students, clients, customers means really writing these down, drawing these out on paper, and tracing persuasion, learning, and development paths for each pattern Following these procedures, we become skilled at combining delivery and performance services at places where these paths intersect and coincide, and we become skilled at branching off and serving one-of-a-kind subgroups when we need to. Quotes: "One basic difference between cats and dogs is motivation. Centuries of cat and dog humor captures the the stereotypes: A dog wants to please you; a cat could care less. Dogs are devoted and loving and selfless. Cats are aloof, indifferent, and self-indulgent. Dogs are social and act in ways that maintain and support the social order. Cats are solitary and act in ways that benefit themselves." (p. - 10) "Marketing and advertising folks have used Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a formula for motivating their customers to buy: Target the appropriate need, and you can create the compelling associative cues that elicit desire. Target a level too low, and you risk creating messages that customers ignore (their needs are already satisfied). Target too high on the pyramid, and customers may not be ready to hear you (they're still focused on meeting a more basic need." (p. - 15) "While you are busy 'selling,' customers are engaged in the related, but by no means identical process of 'buying.' Customers need to resolve their own concerns so that they can build confidence to buy from you. Ideally, they'll build that confidence with information that you provide. But if you don't provide it, they'll track it down by going to other

sources" (p. - 42)

"The classic business-school model that has influenced countless sales people, advertisers, and marketers is the concept of AIDA, an acronym that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. In essence it is the formula of how you persuade the customer to buy." (p. - 52)

"You build and sustain persuasive momentum by intentionally and repeatedly providing answers to these three questions:

Who are we trying to persuade to take action?

What is the action that we want this person to take?

What does that person need in order to feel confident taking that action?

These simple questions are the foundational building blocks of Persuasion Architecture. Only by mastering these three questions can we align our customers' buying process with our sales process." (p. - 54 & 55)

"Marketers have always claimed, and honestly believe, that they listen to their customers. However, most of this 'listening' is carried out in unnatural circumstances--in focus groups or through surveys." (p. - 80)

"The dictionary definitions of persona are revealing. Personas are characters; they have a voice, they are representations or stand-ins for somebody else, and they play a role that, while connected to, is also distinct from their inner selves. They are images, personalities." (p. - 105)

"When you appeal to emotions, you help your customers make their decisions. The easiest path to making an emotional connection is by focusing on benefits--not features--of your product or service. Benefits are based on people; features are based on things." (p. - 115)

"Can you imagine tackling the construction of an office building without a set of blueprints in hand? Can you imagine drawing up those blueprints with only a cursory understanding of all the questions you have to answer before you put a single line on paper? Of course you can't. You intuitively know this would at best limit how your structure worked and at worst doom your project to failure. What you want is a comprehensive picture of every detail that could reinforce or undermine your success before you start dealing with the tangibles. We operate in a world full of unknowables. So uncover is the process of understanding what is knowable, and seeking to understand that from every possible known perspective…it's simply waiting for someone to pull back the covers--to uncover it.…People don't get terribly excited when we first bring up uncover. Perhaps it seems vague or even mystical to them. Perhaps they think that it's a time waster. Perhaps they already know it all. Perhaps they fear what they will learn. Perhaps they prefer to get right to what they think is the heart of the matter…We cannot overemphasize the importance of uncover. It is the foundation for every step of Persuasion Architecture. Without uncover, not only do you lack a useful set of blueprints, you operate blind. Uncover sets the course for everything else that you do. Start by sending your project in the wrong direction, and it will be nearly impossible to steer it back on course again." (p. - 118 & 119)

"Observations about temperament and type preference are now understood as a function of brain lateralization, or how the brain uses its separate but connected right and left hemispheres. Both sides of our brains are different, just as our brain is asymmetrical--our right and left sides are not mirror images of each other. These asymmetrical design limitations of brain and body create the dynamic of the human operating system. Our 'limitations' define what's possible. For all of us, our abilities and preferences line between the extreme of the right and the extreme of the left…Humans are amazingly complex creatures and any classification scheme unavoidably simplifies this complexity. In addition, each person is more than one classic personality type. We are delightful mixtures--one type may predominate, but others come into play, often influenced by environmental factors, social factors, even ephemeral moods." (p. - 144 & 145)

"We've dug deeply into the matter of whom we are trying to persuade. Now we can begin to deal systematically with the actions that we want our personas to take, and what they need so they feel comfortable taking that action. Actions and needs establish the parameters for interaction. We want to create a map of that interacting, through planned scenarios that acknowledge and meet every opportunity. This is the process of wireframing." (p. - 182)

"W. Edwards Deming, considered by many the Father of the Quality Revolution, believed if individuals can't interact with a system successfully, the problem lies not in the people using the system, but in the system itself. He also said, 'If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you are doing…If you think that you can't achieve a framework for prediction, it means that you probably don't understand the system.' " (p. - 207 & 208)

"Because Persuasion Architecture offers a more holistic description for the entire system, it allows us to identify the component parts of the system that need measuring and improving. You can identify and measure specific service and process defects, then ask, 'Why are they happening?' The answer to that question may uncover underlying reasons for customer dissatisfaction and defection. We often find there's more than one reason or root cause contributing to a service defect." (p. -) Issues Addressed by the Book: The issues of motivating (selling) students to learn and study is key to improving education. Especially in a time when individual paths to unique learning are possible because of Internet access and technology.

Understanding that all students are unique, but building assumptions based upon measurable assessment provides the most economic strategy (in terms of time and talent that we expend) in facilitating learning. The Book's

Shortcomings: The book presents a complex analysis, probably too complex.

Although the book is worth studying and applying, it probably won't appeal to the "cookie cutter crowd" that wants "no-brainer" answers to all issues.

But, for the person that wants to perfect their Application and Performance (AnP) skills, this book offers a viable starting

point. Comments: The authors provide a reasoned, analytical and unique approach to understanding the inner workings of people and forming concrete strategies to persuade them. This is exactly what teachers need to do. No learning theory takes the place of direct observation of students and their internal thinking and learning process. And nothing takes the place of direct communication with students. Multiple choice, multiple guess testing provides little or no evidence to guide instruction, and, compared to the process that these authors describe, is a paltry substitute for acquiring real-world assessment data.

In the realm of high-stakes testing, providing the strategy maps, measurable paths and objective points where motivation, instructional delivery and instructional management must be differentiated should be big pluses. Summary: This book is another of those business books that capture the correct meaning of "education should be operated as a business." Most often, those pundits are thinking of the "business of manufacturing" or the "business of banking," and are out of touch with the real world of teaching.

These authors see the delivery of products and services to reluctant, reluctant, recalcitrant customers (our students) as requiring a personalized understanding and a focused effort at persuasion. This is the kind of "business sense" that makes sense in education. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 4.0

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Site Strategy

Classroom Toolkit Redesign

Classroom Toolkit's redesign is in underway at "full steam ahead."

Here is a catalog of the changes: Site host change

Blog moved to new site and redesigned

Forum Added

Site structure prototype posted online for review These changes allow a greater use of Open Source Web software, i.e., 1.) Blog -- Wordpress; and 2.) Forums -- Simple Machine Forum;

Here is a summary of these changes; Site Host Change The transition to the new Web host was smooth. The only issues that developed in the move were an hour or two with the RSS and MY Yahoo, My MSN icons becoming invisible. While fixing this issue, we added a My Google link.

The new hosting plan costs less than \$50 per year. The previous plan cost about \$300 per year. This is important because this project is privately supported, does not seek donations and does not sell products or services. Blog Redesign The Wordpress; Blog allows quicker and easier updates. We chose a different program than our newsletter (which uses Serendipity; another Open Source software package).

Link to the new Blog site;

We will use the Blog to share quick comments, items that 1.) are timely and can't wait for our newsletter, or, 2.) items that are short and don't match a general theme.

Please feel free to comment on items that are posted on the Blog.

Sidebar Our newsletter Classroom Toolkit has nine components and provides plenty of content that can be explored in greater depth than a Blog. Each issue of our newsletter follows a theme (There is often a loose, fuzzy logic, holistic, divergent thinking connection among the articles.) Feel free to 1.) comment about the articles, 2.) suggest topics for the newsletter, or 3.) write an article for the newsletter Our Simple Machines Forum; This is our first forum. We will learn as we go.

The purpose of our Forum is to gather feedback so that we can focus on more of what you want.

The Forum is moderated because our focus is on teaching, and benefits for teachers. (Note: No one wants to wade through a long list of advertisements before they find the next post in the topic thread.) Moderating the forum keeps the SPAM out.

The Simple Machines Forum; software that powers the Forum is Open Source, and available without cost.

Check it out at;

Link to the Simple Machines Forum site; Site Structure Redesign A prototype of the site structure redesign is posted at;

Link to site redesign prototype; Our goals for the site redesign are: Provide a visual overview of our philosophy Structure access so that source materials, tools and resource are easier to find and use

Develop more integration with our newsletter articles

Provide more coaching and support for teachers We are testing this design, and exploring whether an Open Source

Content Management System (CMS) can handle our design requirements. We have explored Drupal, Joomla!, Mambo, Plone and Xoops software packages.

So far, the only Open Source Content Management System that seems to hold promise for the type of site that we wish to develop is Plone; Redesign Timeline Our target for the updated site prior to the start of the upcoming (2007-2008) school year. We want to allow enough time for teachers to implement our planning strategies.

So, share your ideas about how we can improve our site.

Use our Forum, E-mail or "Snail Mail." Your ideas are important to us.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Site Progress at 04:00

Open Source for Education

Teachers to Open Source Advocates: "You have Homework!"

There are technology advocates that want to replace the software that is used in most schools with "no-cost" software. This kind of software is called "Open Source." The name, "Open Source" does not mean "free", but it means that the folks that create the software release the "Source Code" rather than keep that code as a business (i.e., trade) secret. What this means for teachers; i.e., how important this distinction is, is "not much." But, the Open Source argument distracts school district executives from more important questions.

What are more important questions than, "Can we save money on software?" The most important questions; Why should teachers care?

What benefits are there for teachers and students?

What about this software improves teaching and learning?

What about this software increases teachers' and students' productivity?

What about this software increases curricular goals, increases our job performance, increases the long-term value to employers of the students that we graduate, or increases scores on high-stakes tests? ... Answers;

Why should teachers care? Because some of the rhetoric pushing this software scheme is yet another "outside group" (not teachers) that wants to dictate and control education

Because many of these folks (Open Source Advocates) "forget" to ask teachers what teachers and students need.

Some of these advocates assume that they know what is best for teachers and students because they are "saving money" for school districts

Because these folks are chanting the "mantra of cost-savings" to high-level school district administrators, and because district administrators listen to this "No-Cost (\$0.00) Spin"

Because high-level district administrators already think that too much money is being spent on technology without seeing a return on the investment (in terms of student learning and test score increases)

What benefits are there for teachers and students? Little or no benefits to teachers are delivered in this switch to Open Source software because …

High level district administrators are apt to grab the dollars saved on software and spend them on anything except the increased professional development and increased release time that would be needed for any new software deployment; i.e., teachers are expected to get up to speed on their own time, using their own resources

Sidebar (Note: teachers have already learned to use some software, often on their own)

Also, the cost of professional development and release time would be higher than the cost of the software that will be replaced, e.g., \$100 for the software, \$40 to \$100 per day for substitutes, \$18 to \$25 per hour for extra duty pay Teachers are often on their own in downloading and installing the software at home (where they do most of their planning and lesson development work)

Students are often on their own in downloading and installing this software on computers at home

The software that is targeted for this cost reduction is the Microsoft Office Productivity Suite, software that almost all teachers already own

Teachers and students need more than Office Productivity Software

Teachers and students need software that adheres to standards and offers interoperable (interchangeable) file formats and the ability for teachers to collaborate and share

It would be nice if the collaboration was automatic

Teachers need a complete set of tools that transfer components without rework, without saving, then importing into another program. Teachers need programs that work together Sidebar For example, when the teacher creates a Mind Map, the proper software will allow "one-click" … Creation of a Word Processing Document Outline

Creation of a Presentation Slide Show

Creation of a PDF file

Creation of a Web page

Creation of a Project Management Plan

The Sending a Copy by E-mail And it would be even better if a presentation slide show automatically turned into a Mind Map. One crucial option for recommending any software is ensuring that the software works with other educational software. This is known as the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) initiative. Compliance with the SIF initiative is

generally missing in the proposal to save money on software. Possibly because making sure that software "plays nice" with other software also costs money (because this compatibility requires servers, infrastructure and technical staff).
Sidebar Not all Open Source projects are useless for teachers. For example, the state of Indiana has an Open Source project that seems to be working well within its limited scope. (Note: The Indiana 1:1 Computing Project targets only high school language arts students, and the only focus is student research, report writing and presentation development.) The Indiana Project focuses on learning and instruction. And learning and instruction are what motivate teachers to learn on their own, train one another, and share what works.

What makes the Indiana project a success is that state leaders had the wisdom to ask teachers what teachers and students needed. The Indiana Project Leaders also attribute project direction, creative project ideas, and suggestions for program improvement to teachers. It's clear that some educational leaders have the wisdom to focus on the needs and benefits to students, and not sell out to the "We don't have any money for education myth." "One Size Loosely Fits All" Replacing Microsoft's software because Microsoft's charges a licensing fee sidesteps several important questions …

Sidebar Microsoft's already provides most of its software to school districts at about a 90% discount.

There is nothing to prevent school districts from purchasing licenses for teachers' home computers. In fact, some districts do this.

(Note: Teachers may want to exercise caution in accepting school district software because the school district may claim that the intellectual property that was created with that software belongs to the district, even if that intellectual property was created at home, after hours.) Is this "free" software as good, or better, than the Microsoft's software? Answer: No. the commercial software is better (has more features, has organized technical support) than the Open Source software

Will this software be easier to use and require less effort to implement? Answer: Ease of use is about the same. Users just have to get used to a few minor differences.

New features: The nod goes to the commercial software. In fact, the newest version of Microsoft Office's 2007 is "slick" (although most school district staff won't see this software until next school year).

Will school districts upgrade to Office's 2007 any time soon? No.

Will teachers need to purchase anything out of their own pocket in order to use this software? Most teachers already have an academic copy of Microsoft Office's, and won't bother to upgrade until they purchase a new computer. Office's 2007 is worth the upgrade if you are collaborating with others across a network or online, and your collaborators have the same software

Since teachers share very little, most teachers won't find the collaboration features essential

Training teachers to collaborate and making that collaboration easy is a huge missing ingredient in technology plans.

(The reason: Doing this "right" would cost a school district a lot of money. It is easier to "spin" this responsibility as a teacher issue, and let teachers shoulder the implementation on their own) Sidebar Teacher collaboration is the most effective time-saver that we can recommend. In fact, the Classroom Toolkit Open Source for Instructional Materials project is a collaborative effort. We are still looking for volunteers. Do you want to join us? Will teachers need to spend time learning how to use new software on their own time? Answer: Of course, compensation for professional development and release time, while the only choice if school districts offered true professional status for teachers, is "scarcer than a politician's kept promise"

Are the files that this software creates 100% compatible with what we have in our district and at home? Answer: This depends upon how well the planning, configuration and communication are within the school district. Planning also

needs to consider communication and collaboration with colleagues in the greater world outside the school district
Is our district's IT Department equipped to manage this software? If the district's IT Department can barely keep up with repairs now, how will they be able to handle two kinds of software instead of one kind? Answer: The IT Department can't manage and must set standards based on instructional needs

The standards that the IT Department sets should be based upon educational goals, not just saving money with the lowest-cost option

The standards that the IT Department sets should be based upon solving the needs of teachers and students, based upon streamlining the learning process, and based upon making the use of the technology transparent. (This means that teachers and students can pay attention to the curriculum, and don't even notice what technology they are using)

Will the Open Source software work seamlessly in two important areas? …

Teacher and student collaboration
Students' electronic portfolios
Answer: It depends on the standards that are set
Beware of "Geeks" Bearing Gifts
Teachers should be vigilant, worried, concerned, "maybe even hopping mad" when non-educators (techies, lawyers, politicians, court judges; even some school finance directors, and superintendents) make decisions and recommend solutions for education. Some of these folks barely know how to bungle along in their own space, but they have little face validity for making choices for educators.

Teachers should be alert and ready when "save a dime-- create a dollar's worth of hassles" proposals come to the table. Sidebar Actually, teachers should be grateful if they receive any advance notice for changes such as this. Often these "initiatives" just happen during the summer, and teachers are stuck with them for at least a year, when enough complaints cause the error to be fixed and the software returned the following summer. Other considerations are whether the Open Source software is "one version back" with the capacities and functionality that it offers.

The copies of the commercial products (the Open Source products) claim that they stimulate innovation, but they generally follow, not lead, providing features and benefits that imitate the market leader. The reason for this is obvious, the market leader spends lots of research dollars to find out what the buying public wants. The Open Source developers do not have research dollars so they cannot perform the required research. Where Open Source Shines Some Open Source advocates allow the disdain for how much money Microsoft makes, or their displeasure that Microsoft refuses to hand over its "secret code" for them to play with to suggest ridding school districts of all Microsoft products. Open Source developers, on the other hand, are more pragmatic. Most Open Source developers create software that runs on the Microsoft Windows server and desktop platforms. Using Open Source software that runs on the Windows platform is a valid strategy that provides lots of choices for additional software tools.

But, teachers will be hard pressed to find school district IT Departments that will allow them to use these "free" software tools.

The reason is that software in use in a school district is never "free."

School district IT Departments are notoriously under staffed and under paid.

And, the advocates of Open Source often cite the ability to run an IT Department on less technical staff when non-Microsoft hardware and software is used.

So, the IT Department that strips software use down to bare basics and shrinks IT Department staff to a skeleton crew is not going to provide the support required to provide all the Open Source software applications that teachers and students would like to use, even if that software runs on the Microsoft Windows platform. The Biggest Mistake of All Open Source advocates tout successes in saving money by creating high school computer labs using old computers and Open Source software.

These labs allow students to write reports and create basic presentations.

But, the biggest mistake of all is believing that elementary students can use these computers when they become too slow and useless for high school students.

What most these non-teachers fail to understand is that elementary school students require more computing power, more multimedia, more audio and video capacity than high school students who are writing reports. Of course the high school students require more computing power, too. But the "cost-saving, as cheap as we can get away with" mentality denies them access to it. The danger is that 1:1 Computing can become synonymous with "low-cost, refurbished, computing for every student, on the cheap" initiatives. Beware of any "techie guru" who spouts the words "low-cost, saving money, cheap." These folks are "non-educators or politicians," and their "near-sighted vision" (or tunnel vision) prevents them from understanding that the quality education that our students deserve is going to be expensive. Very expensive! And, elementary school teachers (along with every other teacher) require additional computing capacity beyond what students need.

In addition, high school students require specialized software, for example:

Probeware
USB microscopes

Connections to graphing calculators

Instant messaging for communicating with mentors

Specialized software that is science and industry specific as they participate in real-world project learning And, does the Open Source platform support the auxiliary materials and instructional tools that comes with adopted textbooks?

If the text book add-ons run on Open Source platforms, do they also run on the Windows computer that the teacher has at home? How Classroom Toolkit's "Open Source for Instructional Materials" Movement is Different from other Open Source Projects Classroom Toolkit provides Open Source instructional materials for teachers that starts with what teachers need and what teachers can use.

Classroom Toolkit focuses on strategic processes, standards for streamlining teachers' work loads, tools that teachers can use immediately, and the lowest cost needed to "get the job done in an elegant fashion."

Classroom Toolkit's license requires that everything that is made (derived from) using our materials remain "free," while ordinary Open Source software and materials can be collected, revised, updated, altered and sold. Upcoming

Articles The integration of technology is a complex subject, and the April 2007 issue of Classroom Toolkit will continue this discussion of IT Department homework. The upcoming article will focus upon how technology integration advocates went astray by failing to provide measurable, student achievement outcomes as part of technology integration planning. Our May 2007 issue will complete this article series by describing the homework that technology integration advocates need to complete to provide the "back-end processing" that streamlines teachers' efforts and makes collaboration, coordination and communication "one-click" easy.

Friday, March 30, 2007

Quick Tips

Summertime Relaxation: Recharge your Energy (and your Databanks)

Relaxation and Stress-Release Summer is the time to recharge your energy. You can recharge even if you teach summer school, enroll in graduate courses, or work at other full (or part time) jobs to make ends meet. How, can you recharge when you are tired and working?

Answer: Because a change of pace is balancing and stress-releasing.

Answer Number Two: Because you intend to make it so, you plan to make it so, and you do what is in your best interest to ready yourself for the "quick flip in activity levels" that is your mini vacation.

Get some exercise. Have some fun…

Take walks, hike, enjoy a picnic

Swim

Try yoga, tai chi,

Play (or make noise on) a music instrument

Go dancing, skating

Play golf (but only if you are not competitive…against yourself or others) (Recharging your Databanks Recharging your databanks means slowing down your thinking so that you are ready to accelerate during the upcoming school year.

Recharging your databanks includes strategies such as…Thinking and incubating ideas, then writing them down as action items or goals

Brainstorming and fantasizing…imagine how exhilarating next year will be when these new ideas are implemented and tested

Putting together research in a structured manner so that it is organized for use during the upcoming school year Build the ideas around themes, novel ways of looking at the world, the ways that students look at the world

Build more project-based learning, more learning centers, more real-world research Strategic planning, putting together a library of generic materials that you can reuse (use ten, twenty, thirty times is the goal)

Think of strategies where learning activities are self-correcting, group-scorable, or where "spot checking" serves just as well as paper grading. This will decrease the time that you waste by grading "mountains of papers with mole hills of benefits to your students."

Sidebar This recommendation to focus on reusable materials is a hallmark of the Classroom Toolkit strategy. Other Tools Here are a few tools that assist in your research…Developing a vision and overview

Any of the mind mapping programs

FreeMind™

Inspiration™

MindManager™

MindGenius™ Collecting Web Research Use a structured virtual folder system

Sort (rename the information if necessary) into folders and sub-folders

Use a program such as Surf Later™ to collect your Web research

Build a Graphics Organizer Library Check out all the printable, usable Graphic Organizers with a Starter Kit at Classroom Toolkit

Figure out how you can train students in the use of one graphic organizer format, then make subtle, but sequential, variations that stretch your students' thinking during the course of the school year. Summary "Take it easy" now, but take it easy in a way that allows you to do more work in a relaxed and focused way once school starts.

Focus your summer preparation for the upcoming year on essentials, modules…trainable procedures that are adaptable for many subjects, assignments and lesson goals.

With a bit of stress-free planning and stress-erasing relaxation, allow yourself to target a goal of maintaining a calm and peaceful attitude for the upcoming school year challenge.

You will accomplish more with a calm, focused and relaxed attitude, anyway. And, you will be able to attend to your students communications (and unexpressed needs) better if you have your life and your attitude under control.

Sidebar This is also the type of learning environment that is most conducive to maximizing your students' learning. Rest. Recharge. Re-energize. Reinvigorate.

"Then, let the games begin."

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00