

Monday, April 30, 2007

News Nuggets

Why H 1 B Visas Matter for US Education

The Tuesday, 4-3-2007 Marketplace® broadcast noted that the applications for H 1 B Visas (not credit cards) had run out in two days. Last year, it took two months before the applications were gone. The H 1 B Visa is a permit that allows foreign (high tech) workers to accept employment in the US. The Marketplace® story went on to say that the 65,000 available visas will be assigned by a lottery.

(Note: 150,000 applications were received, the two offices were "swamped," and they had to just stop accepting them. Link to the Marketplace® article… Why should this be important to American education?

Lots of reasons…

First, American companies cannot hire enough local high tech workers (engineers, programmers, etc.) because we don't graduate enough of them. And, as the report noted, our students are studying other things besides science and math.

If our students are not studying science and math, what are they studying?

Aren't school districts eliminating art, music, even Physical Education (PE) to… Save money?

Teach a high-stakes test curriculum? If we're not teaching science and math, and if we're not teaching art, music, PE; What's left besides "Teaching to the Test?"

And, aren't employers unhappy with the quality of workforce candidates that our schools are graduating? (See our newsletter article, Workforce Readiness: The Tripe Behind the Hype

Actually, the answer is "self-evident." As teaching to the high-stakes test squeezes out the rest of the curriculum, test scores rise incrementally, but learning takes a precipitous "nose dive."

And since employers have no need to employ test takers, disenchantment with the competency of our schools increases among employers.

An analogy to this situation would be that as we stomp on the gas, our car's engine races, our gas mileage decreases, and wear on the engine (stress) climbs. But, instead of going faster, our car slows down and can't carry as many people. Scenarios? Transitioning from an industrial economy to a service economy to an information economy seems to require planning and a roadmap. Otherwise we we may end up in a place that we don't want to be.

Here are some scenarios that seem possible if we continue to under fund our schools using the "do it as cheaply as possible," mass-production, factory model… India and China become the dominant world economies in the next ten years

India and China become the dominant forces of innovation in the next 20 years

High-Tech companies such as Cisco™, Intel™ Microsoft™, Oracle™ will relocate to countries with adequately trained high tech workers so that they can remain competitive, just as Levi Strauss did in the textile and garment industries

Chinese companies will take over administration of US Health Care and Foreign Guest Worker Industries, just as they have taken over the administration of the Panama Canal

Admission to the Test Prep Academies (formerly the public schools) will be by political appointment

A lottery will be held to choose which students will be able to enroll in India and China as foreign exchange students, and India and China will try to increase the number that can enroll each year as part of their foreign aid package to the US. Far Fetched? Well, just consider "The Law of Numbers" in the Game of War. For example, you can play "War" with coins or cards.

With cards, each player reveals their next card, and the player with the highest card takes both. If the next play results in a tie, the players reveal the next card and the highest card takes all the ties, plus the current play.

With coins, one player chooses "even or odd" and the other player gets the opposite. Two coins are shown during a play. If both coins show "heads" or if both coins show "tails," the player who called "even" wins and takes both coins." If the coins show dissimilar, the "odds" player takes both. (You cannot have a tie in the coins version of the War game. In the Game of War, the person who starts out with the most coins or cards usually wins all the coins or cards after multiple iterations of the game.

In the case of world competition, the country wins that trains the most scientists, engineers, mathematicians, technologists and innovative managers.

So, continue focusing on improving high-stakes test scores instead of improving what students learn. Continue driving creative and motivated teachers out of the profession with bureaucratic inefficiencies, with a lack of support, and with a "No Can Do" attitude toward funding hands-on, real-world experiences for our students.

Continue replacing experienced teachers with brand-new teachers (because they are cheaper), and keep on complaining that our teachers are not instructing as well as they should.

Continue approaching access and use of technology as though it was a "budget-buster", and squeeze a few extra years

out of the equipment because that is cost-effective.

In short, continue, business-as-usual, and watch other countries that don't have our resources out-compete our country. Why? Because other countries have a vision for success and follow-up, while we want to deliver as much as we possibly can with minimal cost and with minimal sacrifice.

Our country has to commit to education on a higher level and with a greater passion. Otherwise, Chinese is destined to become the dominant world language.

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

Short Article

What does it Take to Replicate a Pilot or Model Program?

The idea is great. Build a program that works, then clone the program. Let someone else shoulder the burden of thrashing out, fleshing out, tweaking a program; then grab their working model and "run with it." Once the kinks are worked out of a pilot or model program, we just make carbon copies and avoid start-up stress, avoid the confusion of pioneering, and avoid start-up costs. A copycat project should be a model of efficiency.

Great scheme! How come it just doesn't work? Unique, One of a Kind Programs: Local Issues Trump Uniformity Programs don't stamp out in replicas like auto body fenders, just like it students don't clone into uniform grade-level-month-achievement-levels.

So, once you have a package that someone else developed, what do you have? The Rest of the Story! The old saw, "the devil is in the details" applies to the implementing a pilot or model program. This "wise caution" applies when it seems like a "gremlin" sabotaged the program the second you began to implement it.

You expected to just plug in the package, "pop in your individual particulars" and skate on a "smooth-sailing," downhill slide to success and glory.

What you encounter as you implement the program is the "redacted" lessons-learned, and the unstated, "real-story" best-practices.

You have just been "Zapped!" by the best-face-forward documentation and the it's-easy-when-you-know-how" instruction pack.

Not that anyone from the pilot project wanted to deceive. They just wanted to keep their jobs. Maybe they didn't want to give the grant money back to the donor organization. They didn't want to embarrass their bosses, or lay the blame for project miscues where it belonged, on their supervisors.

An organization's stakeholders meddle in projects, and these decision-makers place obstacles and barriers to the smooth development of a project. Then, when staff works extra-hard to overcome the hurdles that the stakeholders placed on the playing field, those same supervisors frolic in the limelight and sop up the success accolades.

But, it is a career-stifling move to tell the world what happened to snag, delay and hamper the project when those lag-producing drags upon the project derived from internal pressures. Key Factors for Project Implementation The keys to a successful project implementation are...

Teamwork among the Principals (Maybe the Principals, too)

Contingency Plans (that head off trouble)

Formative Assessments (that identify what is going askew)

Rapid Response (with corrective actions) What the project team needs is a clear vision of what issues really impacted the pilot or model program. A public relations rendition of best-practices and lessons-learned serves no one except the "high-level, guilty."

Recipients and implementers of follow-on programs based upon the pilot or model program need to be informed about the "going-haywire-happenings" involved in the foibles, shortcomings or outright sabotage of the pilot program stakeholders.

Why expose such dirty underwear? Aren't the guilty best served by status-quo silence?

Absolutely not! The best information that implementers of the "copycat" program can have is a chronicle of how stakeholders from the pilot project "goofed" up the original project.

Armed with this information, the folks that implement the copycat program have the strongest repellent possible to ward off the meddling and depredations of current stakeholders. All they would have to do is refer to the documentation to show that such "bone-head" decisions during the pilot project were responsible for delay, diminished progress, squandered opportunities and accelerated cost overruns. Real Copycat Project Requirements Real-world projects are unique, and must adapt to local issues, local concerns, differences between the pilot venue and the copycat site.

But, projects do need similar environments. Environments where... Upper level executive management commits to adequate funding

A clear vision of what will be accomplished

Competent staffing

A clear vision of the benefits that the program will produce for all concerned

Buy-in from the low-level staff that will actually implement the program

A realistic timeframe

Measurable milestones that are time-and-outcome specific

A realistic contingency plan There are more items that prove to be the pulse of a project, but these provide a clue as to the reason that pilot projects seldom "get off the ground" the way that copycat supporters imagine. Easy success for copycatting a project is as rare as an airplane that flies without fuel. To Discover the Truth If you want to discover the truth about a project, ask the engineers.

This bit of wisdom was discovered by researcher, Scott Adams. One of the many truisms from the world of Dilbert is that engineers are like Vulcans, they cannot tell a lie. They will happily contradict their company's marketing hype, usually without even the slightest provocation, telling you: What their product does well What their product does poorly* What they wish their product could do Source: Strange

Connections http://argus-acia.com/strange_connections/current_article.html

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

Feature Article

Don't Send Kids to the Office: Save Minimal Administrative Support for When you Need it

Teachers fare far better by keeping discipline "in house."

It often proves counter-productive to send students "to the office." First, a teacher should never threaten, and "promising" to send students to the office is a threat.

But, what if the campus administrator sends the student back with no consequences having been leveled?

Worse, what if a teacher refers a misbehaving student to the office, only to find that the student was rewarded!

Sidebar I remember a case where "trouble-making students" (repeat offenders) on one campus were given special hats and made partners on the Assistant Principal's Posse. Of course, the Posse scoured the campus for papers and trash, but the students "got out of class" (a reward), and received recognition. Besides, "Negative student behavior isn't only the student's fault, is it?"

In these cases, teachers need to exercise the caution and "wisdom" shown by (better paid) lawyers.

The rule for lawyers is, "If you don't know what the witness is going to say beforehand, don't place them on the witness stand."

The same rule holds for referring students to the office, i.e., "If you don't know what is going to happen (consequences to the student, consequences for yourself), don't send students to the office." Indirect Suggestion Sending students to the office communicates the following … The Teacher is NOT in Charge

The Teacher can not handle the situation, alone

The Student is "winning"

The Teacher doesn't have enough power to control the student or the situation

Etc. Perhaps the stress relief is worth removing the student from the classroom seems worth the risk of ejecting the student, but this ploy is short-lived and often self-defeating.

Reward First, Take Away Rewards, Punish Last

A rewarding, engaging, stimulating, supportive and dynamic learning environment is the first line in defense against negative student behavior.

Rewards, as long as they are not perceived as "bribes" are the first choice for teacher intervention.

And, the shorter the student's attention span, the more frequent those rewards need to be delivered.

However, for some age groups (especially Middle School, Junior High), peer pressure overpowers most of the rewards that the teacher can offer. This means that the teacher must "win over the peer group" with fairness, compassion, toughness, empathy and a "no teachers' pets favorites" approach. Taking Away Rewards The most rewarding part of each student's school day is inclusion in the exciting, stimulating, socially beneficial "happenings" that engaging lessons provide.

"Time out," cooling off periods and other side roads from where the action is; as long as removal is not too far away or for too long, creates an internal pressure within the child to return to the flow of classroom activities. That is, as long as the teacher didn't "burn any bridges" connecting the student with the class.

"Everyone cooperates and succeeds here, everyone is welcome" is the mantra that teachers need to repeat aloud, show by behavior and body language, share with empathy, and pound home with fairness. Consistent, Determined, but Minimal Punishment The military slogan applies in education, "Surety of punishment is more effective than severity of punishment."

This means that a teacher needs to choose the highest level of mild punishment that they can support, and level that punishment as a consequence, every time, no exceptions, no delay.

If the teacher's own child was visiting and broke the rule, the punishment would be leveled, at once.

But, if a harsh penalty is chosen, the teacher vacillates, delays and has to process whether this instance meets the test of "deserving" the punishment. Whenever a teacher engages in this internal debate, students lack confidence in the teacher, and become confused about the rules.

Of course, one or more students will rise to the occasion to "test the limits" and bring clarity to the classroom milieu.

Crystal clear teacher policies avoid this unnecessary limit testing, and decrease the number of behaviors that require redirecting.

Teachers who are dedicated to student learning become "ruthlessly consistent" in a kinder, gentler sort of way. And, most children appreciate and thank them for this approach because it brings stability, safety and comfort to their lives.

Boredom, Frustration and Failure Disguised as Misbehavior

Teachers alert themselves to the slightest hint of misbehavior, and teachers focus upon restoring order. But, seeing the cause of the misbehavior as the student may mean misperceiving the symptom instead the cause.

Master Teachers ensure that the classroom environment is safe and secure, that children are supported and empowered, and that everyone is valued.

Then, teachers assess whether the curriculum or the instructional delivery could be more engaging.

As long as punishments were mild, "teacher's remorse" is kept at bay when the cause for the misbehavior turns out to be

• The lesson was boring or confusing

• The lesson was too difficult and students were floundering, feeling confused and feeling frustrated

• The lesson was irrelevant to the students, and did not connect with any portion of their lives

Punishment is like "Fly Spray." Over use extermination chemicals, and the buildup creates a toxic environment

It is better to have a strategy that keeps the screens on the doors and windows in good repair

• and don't prop the screen door open for long periods of time.
Meaningful, learning activities targeted to each student's learning style (Multiple Intelligences) are the learning environment's equivalent to screens on the doors and windows, i.e., barriers that keep pesky misbehaviors out of the classroom. Keep it in the Family Just as families like to keep facts about the family's issues known only to the family, teachers need to keep most of the classroom family's negative information under wraps.

This means, Dealing with issues in a private way

Avoiding comments about a student in the Teachers' Lounge

and briefing supervisors about the success of classroom management efforts without a "blow-by-blow" rendition of the saga of getting a specific student to behave "Keeping it in the Family" also means contacting each student's family ahead of time, with positive reports, and with a description of classroom rules and procedures.

The task is to win over the family's help with the classroom focus upon positive behavior.

If rewards are fair, if children are treated fairly, and if punishments are fair and mild; almost every family in the world will support their child's teacher.

Then, when a call home is necessary, the focus can be on obtaining help in keeping the child on track, obtaining help in keeping up the child's great progress, looking for a return to progress, positive behavior and cooperation. Catch a Student Acting Nicely Narrowed, tunnel vision is often necessary, with a lot of effort and vigilance expended in finding something that a student does that is positive. But, this strategy is worth the effort, even though the first time (or the first several times), the student may reject the social reinforcements of praise and appreciation.

But teachers who stick with this strategy are often rewarded by the cooperation of the child who was won over by the teacher's good will. Experiment, Assess Another approach that you can use is to keep track of the number of times that you threaten to send students to the office and compare that number of threats with

• The number of actual office referrals

• The number of threats before an office referral is initiated

• The increase in offenses between the time of the threat and an actual referral

• The increased number of offenses following an office referral

Keeping objective, countable records should convince you to refer students to the office for discipline incidents only as a last resort.

Make Campus Administrators your Greatest Ally

On the other hand, creating all kinds of award certificates, especially ones that require the signature of a campus administrator, make sending students to the office a rewarding experience for everyone.

Pass these certificates out when they are deserved, when students vote on the most deserving recipient, when you catch a student doing "good."

Sending students to the office to be rewarded is a strategy that pays off. Try it. You'll see.

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

Quick Tips

The Most Precious Time of the Year (For Learning)

Now is the most precious time of the year for student learning. The high-stakes test start to fade into the unpleasant fog of distant memory. Lesser teachers gear up for the downhill coast into the oblivion of those pesky test results arriving before school dismisses for the summer.

But, Master Teachers know that every moment spent from now on, now that the stress and obsession with the high-stakes test dissipates. Now that the daily specter of doom and dread fades

• students are free to learn. Teachers Know These Students At the start of the school year, teachers experience the joy of discovery as every student is new and fresh.

And, the first six weeks of the school year are invested in review.

Last year's learning settles in quickly, and then every one "hunkers down" for the stormy ride to and through the

high-stakes test.

But, after seven months of daily, personal observation; teachers know what makes their students "dance and sing, weave and bob, boil and settle down. Teachers have their fingers on the pulses of their entire class. Brain-Dead, No Pulse? But, children snap back and recover quickly from the stress of the high-stakes test. They never were "brain dead," only bored and repulsed from their joy of learning by a system that seems to rise to the challenge of delaying and incapacitating learning in odious new ways.

So, now teachers can teach, and children are free to learn.

Now, the teacher can express empathy and leave a "lasting impression" upon the humanity and deep spirit of each child. And, academic achievement is easier at this time of year, too.

The teacher has repeated the prerequisites in so many ways that a solid foundation of basic knowledge paves the path to each element of novel learning. Don't Slack Off! Teachers might slide past the supervising "work police", I mean campus principal; but knowing how precious each learning opportunity is at this time of the year, no teacher could sleep sight and sound after squandering these precious days on "status-quo" learning.

So, redouble your efforts. Focus. Think and visualize greater learning heights, and there will be no limit to the talents, skills and abilities that your students develop.

This is the most precious time of year for learning. Cash in on it. Opulent learning awaits.

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

Top Tips

InspireData: A Must-have Tool for Integrating Math into Every Subject

Most database software is difficult for teachers to get their hearts and minds around. Ordinary database software is arcane, unfathomable, elusive, scary. But, the folks at Inspiration software have created a database program that teachers must have.

The name of this program is InspireData.

Link to the InspireData; Information Page

No Teacher should be Without This Program

The InspireData; Web page seems like "a lot of hype."

But, here is the truth.

Teachers miss an opportunity for propelling student learning to every-higher planes of cognition, unless they integrate math into every subject, every day.

From the InspireData; propaganda page; InspireData; applies the proven strategies of visual learning to data literacy, inspiring students to discover meaning as they collect and explore data in a dynamic inquiry process.

Students formulate questions and make connections between data and its visual representations to interpret information, solve problems and draw conclusions. As a result, students develop deeper content knowledge and stronger critical thinking skills.

InspireData helps students successfully: Strengthen the inquiry process

Build data analysis skills

Improve data literacy Making Math Concrete InspireData; does not teach students, teachers do.

But, anyone who knows about learning styles (or Multiple Intelligences) realized that meaningful repetition, pre-introduction of information, and the integration of information through concept-based learning are important keys for memory and retention.

Request InspireData; Now

Put in your request that your school district budget for, and purchase this product for every campus. Target the purchase of this product for the start of the next school year (2007-08). Those teachers that work in a wealthy (or forward thinking) school district will have this product installed during the summer.

Other teachers will have to wait until the budgeting bureaucracy creaks and clanks its way clear to purchase this product.

There are a lot of ways to pay for this product. For example, purchase this product instead of buying new band uniforms. Or, why not ground every bus for one day, allow car pooling and healthy walking, and the district could easily pay for the campus site licenses.

In the worst case scenario, a bake sale for two (maybe three days) at lunchtime should more than cover the cost. Accept No Excuses Budget managers, bureaucrats all, may attempt to stonewall, co opt, derail or distract you from obtaining this product for your students. But, do not fall prey to their ploys.

Accept no substitutes. Don't settle for less. Accept no excuses.

It is seldom useful to go the distance with the bureaucrats because they wear their opposition down with sheer inertia.

But acquiring this product is not one of those times.

Go after this product and keep dogging the appropriate, "lethargic paper-pusher" until you prompt action.

You will be glad that you did. Sidebar Note: Classroom Toolkit is not related to the Inspiration software company

in any way and does not receive any compensation for providing this recommendation. This recommendation is based upon our belief that concrete and visual math concepts must be presented to students in meaningful ways, during every subject, every day. Anything less "shortchanges" our students.

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

Teacher Resources

Teacher Tube: A Great Resource, If you Contribute Online video is popular, and some videos become popular. Video sites such as YouTube are the current rage. Link to TeacherTube; Unfortunately, YouTube; contains material that is unacceptable for use in school (although students devour this questionable content at home). School district's content filters (required by federal law) generally block YouTube; TeacherTube: A Safe, Unblocked Alternative What good is building a lesson around a wonderful video that perfectly captures your lesson's theme, only to have the item blocked by your district's content filter.

And, storing the YouTube; video, even if you have the technology to capture it is... Time Consuming A "Memory Hog"

Cumbersome to Transport from Home to School But, TeacherTube; is safe, video content is checked by humans, and users just have to complain to remove a questionable video.

Uploading content to the site is easy.

And, the company is even selling its technology to school districts so that each school district can build and keep instructional videos inside its own network! The Site's Shortcoming With all this "Too Good to be True" news, you know that there has to be a catch.

The catch is that there isn't much video on the site, at least not yet.

But, you could create instructional video and submit it to TeacherTube;.

Just remember that you may have to obtain school district approval to submit the video, especially if you use district equipment in any way to create the video product. Sidebar In almost all cases, any video that you create with district equipment belongs to the district. And school districts are notoriously stingy about sharing. Maybe the school district didn't attend kindergarten. Or, maybe there is something about the arrested development of some school district leaders that is involved. In any rate, check first to stay out of trouble.)

Another issue is obtaining parent permission either for... Capturing and publishing images of children Posting students' work (Children's Work is automatically copyrighted, but their parents control it while the children are minors) Some really greedy school districts have policies that state (erroneously) that any student's work that is created with school district equipment has joint copyright ownership with the school district being able to use that material for as long as the district wants.

Sidebar within a Sidebar This seems to be a violation of students' rights, and a court case where a student creates a really valuable piece of intellectual property will, I predict, decide in the favor of the student. I met Jason and Jodi Smith, the developers of TeacherTube; at the Region 20 Tech Fiesta in San Antonio, Texas this past week.

Jason and Jodi told me about an interview that they had scheduled that evening with Miguel Guhlin, Technology Director for one of the local school districts. Link to that Blog posting and interview Sidebar I didn't know that Jason was a school district superintendent, and I wonder what comments I may have dropped that revealed my attitude about our bureaucrats needing to empower and support teachers. Bottom Line If you have instructional video that you can legally and ethically post on TeacherTube;, feel free to share. A video that you post on TeacherTube; will reach children, unlike a posting on YouTube; that will be filtered and blocked.

Out children deserve the great content that you can provide. Make that content open and free for all of them.

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

Book Review

Getting Everything you Can out of All You've Got Author: Abraham, Jay ISBN: 0-312-20465-5 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2000 Publisher: NY: Truman Talley Books/ St. Martin's Press Pages: 376 Cost: \$24.95 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$10.85 (new paperback) - \$2.99 new, hardcover at eBay(TM) Subtitle: 21 Ways you can Out-Perform, and Out-Earn the Competition A business book, but the author presents strategies that work in education and instruction because teachers have to persuade others to accept their position.

The key is to get others to cooperate with you, and to willingly go along with your ideas. The Books' Topics: Assessing your Current Strengths

Adjusting your Philosophy toward Life and the People you Work With

Creating No-Risk Offers

Maximizing Satisfaction for your Services

Testing Everything you Do

Heads Up, Eyes Open, Mind in Gear

Your Unique Definition of Success

How to Establish and Reach your Life Goals
The central themes of this book are: You have a lot to offer. And if you offer your talents, skills and abilities in more useful ways; you will be more successful. You will also be appreciated more.

Strategic action outperforms working harder, working smarter or working longer

Valuing people (students, supervisors) and caring for their welfare increases these people's willingness and readiness to help you and their readiness to cooperate with you

Keywords: Unique Selling Proposition

Unrefusable Offer

Host-Beneficiary Relationships

Unique Definition of Success
Main Idea: You have a lot of talents and abilities, so why not embark on a strategy of applying these in a way that brings the most positive outcomes with the least effort.

And, if you have "other people's best interest at heart," you will be able to establish collaborative and cooperative relationships that benefit everyone.

When you find "Win-Win" solutions, you increase your productivity and success. You also increase the satisfaction that others have with your services. And satisfied others cooperate with you even more.
Quotes: Like other business books that we review, just substituting the words "teacher" or "education" allows us to apply the author's concepts to our academic focus. "You're about to begin a wonderful journey. You're going to learn that you have hidden assets, untapped opportunities, and overlooked possibilities that are not producing maximum results for you. That is going to change. You'll be shocked at how truly easy this is going to be. Too good to be true? It's not." (p. - 4)

"Realize this hard fact: The people above you (bosses, management, and organization leaders) want one thing most of all; they want solutions to problems. Solutions that make them look good and help them achieve their goals. They want the people that report to them to be problem solvers." (p. - 10)

"The philosophy of this book allows you to avoid the costly learning curve in almost everything you do. And that saves you time and money; I'm referring to the process of borrowing success practices from other industries and applying them to yours." (p. - 12)

"Client: A person who is under the protection of another." (p. - 17)

"To get your prospects and clients to see you or your business as offering them a superior benefit or advantage that no other competitor offers them is the essence of a unique selling proposition (USP). You must determine the most powerful benefit or advantage that you can possibly offer on existing or future client so that it will be totally irrational for them to choose to do business with anyone but you or your company. And here's how you do that. You identify what advantage or result your clients want the most." (p. - 19)

"You don't have to change your product or service, but you have to position your product or service as having a unique benefit they're not getting from your competitors. And you don't offer it to your clients subtly. You incorporate the fact that you are now offering them this unique advantage of benefit in everything you say and everything you do. When you do this you clearly educate them so they see, appreciate, and want to seize that advantage." (p. - 19)

"Advancing at a measured pace; step by step, from where you are to a little bit better; may seem the logical and safe way to proceed. But you can and should think in terms of skipping levels and making quantum leaps. You can move rapidly and easily, and surprisingly safely from your present level of accomplishment to a place that is several stages higher. You can do it instantly; and directly. And you can do it in virtually every aspect of your business or career activities. You can do it by not limiting yourself to following only those practices people in your industry follow. I want you to stop accepting your present-day business circumstances as the way it has to be. You're going for major breakthroughs. A business strategy that is common as dirt in one industry can have the effect of an atom bomb in an industry or business application where it's never been used before." (p. - 35 & 36)

"You probably spend too little time studying the most successful, innovative, and profitable ideas people in other industries use to grow and prosper. Yet, if you start focusing on other industries' success practices, you'll be amazed at how easily you can adapt these ideas to your own business situation. Suddenly, you'll see significantly better ways to produce significantly bettered results from the same time, manpower, effort, activity, and capital." (p. - 36)

"Breakthroughs are unconventionally fresh, superior, more exciting ways of doing something. Breakthroughs are the dramatic improvements in each area that make you more powerful, efficient, effective, and productive, and more valuable or inspiring to your client." (p. - 37)

"So you must invent and constantly be reinventing your own better future. That means becoming ethically opportunistic, looking at everything around you (in and outside your business or industry) with an opportunity-based focus and asking yourself continuously, 'Where's the big overlooked opportunity here?' It's also adopting a possibility-based mind-set that looks for new, different, and better ways to attain a goal or solution or address a situation. It's starting to see opportunities where everyone else sees problems, obstacles, limitations, or boundaries. It's recognizing how much you can achieve by leveraging the impact of whatever is going on around you. The most exciting breakthroughs occur when you reach beyond the traditional way of looking at or doing something and become open and receptive to new possibilities." (p. - 39)

"Most major breakthroughs are a result of looking at things with a commonsense, 'superlogical' degree of open-mindedness. And the ability to take action on what you see. They have little to do with advanced education, high IQ, or vast amounts of money. And the most dramatic breakthroughs frequently center, pure and simple, on better ways to do things; faster, easier, or more effectively or logically." (p. - 40)

"You need to reach out for ideas and answers. Examine ideas, people, procedures, and philosophies from as far outside your normal sphere of business and life as you can possibly reach. Discover a genuine interest, fascination, and curiosity for how other things outside your limited business world work and the principles they're based upon." (p. - 44)

"Stretch yourself and start examining subjects, industries, and markets you've never been interested in before. Why? Because you'll get fresh new perspective, ideas, and insights…Ask yourself powerful questions about how other people use things, do things, sell things, deliver things, make things, compete and prosper." (p. - 45)

"There are an unlimited number of breakthroughs out there…just waiting for you to discover them…So many breakthroughs, so little time to discover them all. So much to borrow from and funnel into your newfound maximizer's mind-set. That's why you need to start doing it right now. And keep doing it, forever!" (p. - 45)

"Whatever you do, if you focus on giving value and advice instead of manipulating and maneuvering, you win over many more prospects, clients, bosses, colleagues, and friends. And you will be rewarded in ways you never dreamed. " (p. - 59 & 60)

"You can't maximize your performance or make the most money unless you know how to make the best use of your time, opportunities, efforts, and investments. You can't get the best results until you comprehensively evaluate all the different approaches you have available in all your business activities…The odds are great that you are currently under performing and not reaching your real potential because you're depending on the wrong actions or approaches for your success. " (p. - 145)

"Test Everything, Starting Right Now " (p. - 147)

"Never test big if you can test small. " (p. - 151)

"When you change your sense of self-worth, you also alter the way you look at your relationships with your clients. " (p. - 191)

"If you're timid, take little steps in the beginning (you can test any of the principles on a small scale with no financial or career risk). You'll see the strategies work. You'll gain confidence in them and yourself. Then you can start to take bigger steps. But don't just sit there doing nothing. Take the first step, no matter how small it may be. Take it. A very wise man said, 'Far more is accomplished through movement than was ever accomplished through meditation.' And while I think meditation, contemplation, and formulation are all quite essential to the success process, unless you act you'll never realize any rewards." (p. - 342) Issues Addressed by the Book: Jay Abraham knows how to communicate with clients, and for teachers, our clients are: Students

Parents

Administrators So, we learn that we need to change our attitude as we continually figure out how to make life better for our clients.

The cue to this task is that we hold our clients (these groups, these individuals) "in our care."

This attitude creates a mind-set that launches cooperation and commitment from the members of these groups.

This mind-set also improves our perspective so that we begin to see mutual, cooperative, beneficial opportunities for joint benefit.

The Book's Shortcomings:

The book is a bit long-winded, although easy to read.

The author uses lots of contractions, even in the title, possibly so that the author models his belief that advertising writing is "like one friend having an intimate conversation with another friend."

There is more to the book than a pep talk and case studies, though. The book provides such extensive lists of need to take action on now" topics that a teacher would have to dedicate a year or two in developing a new repertoire of "thinking and doing" behaviors. Comments: Some of the sections of this book are more applicable to teachers than others. But, as teachers implement the obvious changes in improved collaboration and care giving, more of the author's recommendations will become applicable.

The author provides a lengthy list of "Action Items," mostly to stimulate thinking. The author is less helpful on providing that missing step between knowing what to do and actually doing it. I suppose that the author, writing for business folks, assumes that his readers will be motivated by major increases in earnings. (It is logical to assume that as the business person begins to make more and more money, that they will implement another strategy.)

Teachers will need to read this book and build their own checklists and action items, tailor-made to the issues that affect teaching. Summary: Teachers interested in a long-term, personal improvement and personal effectiveness project would do well to study this book.

But, the integration of these attitudes into best-practices, like all the side trips that we make on the road to becoming a Master Teacher are worth the challenges.

And, Jay Abraham is "right on" in his observation that we speed our creativity and boost our service genius by looking at tested and accepted practices in other fields and industries (because they have done the hard work of development), and "borrow at will."

Sidebar Note: See our article on the tricks and traps of copying another project. Link to the What does it Take to Replicate a Pilot or Model Program? article Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 3
Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.7

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

Site Strategy

Presentation/ Training Follow-Up Switchboard We delivered two presentations at a regional Tech Fiesta Conference (April 24 and 45, 2007).

We used this double project to model the practices that we recommend, as well as to provide crucial content to teacher, trainers and instructional planners One focus of both presentations was Online Follow-Up.

But we found that keeping track of all our experimental and demo sites with cross references got to be too difficult to manage.

So, we created a switchboard where we centralize the links. Follow Along with Us Even if you couldn't attend the conference in person in San Antonio, Texas; you can participate. You can engage in social reinforcement activities using any of the models that we developed, or you can create your own for little or no money.

Two of our demo sites were placed on a free hosting site that cost us \$1.24 USD per year. (Note: The cost was for the lease of a Web domain name. Domains with a ".INFO" extension were on sale for \$1.99 USD per year plus a \$0.25 USD ICAN fee.)

Presentation Topics The titles of the two presentations were: Creative, High-Stakes-Test Coaching Strategies: Methods that Motivate, Excite and Stimulate Test-Taking Skills are as Near as your Curriculum

Training and Professional Development Follow-Up: Your Staff Deserves it, So Deliver it Switchboard Link The switchboard provides links to

Forums

Mind Maps

Newsletters

Online Presentations High-Stakes Test Coaching

Workshop, Training and Professional Development Follow-up Online presentation Presentation Outlines High-Stakes Test Coaching Outline (DOC Format)

High-Stakes Test Coaching Outline (PDF Format)

Workshop, Training and Professional Development Follow-up (DOC Format)

Workshop, Training and Professional Development Follow-up (PDF Format) Slide Shows High-Stakes Test Coaching Overview Slide Show (PPT Format)

High-Stakes Test Coaching Overview Slide Show (PDF Format)

Workshop, Training and Professional Development Follow-up Overview Slide Show (PPT Format)

Workshop, Training and Professional Development Follow-up Overview Slide Show (PDF Format) Tutorials

Web 2.0 Pages

Classroom 2.0

Free IQ™

Squidoo™

Wikis See the hassle that placing links every time a list like this is created?

Switchboard Link Bonus Material In addition to the Mini-WebSite-Style presentations for both topics, we provided a handout CD with several other resources A Presentation on Online Course Development

Our Graphic Organizer eBook

Our Teacher Time-Saver eBook Look for us to add more items to this switchboard system until our site redesign is completed. Switchboard Link

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

Open Source for Education

Teachers to IT Departments: "You have Homework"

Every teacher, unless maybe a teacher who has been driven under a rock (or into deep depression) by the stress of high-stakes testing; knows that the integration of technology is important. But, do teachers know what is important about this "integration" effort?

In fact, do teachers know what the "IT" in "IT Department" stands for? Sidebar "IT" can stand for "Instructional Technology" or it can stand for "Information Technology." So, what is the difference, a name is just a name, right? On the surface, the "Instructional Technology" name would seem to hint that the department was focused upon technology that supports instruction. We wish that were so. The "Information Technology" name might indicate that the department supports the schools Business Office and focuses upon the data that is used to manage the district. Doesn't the school

district's Business Office support instruction with the same goals?" you might ask. We wish that this were so. Sidebar to the Sidebar Instruction and School District Business Office folks should work together, with the Business Office recognizing that school management functions occupy a subservient role in education. However, school Business Office folks seem to believe (in a grandiose way, sometimes) that they perform the "mission critical" functions of the school district. And, these folks tend to use a "passive-aggressive" approach to getting their way, i.e., choking and strangling change, innovation and personal teacher initiative by the withholding of funds. This strategy directly affects instruction in a negative way, and also affects instruction indirectly in a negative way by choking and strangling funds for technology. In practical use, "Instructional Technology" and "Information Technology" mean the same thing because… Even if leadership of these departments consists of real educators, the staff (depending how large the district is) consists of technicians, network administrators, database administrators, technical managers, project managers, programmers, systems analysts, Webmasters, graphic designers, and maybe trainers. Even if the leadership folks are real educators, they usually don't employ nearly enough of the listed staff members to do an adequate job. Even if the IT leadership consists of educators, campus administrators and curriculum administrators resist the meddling of technology folks in instructional matters affecting their little kingdoms. IT Leadership and staff often are overwhelmed by fix-it work stemming from an under whelmed budget that they do not have the luxury of focusing on the needs of instruction (Note: School Business Offices are under funded, too). The IT Department should be able to offer Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that guarantee uptime for all equipment. Spheres of Influence: No Confluence of Focus. There was a push to integrate technology into instruction, a big push.

But, the politicians and corporate leaders, and the parents that want to see their graduating children as "employable" neglected to "pull" adequate funding from for technology programs from their wallets.

So, everyone involved in Instructional/ Information Technology, i.e., the IT Department and the School's Business Department are handicapped by a lack of available funds to deliver on their mandate. So, rather than cooperate for the best interest of our students, the power centers (Business Office, Curriculum Department, Campus Administrators, IT Department) jockey for position and prominence. Each sphere of influence tries to maximize its performance and maintain its survival by "doing more with not enough."

Each of these groups fails to complete the required homework, i.e., talk to teachers and understand the educational case for their existence. But, the focus of this article is upon what the IT Departments needed to have done, but didn't do. Missing Assignment #1: Show the Direct, Irrefutable Connection between Technology and Student Learning Outcomes

Technology integration advocates went astray by failing to provide measurable, student achievement outcomes as part of technology integration planning. The early conversations by the technology folks went something like this… "If only those (fill in your own derogatory adjective) teachers would integrate the technology that we have given them, then our students would benefit." "We can't point to the direct connection between technology and learning, but we know that that connection is important to our students' future job prospects." "The benefits to students are down a future road, and we can't measure those benefits now. It will take a long time before we get that data." Here is the problem. These Techie folks needed to go into classrooms and find out what teachers do and find out how teachers do what they do. These Techie folks needed to observe students who were actually learning and find out what learning students do and how they do that learning.

Sidebar Of course the Techie folks didn't go into the classrooms because… The campus administrators and curriculum folks wouldn't let them in. The teachers didn't trust them because they spoke a different language. The Techie folks were too busy fixing equipment and too busy keeping up with service requests to go into classrooms to observe learning. Everyone knew that finding out what the technology needs of teachers and students actually are, then delivering strategies and services that solved those needs would be too expensive to carry out, anyway. So, the Techie folks delivered as much equipment as they could afford, set standards for equipment, and allowed campus administrators, grant agency targets and state curriculum pushes to drive IT Department efforts. Missing Assignment #2: Obtain Requirements and Specifications from Educators

If IT Department leaders had been able to speak the same language as teachers, and if they had completed Assignment #1, they would find themselves face-to-face with Assignment #2. (Of course, few ever made it this far.)

Of course the IT folks didn't want to face Assignment #2 because in doing so, they would have to give up some of the precious little authority that they scrapped and grappled for.

To complete Assignment #2, Techie folks would have to quit prescribing technology (hardware, software, infrastructure) and build to the requirements and specifications that teachers provided.

it would have been a wise, and rare IT leader that said…

"IT has no business prescribing technology for instruction. Provide us (IT) with: The educational case for your program

The requirements for the project based upon

The exact student outcomes that the technology targets. What the students will actually need to do?

How much access time each student will need to produce measurable gains?

How will the students actually do what they need to do?

When will the students actually do this?

How many students will need to be doing these things (be provided this access) at the same time?

How will we actually measure these results? The exact measures (formative and summative) that will be used to

document the success of the technology in driving student learning

The contingency plans that will be in place to redirect the project toward success if the situation goes awry
Missing Assignment #3: Choose the applications first, and the hardware and software afterwards.

This is a logical step that is best approached by "thinking backwards."

For example, if an entire campus will focus technology efforts upon improving student writing skills by daily computer access in every Language Arts class, a few other items are needed: Students need a central place to store their research and writing products on the campus or district's network

Students need individual computer accounts so that their work is protected

Students need access to the Internet

Students need a portfolio system where they can place completed work that will be graded and assessed by their teachers

Teachers need access to the portfolio system and an easy way to assess, evaluate and grade each students' work
Thinking this way, the project is seen as requiring: Enough computers for every student and teacher, and perhaps 10% more computers to be used as "hot-swappable" units in case one breaks

Service Level Agreements to ensure that every student has a functional computer in every class, every day

Network switching to accommodate this huge need for bandwidth

Network administration for all the student accounts, and the "moves, adds, changes" that accompany the arrival and departure of students

Network storage for "home directories" where students' work will be stores

Network storage for the Online portfolios that will deliver gradable work to teachers

Connectors to an Online grading system so that teachers can record grades, and so that students and parents can see progress in real time

Connectors to each student's previous high-stakes test scores so that formative assessment can be geared to each student's strengths and weaknesses

Student access to their "home directories" from outside the district (so that they can work on their assignments from home, or the public library)

Etc. If the focus is on science classes, gathering experimental data, connecting computer systems with probes and remote hardware; the requirements for implementing an integrated technology solution are even more complex, and expensive.
Missing Assignment #4: Building end-to-end projects instead of building piecemeal.

The reason that IT Departments did not build end-to-end projects was that funding was not available to do the job right. Other reasons that IT Departments did not build end-to-end projects include: IT Administrators and Staff didn't have a clue about what teacher and students really need

IT Administrators and Staff didn't ask, observe and validate what teachers and students really need

IT Administrators and Staff assumed that the need for teachers was greater familiarity with software
Note: The focus on software operation skills is irrelevant to the integration of technology since the use of the technology needs to be transparent to the user

In other words, teachers and students are distracted from the curriculum if they have to pay attention to the software
Attention to the curriculum is the "mission critical" need of instruction

This means that the "back-end-programming" that would make the use of all network resources "one-click-easy" was never started.
Summary of Missing Assignments
What can you say that is positive when so many assignments are missing?

Maybe that IT Departments could have anticipated that they would end up in the position that they did, i.e., "reviled from the top" for spending way too much money without any educational outcomes to show for it, and "reviled from the bottom" by teachers and campus administrators for failing to listen, for failing to provide easy and workable benefits to teachers and students, and for foisting "less than finished" solutions upon teachers with the message that learning to integrate this stuff was a "teacher problem."

School district IT Departments generally failed the old-time IT marketing maxim, "The customer is always right" by supplying a maxim of their own, i.e., "The customers don't know what they need, but we'll give them the right stuff, anyway." IT Report Card
IT Departments earn an "Incomplete" on their report card.

Too many assignments were

The IT Staff meant well, and they worked hard. But, they neglected to complete the most important (mission critical) assignments, and instead busied themselves with hardware, software and network infrastructure issues, while leaving undone the more important direct support for teachers and students.

IT Departments also receive "low marks" for listening skills and communication. While they speak eloquently in "technical jargonese," they are found wanting in their ability to "read between the lines" and discover what technologies are truly important for instruction.

The area where IT Departments "completely bombed" is that of identifying an educational case for IT Projects, and of discovering the direct, measurable and reliable areas of instruction that benefit from the integration of technology.

"Wishin' and Hopin'" that the purchase of equipment and infrastructure, without identifying exact, measurable, replicable instructional outcomes was the major failing of school district IT Departments.

This is homework that still needs to be completed.

Failure to complete this assignment (a prerequisite for all other learning) will keep school district IT Departments stagnant, reactive, and unappreciated.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 03:00