

Friday, August 31, 2007

News Nuggets

"SEX" is a Four-Letter Word for Politicians: Maybe "Virginity" is a Four-Letter Word for Educators
How can these be "Four-Letter Words?"
Sidebar
The phrase, "A Four-Letter Word" is an idiom that means "bad-words, cuss words, or words that we are not supposed to say, especially in school.

What we are referring to in this article is an attitude against what that word represents.

Here is the problem…

Certain politicians want to fund "Church Schools" because the people who voted them in want to see our country adopt their version of "family values."

What does "Sex"and "Virginity" mean to politicians?One man, one woman marriages

Sexual activity only after marriage, to one partner, for life

No abortions

Funding for "abstinence only" sexuality education programs in our schools

A "flight of fancy," out-of-touch, understanding of the real worldWhat does "Sex"and "Virginity" mean to

teachers?Wasted, scarce funds for programs that do not work

Wasted student time

Students who don't get the contraceptive and safe-sex information that they need

Teachers favor family values, moral behavior, and any learning that helps students take better care of themselves as they become productive citizens.

But, teachers also favor success, and they favor allocating their time to strategies and programs that pay off for students. Teachers view projects, programs and initiatives that don't stand a "snowball's chance" in a bad light."Tempest in a Teapot" or a Real Educational Issue?What set off this discussion is the following article headline…

Abstinence Education's Future UncertainAnd some of the rest of the article…

For the first time, however, Virginity Rules and 700 kindred abstinence education programs are fighting serious threats to their future. Eleven state health departments rejected abstinence education this year, while legislatures in Colorado, Iowa and Washington passed laws that could kill, or at least wound, its presence in public schools.Opponents received high-caliber ammunition this spring when the most comprehensive study of abstinence education found no sign that it delayed a teenager's sexual debut. And, after enjoying a fivefold increase in their main federal appropriations, the abstinence programs in June received their first cut in financing from the Senate appropriations committee since 2001.But the final outcome is in question. Some \$176 million in federal support has survived several early maneuvers in the House, and the full House plans to debate the issue July 18 as part of the proposed Health and Human Services budget.Lost in the political rancor, however, is that teenagers throughout the country are both abstaining more, and, especially among older ones, more likely to use contraception when they do not abstain."Source:AOL News Story: http://news.aol.com/story/_a/abstinence-educations-future-uncertain/20070718091209990001 (No longer available online)Success is the ThingDespite the fact that so much money has been wasted on the "Abstinence Only," "making Virginity the ticket to living sainthood" program; teachers are more concerned about instructional success. If these programs could be successful in any way, shape or form; teachers would stand behind them.

Schools squander and waste so much money that news of yet another hemorrhage of lost revenue doesn't phase them. But, like everyone, teachers want to be successful.

So, why would a teacher want to be mixed up in a program that has limited (or no) chance of success?

Trick Question: Answer: Most don't. Most know better.How Bad is This?Teachers might just as well teach "Swimming in Quicksand" as teach "Abstinence Only." Of course, the Quicksand Swimming would have a better success rate than teaching "Intelligent Design" to chimpanzees, but the dangers are greater.SidebarFYI: Swimming in quicksand is possible. The trick is to not make any sudden moves, gently lie flat, and spread your whole body across the mud. Struggling and fighting just causes sinking more quickly.

Actually, quicksand is more buoyant than water in the same way that salt water is more buoyant than fresh water. The only thing is that the quick sand mud sticks to you, while the fresh or salt water doesn't.

Spread your body's surface area over the mud and slither and slide out.But, what is the danger?

Anyone that has seen the number of pregnant teens that we have in our schools knows the danger of focusing on programs that don't work.

How do we know that our students are "failing the abstinence test?" The growing bumps on their abdomens are a give-a-way.SidebarAnyone that works in our schools where this issue is a problem (what school doesn't have this problem?) knows that the girls that become pregnant are not the "bad girls" that the politicians think they are. These are often nice girls, sweet, loving (maybe a bit too loving); who will make good mothers. They will also have a much more difficult life and a real challenge to get out of and stay out of a low socioeconomic fate.But is Teen Pregnancy a School

Problem? Teen pregnancy is a social problem, not a school problem.

Teen pregnancy is a problem that society sends to our schools.

And, rather than blame our schools, and forcing our teachers to teach useless "Abstinence" courses, our politicians should focus their "talents" on eradicating one huge source of the problem.

How can we expect our students to keep their bodies and minds pure until marriage with the amount of sexually explicit imagery, sexual banter, and sexually exciting content ravishes our air waves and movie screens>

Titillating, barely covered bodies, cleavage, blatant sexual banter that bypasses the entendre stage, and "matter of facts of life" attitudes and on-screen, on-tube behaviors assail our students, moment by moment. Sidebar We're referring to mainstream, network TV, not the specialty channels or the Internet, though many children have access to "cable TV" from the privacy of their rooms.

These are the big campaign donors who deserve support for their "Freedom of Speech" First Amendment rights.

The fact that they feed the mouth of the hand that protects them by the lavish "extra curricular perks of office is not relevant to our discussion of our schools complicity in teen pregnancy issues, is it?

The stimulation of broadcast media upon our students seems similar to placing our student on a strict diet (fast, where abstinence is concerned), then wafting cooking smells and delicious aromas under their noses.

Solving social problems such as Teen Pregnancy, like so many other societal issues that schools take the blame for, is beyond the scope of our schools' mission.

So, when politicians as schools to teach non-functional, non-results-producing, "doomed to failure," "no-way to succeed" programs; teachers should, "Just say, No!"

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

Short Article

Rabbit's Foot Leadership

"Rabbit's Foot leadership" is about the only type of leadership that is available to executives and managers of our public schools. Why "Rabbit's Foot?"

As the joke goes, "How can the foot be lucky? Look what it did for the rabbit."

The metaphor of the rabbit stems from the era of Aesop. In the fables by the same name, the rabbit was portrayed as a timid creature, with a level of courage lower than any other animal, except for the frog.

In the same way, bureaucratic leaders exhibit a scarcity of courage on the "courage level dipstick." The only group that registers lower on the "courage-o-meter" are television network executives who prefer to air salacious and lurid (as close to the smut surface as they can get without a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) fine, instead of educational and uplifting programming. Sidebar You do support your local educational television station and Public Radio, don't you? Characteristics of the "Rabbit Foot & Leader The key to understanding the Rabbit's Foot leader is to understand survival by dodging, survival by running in circles to avoid predatory issues.

Rabbit's Foot Leadership is being nimble on one's feet, hopping just out of reach of danger; not venturing too far out of the bureaucratic comfort zone lest another danger lurks.

This is called "Leadership by the Quick Step,"; (some would call it the "Shuffle"); i.e., dancing just out of the reach of danger, but skirting "new dangers" by taking an indefinite stand…"Spin your Partner, Twist Again!" Safety in the Rabbit Hole When the hound-pack of accountability, track-record, and transparency begins closing in, institutional survival tactics must be employed (no pun intended). These survival tactics mean ducking into the rabbit

hole. Sidebar The bureaucratic "Prime Directive" differs from the personal "Prime Directive" in this way. The personal prime directive is to "protect your job at all cost." The institutional "Prime Directive" is to "protect your boss' job at all costs, even at the cost of your own…neck, hide, skin.

Captains go down with the ship, but "Good Soldiers" take a bullet for their "big chief." Descriptions for what might happen to the "protect-at-all-costs" job if "ducking into the rabbit hole isn't effective include seeing the job go…Up in Smoke Down in Flames

Out the Door

Off the Charts

On the Rocks

Into the Fire

Against the Ropes

From Heaven to xxx The trick is to "set the hounds on someone else's track, and let an underling take the…Rap

Fall

Flack

Fallout

Tail-Kicking

Whipping In the "almost words" of an immortal commercial, "The underlings take the licking, so the boss goes on

ticking." Borrowing Another Icon And there is no copyright infringement in drumming up the image of another

rabbit-related drum-thumping icon, but the idea of just drumming along in a mindless fashion is enough to energize any

Rabbit's Foot school leader. Sidebar This is parody, and the Supreme Court sanctions our right to borrow. Another Rabbit's Foot Leadership skill is in "Beating one's own Drum."

"Tooting one's own Horn" is necessary, even if the band bus wallows in the swamp after deferring to "executive guidance."

No matter how many "sour notes" are played by this "fan club solo," "the show must go on," and the "Spin" must be doctored. Rabbit's Foot Leadership to the rescue. Talk fast, think on your feet, grasp for any passing flotsam to keep afloat… other hallmarks of Rabbit's Foot leadership.

Of course, some folks will decry this state of affairs…

But, no, we're not going there because this is an article about school leaders, not politicians and elected officials… although there is some infidelity to the cause of educating our children.

That proclivity of rabbits (and some politicians) isn't the focus of this article. How does Anything at All Get Done? Noticing that Rabbit's Foot Leaders such as the ones described in this article abound in the school district habitat, one might worry… and assume… and lament that "nothing of value will ever get done in our schools."

This would be true except: Students learn in spite of administrative bungling and issue sidestepping. Teachers learn to "fly under the radar" and avoid detection for employing sound instructional strategies amidst the wail of administrative directives.

Teachers and students are so incredibly creative and inventive that they can make the most of a bad learning environment. So, it is the "on the dodge" pattern of the Rabbit's Foot Leader in our school district bureaucracy that enables any teaching at all in the classroom environment.

Of course, this brings to mind the mixed metaphor of another group of critters, each personifying this trait of Rabbit's Foot Leadership.

Not sure which one we mean? Well, it isn't menagerie in Henry Penny's barnyard.

Give up?

Here's a clue…

Picture four monkeys, three with hands strategically placed to signify traits of the Rabbit's Foot Leader.

And the fourth monkey. Come on, you know. It's on your back!

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

Feature Article

First Day Confidential: Time to Gear up for your Observations and the Dreaded High-Stakes Test The First Day of School It's the first day of school, and you must launch some high-priority initiatives. You're already behind. But, these are two high priority strategies that you have to "keep underground." They are: Practicing for your Classroom Observation Teaching to the Test The reason that these priorities have to be kept "confidential" is that you can't tell anyone, not even colleagues that you trust, what you are up to.

This means that you will be developing "No Help, No Share" tactics and tricks on your own.

You can't tell anyone that you are meticulously focusing on these two pillars of job survival because… You aren't supposed to be doing them.

They are professional "No-No's"

You and your colleagues were taught that engaging in these strategies is not proper teacher behavior.

If you 't clue your "colleague-competitors" they will start doing the same thing, and you will lose your advantage.

You are supposed to be more interested in your students than you are supposed to be interested in yourself.

You are supposed to be a skilled, competent, know-it-all expert who doesn't have to resort to such tactics. Stealth Operations So, how do you keep this "big deal" "stealth operation" quiet?

For sure you can't tell anyone, and swear them to secrecy.

Sidebar Swearing colleagues to secrecy is the method that you use to communicate stuff that you want the school administrators to know, but don't want to (or can't) tell them yourself. Swearing students to secrecy is the method that you use to tell the entire community something that you can't tell them yourself.

But be careful, and try to keep your statements positive because the recipients of these "secrets" have mysterious ways of sleuthing sources.

Your goal is "Double-Two-Squared," that is, complicated… Two goals: 1.) Teaching to the Test and 2.) Rehearsing for an Outstanding Observation Performance.

Two goals for yourself: 1.) Practice, Practice, Practice and 2.) Over learn and Build a Positive Repertoire of Instructional Delivery and Class Management Habits.

Two Goals for your students: 1.) Build a Repertoire of Test Sophisticated Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills; and 2.) Build a Movie Director's Level of Classroom Management for an Orchestrated Performance when you and they are "on stage" during your observation(S). Sidebar Note: During these times of highly paranoid school administrators, you have to be "on alert" all the time so that any time that they meander past your classroom door, they "catch you" orchestrating and managing your class as you teach to the test. For insurance, you could list the times that you know that your observer saw you teaching to the test in an elegant manner, and bring that up in an off hand manner when you are discussing

something else. Find a way to weave the fact into your conversation in such a subtle way that mentioning your students' progress toward measurable test score improvement results seems natural. Another strategic practice is to leave your classroom door open as long as the halls are quiet. (Of course, if you are relegated to a portable building, other rules apply.) Targets for Yourself For yourself, you have to remember that the first minutes of class each school year begin your test practice sessions. And, at the same time, you are beginning the intense practice that is required to excel as an "Classroom Observation" star.

And, every class session for the rest of the year provides focus and follow-up for these dual-action goals. No let up. No excuses for missed practice sessions. No letting your guard down.

Your mission, should you accept it, is to craft a classroom response to the high-stakes test and to the challenge of a classroom observation that is clearly and unequivocally outstanding.

Consider each class session one step in your "maestro training" in classroom orchestration.

You will spend so much time visualizing and practicing the specific steps to success that these become habits. Then, in the moment of stress (like a pop-in, surprise observation visit - if your union contract allows such an animal), you just do what you and your students have been practicing. Targets for your Students For your students, you have to use every trick of motivation and marketing, performance persuasion psychology and coaching craftiness.

You have to position learning in such a way that students like and enjoy the challenge and avoid the minefields of boredom and irrelevance.

Dealing with the Shame and Guilt

You might have to carry the burden of shame and guilt for what you are up to. But if you told anyone that you are teaching to the test and practicing for your observation; and addressing curriculum objectives when you can squeeze them in, you might be ostracized.

You might find that you carry such a self-defeating attitude because: Your "ivory tower" professors "bad-mouthed" the practice for years, "brainwashing" you against using these survival skills

You believe that teaching is above such trickery and subterfuge, and that teachers should never stoop so low as to sully their hands (or reputations) with such practices

You are uptight about your observation and your students' performance on the high-stakes test

You are concerned about keeping your job, and that fear has driven you to be this compulsive

You are so competitive that you can't let your colleagues gain even the slightest advantage over you

You are so suspicious that the campus administrators lavish high evaluation scores to their "fan-club-cliques," so that there are no high evaluation scores remaining for the "out-crowd"- like you Rationalizations of Consolation In light of these issues, you have several choices. Obtain mental health counseling or therapy from community professionals who are sworn to maintain confidentiality

Accept the behaviors because "everyone is doing it"

Abandon these strategies and fly for the rest of the year by the "seat of your pants (or panties)"

Deal with the stress of your guilt by adopting other, worse habits such as over eating, smoking, imbibing in spirits or wild and uninhibited sex. The strategy here is that you will be so overcome by worse behaviors that the teaching to the test and orchestrating for a high observation score will seem insignificant and trivial Or, you could consider that teaching to the test and orchestrating for a high observation score are components of a master teacher's repertoire.

In this way, you could reframe your thoughts and decide that for a limited time, say the next three years, you will focus on these skills. Sidebar This is a trick that creative and success-driven people use in many fields.

For example, a fisherman may decide to only use lures for a year, instead of using live bait.

Or, a golfer may decide to use only one kind of club to perfect the intricacies of using that club. The great golfer, Sammy Snead, is reported to have gone to county clubs and bet their best golfers that he could go into the woods, cut a stick to use as a club and beat them. The story goes that lots of overconfident golfers took this bait, but that Sammy Snead beat every one. Just imagine what he could do with real golf clubs if he could out play talented amateurs with a crooked-stick golf club that he fabricated on the spot!

Real Teaching Teaching to the test and orchestrating classroom routines to practice for the teacher's observation have some positive side effects that you can hope might happen.

For one thing, this approach requires that the teacher become super-observant and vigilant of what students do and say. This strategy involves figuring out what students might do, and involves finding ways to circumvent problem behaviors before they erupt or solidify. Master teachers do that as a matter of course.

This approach also involves communicating classroom policies, procedures, routines and expectations in clear and unambiguous ways, another stock in trade for the master teacher.

These strategies also call for training students in successive, small steps toward complex behavior patterns; ensuring students' feelings of success along the way and diminishing confusion, stress and frustration. Master teachers also are big on this kind of structure.

Structure is also required in the hands-on, engaged, cooperative group learning activities that you will train students to participate in and manage. And, you will train student in the use of self-evaluation and group evaluation tasks using rubrics. Yet other strategies that master teacher employ. Self-Confidence on AutoPilot Here is what you can expect…

You and your students will be so well trained and so meticulously practiced that neither your students or you will be

phased with the arrival of the "all seeing administrator" or the "all enveloping" high-stakes test.

Everyone will know what to do, and everyone will just carry on with "business as usual."

No one will do anything special when the observer stalks in, no one will notice, and no one will make overtures, engage in grandstanding, or stoop to pandering to the power figure.

The teacher will maintain a "cool, calm and collected" demeanor; indicating that success was only natural. (Natural when it was practiced every minute up to the time of the observation, that is.)

And, when all students exceed their previous personal best on the high-stakes test, exceeding everyone's expectations; the teacher can nonchalantly point out that it was the students' great love of learning and their thirst for achievement and mastery of the curriculum that made the difference.

Taking no credit, looks like modesty and humility.

But we know, it is just a compulsive and strategic teacher being "tight mouthed and secretive" about a strategy that started with the first minute of class.

And, even though we know what you're doing, we'll never tell.

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

Quick Tips

Mini-Relaxation Minutes: Restore Concentration and Mental Acuity

Focus and concentration can feel like stress-- whether it is the "good stress" of enjoyable, captivating, discovery-learning; or whether it is the "distress" of authoritarian, who-cares?, "forced to grapple with it" boredom. But, some quick as a blink strategies and techniques can provide needed respite. These tricks don't take 40 winks, but only 60 to 120 seconds.

What we are suggesting are easy to do, high recovery, catnap replacements that energize and revitalize your performance.

Respite Options

Here are some strategies and techniques to try…Sit quietly, close your eyes, lift your gaze slightly. This will stop your thoughts. Hold your eyes in this position for as long as you are able to rest

Take a deep breath, breathe out slowly. Pay attention to your breathing without controlling it. Let your breathing settle into relaxation on its own

Start at your feet and tense, then instantly relax each muscle group up to the top of your head. Feel any body part that captures your attention, then let go. Feel yourself settle into relaxation

Sit quietly, and listen to any subtle sound. Focus your hearing on the sound, then listen to the sound below or around the sound that you hear. Follow the subtle sound to its more subtle source, to a more still and calm level

Make a barely, even audible subvocalized hum, then let this sound trail off into silence. Feel, sense and focus on the properties of silence

Hold a coin, button, thread or other small object between your thumb and one finger. Focus on feeling the indentations, holes, textures of the object. To get really focused, try to feel the texture and grooves of your fingerprints

Sit quietly, then count down from 10 to 1. At the same time, focus your eyes downward in steps, one step down for each number. Hold your focus on the bottom step, until you are ready to resume your normal activityAfter experiencing these mini-vacations, stand up, stretch, and hold happy, positive thoughts.

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

Top Tips

Education Gallup: What's in it for You?Why go to site run by people that make surveys?Well, information about hiring and training teachers is important, you might be curious.

Besides, these folks know what demographic communities are thinking, so we might profit if we pay attention.

The site also has information about hiring and training principals.

The Gallup™ organization also provides workshops and speakers who focus upon improving school culture, and they have a program for working with students (ages 15 and above).Teach to their Strengths: Teach with your Strengths

The Gallup™ Education site is not very broad or deep, but they get one thing right, and that is the reason that we point to their site in this article.SidebarA second reason that we point to the Gallup™ site is that we review the book, Soar with your Strengths in this newsletter.Link here...If there is anything that a master teacher knows, it is that teaching to your students' individual strengths is the only viable option.

Teaching to weaknesses to remediate them is a fools-foolly-flop.

Who needs the stress or the hammering of their self-concept by being reminded about their weaknesses, while at the same time, being deprived of exercising their strengths?

Answer: No one, except maybe politicians.

But too often, we fall into a trap: approaching student development from a deficit model. Part of the reason students

don't like school -- and don't achieve to their ability -- is that they leave each class knowing what they did wrong, but knowing little about what they did right.

Gallup's Education Division takes a different approach. Instead of asking students to fix weaknesses, developing student potential is rooted in building on what students are naturally good at, and reinforcing the use of those talents through positive recognition. Source: <http://education.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=22135> You may want to purchase one of the books that is published by the Gallup organization.

Link to the Gallup Publications Information page

Your school would benefit from the purchase of multiple copies of these books, perhaps with professional development funds. Book studies and discussion groups were a one-time staple of building school competencies and a cohesive, collegial culture.

Perhaps your campus could revive the practice and benefit both teachers and students.

Focusing on the strengths of students and teachers can only "go right," it cannot go wrong.

And, you can only become a better teacher when you focus upon your student's strengths.

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

Teacher Resources

Nation Master .Com and State Master .Com Every teacher needs an up-to-date resource about the history, geography, politics and other information about the countries of our world. NationMaster is like the CIA World Fact Book on steroids. Link to the sites: NationMaster.Com, Statemaster.Com. Wide, Deep and Broad in Scope NationMaster and StateMaster; can provide the standard fare, i.e.: Flags

Maps

Statistics

Country Profiles

FAQs

News

Site Search

Free Lesson Plans The sites also has a forum. Uses of Geography In a country where many students can't identify the country of Iraq on a map, even though our country has been at war there for the majority of their lives, geography is important.

Geography is one area where our students are being "left behind."

The power of sites such as NationMaster and StateMaster is that teachers don't have to remain the sole expert about country and state information.

With Internet access, students can search for the facts and figures that fascinate them. Then, it is up to the teacher to tell stories, and weave this information into concepts and higher-order thoughts. A Resource for (Almost) Every Subject, Even Math Classroom Toolkit advocates teaching math at every opportunity in every subject. The same recommendation goes for geography, history and news (current events).

Background information is the natural segue into every lesson, because if stories were written, they were written in a country (maybe a state, province or political division within that country)

If stories have settings, these may be in countries, regions or cities within those countries

If science discoveries were made, these discoveries were made within countries, by scientists that were either citizens of that country, or by scientists that were born elsewhere

If food is being prepared, that food came from somewhere

If sports are being played, they are also played in other states and other countries. And many sports heroes (and national icons) come from other countries

Etc. On and on; You get the idea Not only are children interested in other countries, but they often communicate with students from around the world.

How?

Children play online video games with others at home.

A Nation of Immigrants

With the recent rancorous debate and divisive public opinion our country's immigration laws, our students need to become conversant of the issues.

In some schools and in some communities, there could be one or more "illegal immigrant" children sitting at the desks of its classrooms.

Students could suffer distress to learn that some folks in our country, politicians among them, might consider their friends to be "criminals and unsavory elements" in our society.

Do the math. Not every one of the estimated 12 million "undocumented aliens" is a maid, migrant farm worker, construction worker or custodian. A bunch of them are children. Sidebar The existence of these children in our school has to gail certain politicians among us.

Not only do these children consume resources, but these children are primarily of the "wrong religion," and they

consume public school resources that could be used to send children of the "right religion" (i.e., their rabid constituents children), to church schools at government expense. Too bad that this is illegal. Of course, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is designed to fix this by making our public schools (and our teachers) look bad; and provide an excuse to give government money to pay for church school tuition for these children.

Hopefully, this brand of bigotry (both the politicians of this ilk and NCLB) are on the way out. The next election will tell.

But, teachers are "child-centered" and politically neutral in public. In private, NCLB is enough to turn the vote of many teachers away from the party that "rammed it down the gullets" of our schools. Mature Resources "Mature resources" does not mean that these two sites are for adults, but that they have deep and well developed content.

Of course, StateMaster#8482; is the newer of the two online resources, so its content isn't quite as expansive. (We're sure that it will get to this level in short order.)

In addition, the close integration with Wikipedia#8482; seems to be a plus, even though the validity of the information in Wikipedia#8482; is sometimes of less than first quality.

In summary, NationMaster#8482; and StateMaster#8482; are resources that can help almost all teacher to integrate geography, history and current events into all subjects.

Children respond to this holistic approach to "human interest-type" knowledge with excitement and curiosity, a welcome "breath of fresh air" that can spruce up and spice up the bland taste of our "politically correct" textbooks.

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

Book Review

Book Title: Soar with your Strengths

Author: Clifton, Donald O. and Nelson, Paula | ISBN: 0-385-30414-5

Format: Hardcover | Pub. Date: 1992 | Publisher: Delacorte | Pages: 193 | Cost: \$19.00 (List) | Available: Amazon at as low as \$10.20 (new) \$0.55 (used) - \$2.75 at eBay(TM) | The Books' Topics: Our national obsession with weakness

Focus on strengths, manage weaknesses

Do more of what you do well

Stop doing what you don't do well

Strengths and weaknesses are only relative

Ways to recognize good work | The central themes of this book are: We waste time and people's lives by focusing on remediating weaknesses instead of building upon strengths.

We also seem obsessed with the negative, the bad, with weaknesses; as though these weaknesses are our enemy

We force children into boring and stress-filled remediation instead of letting them "take off and soar" with what they are good at. Children (and adults) enjoy, like, and flourish when they can be successful. Being successful is much easier if the success activity is a strength | Keywords: Strength Theory

Managing Weaknesses

Great Expectations

Right Expectations

Closing the Gap | Main Idea: Strengths are relative skills and abilities that we all have. We enjoy what we are good at, and we don't enjoy doing what we are not so good at.

We waste too much time and human resources by trying to rid our children (and ourselves) of weaknesses. We would be much better off as a society, and as individuals, if we focused on strengths.

There are also a lot of myths associated with eradicating weaknesses, and these have wreaked untold havoc upon the lives of children. These affects linger in the psyche of us as adults. Quotes: Here are some useful quotes …

"Like a trap set for a mouse, our national system is rigged to catch people's weaknesses rather than to build on their strengths." (p. - 9)

"We continue to focus all our energies on fixing weaknesses while ignoring strengths. Why do we continue to work at some activities without getting much better at them? Why do 80 percent of our New Year's resolutions stay on our lists year after year?" (p. - 10)

"This myth takes many forms: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Practice makes perfect. If you can conceive it, you can achieve it. If I can do it, you can do it." (p. - 15)

"When we focus on weaknesses, it takes on a life of its own and begins to smother our strengths." (p. - 17)

"The study of strengths creates a new theory of what people are like." (p. - 22)

"Great teachers show an ability to work with children as equals, even in preschool. Poor teachers present information to be memorized." (p. - 25)

"For example, a study of a sample of teachers shows they have problems with discipline. So many administrators want to require these teachers to take additional courses in school discipline. Look what happens: The college courses on discipline encourages teacher to develop more rules and ultimately become more controlling, making them less effective in the classroom. On the other hand, we found that outstanding teachers spent time working on their relationships with the students. They thought about how they could help the students grow rather than control them, which inspired the students to cooperate." (p. - 26)

"Success has its own rules, and highly successful people look at the world in a different way." (p. - 29)

"As you will discover, the Strengths' Theory applies on three different levels: as a philosophy for guiding your personal life, as a strategic tool for decision making, and as a system for developing those around you." (p. - 36)

"Many people, intrigued by the theory, ask if we're promoting the development of strong people over those who are less talented and are, therefore, promoting an elitist concept. That would assume that there are 'less strong people.'

Strengths' Theory is based on the premise that every person can do one thing better than any other 10,000 people. " (p. - 36)

"It may take a while to sort your strengths because invariably you will have to let go of one activity or another that you dearly love. But when the decision is made, you will go for your goal now matter what. All at once, your questions and doubts are gone, and the past is cleared to move forward. This decisiveness nearly always follows a time of musing, tossing around the pros and cons. But soon you will be the manager, go for the promotion, tryout for the play, or launch a company. You will often feel fear, but fear with an interesting quality to it…It's the moment that fear, while still exciting, is superceded by the excitement of your new commitment—when you strike a direction and "go for it."" (p. - 61)

"When we speak of weakness, we don not mean everything that you don't do well, only what intrudes on your area of productivity or lessens your self-esteem…When you unearth a weakness, you must manage it and never think that it can be turned into a strength. True, some apparent weaknesses can be corrected with an extraordinary amount of time, energy and money, but there is no alchemy for weakness. The can be removed, but they cannot be transformed into strengths. The goal, therefore, is to manage weaknesses so the strengths can be freed up to develop and become so powerful that they make the weaknesses irrelevant." (p. - 72)

"Teachers weak in teaching skills pin the blame on the students." (p. - 77)

"It is one thing to write about weaknesses, but another to claim them." (p. - 85)

"Quickly admitting weak areas is an act of courage and growth. Those who embrace their nonstrengths are those who move on with developing their strengths." (p. - 89)

"Holding on to something that doesn't work is not an act of strength, it is an act of blocking. It is perpetuating a weakness that stands in the way of strength. " (p. - 92)

"Goals die; Mission lives on " (p. - 113)

"The goal is not to proselytize or convert, but to express your true desires without regard to what others will think." (p. - 117)Here are the myths:Fixing weaknesses will make everything all right

Let strengths take care of themselves

Success is the opposite of failure

Anyone can do anything they put their minds toThe ways that you uncover your strengths are to:Listen to your yearnings

Watch for satisfactions

Watch for rapid learning

Catch glimpses of excellence

Look for total performance excellenceThe ways to uncover weaknesses (as if they weren't apparent because of our obsession with them) are:Look for performance that we feel defensive about

Find areas where we learn slowly

Examine areas where we don't profit from repeated experience

Consider skills where we have to consciously think through the process

Experiences that reduce our confidence

Experiences where we don't perceive the activity in our future (we don't look forward to it)

Experiences where we feel "burnout" from practicingIssues Addressed by the Book:If we would adopt the theory presented in this book, we would…Learn how to find out how good people can be

Stop wasting our time working on weaknesses

Learn to double or triple productivity by working on strengths

Make more effective decisions by studying what is right instead of studying what is wrongRules for improving and increasing our strengths include:Practicing a strength to perfect it

Enjoy and relive your successes

Picture and visualize your successes

Write and talk about your successes

Sticking to it and keeping on the path to self-improvementThe Book's Shortcomings:This book is right on, but is it strange that the authors have made such little impact in the 15 year that have passed since the book was first published. Even with the support of the Gallup™ organization, this book has create little stir, hardly a ripple in our educational system or our society.

Perhaps this is because human nature changes so slowly.

Or perhaps there is an intrinsic "survival benefit" of focusing on weaknesses.

On the other hand, the authors fail to note that many of the current practices inherent in our form of education are artifacts and carryovers from a "factory model of education." In this model, quality control, making all products the same, takes precedence over making unique and individual products with qualities that are better in some areas but not uniform. Of course; modern, Information Age survival depends upon building those unique strengths.

Perhaps our society will catch on to the ideas that these authors present. Comments: We enjoy doing what we are good at, and we don't enjoy struggling with what we are not good at. This makes sense, and this coincides with teachers' observations of children who are learning in the real world.

This may also explain the reason that the United States has so many "Learning Disabled" children, while Japan has none. In the United States, we create them.

By focusing on weakness (the disability), we integrate and solidify incapacities, while preventing the children that we have singled out from focusing on the activities and learning capacities that they enjoy (their strengths).

Wouldn't school be a nicer place if we didn't stratify children as "smart and talented, over achievers, average, under achievers, slow learners, dyslexic, Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, etc.

Ignoring these "technical definitions and jargon-based verbal shortcuts to understanding," we might be forced to celebrate children for who they are instead of for how they can perform on a battery of high-stakes tests. Summary:

Teachers who want to excel must take this theory into practice. Master Teachers already focus upon the strengths of their students and themselves. Every teacher needs to do likewise. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 2

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

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

Site Strategy

Change in Newsletter Service Company

The Classroom Toolkit Newsletter is changing the service company that distributes our newsletters. This will streamline our newsletter publishing system.

Because the new company has anti-spam policies (which we support), you will be asked to reconfirm (Opt-in) to subscribe to our newsletter, again.

The reason that we cannot just send the newsletter is that … Distribution lists (such as you use with

Microsoft™ Outlook, fail to protect your privacy

Sending individual E-mail messages takes too long

Internet Service Providers don't deliver all the mail that is sent to their customers The company that will deliver our E-mail is AWeber™. To Re-Subscribe To re-subscribe to this newsletter, use the following form…

Subscribe to the monthly Classroom Toolkit Newsletter Email: Name: This subscription will only be used for our newsletter. If you would like to enroll on our other mailing lists, you will need to do that on our Website, Classroom Toolkit.

But, why not just click on the RSS icons on the side of the newsletter, and be notified when we post changes to the newsletter?

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

Open Source for Education

Open Source for Education: Last Article The Open Source for Education section of the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter has reached its "end of life" stage. This is the last article in this series.

Open Source for Education will be replaced by a new article series, on "Professional Self-Improvement." "Open Source for Education: High Value, Low Interest Open Source for Education provides a high potential value for teachers, but there does not seem to be adequate interest for Classroom Toolkit to continue devoting the time in creating world-class

newsletter articles. Instead, the topic will be relegated to our Blog when items of interest develop. Saga of a Marketing Research Plan We have been conducting marketing research for a Texas-based organization that we belong to, Strategic Open Source. This is a special interest group of the Texas Computer Educators Association (TCEA).

This group has experienced difficulty in expanding its membership base, and in "getting behind the need of marketing Open Source solutions to teachers." I pressed the group to begin a marketing campaign, but I was assigned to conduct the marketing research and report at a subsequent meeting. Sidebar This seems to be an issue of "Techie-Type" folks thinking that they know what teachers need. Of course, educational research shows that instruction is the focus of teachers' needs, and that technology should be transparent, i.e., invisible to the teacher. The reason that the Texas organization hasn't developed a marketing plan to reach teachers is that many members seem to cling to the idea that Open Source is a "Technology" issue. That research leads me to believe that… Teachers don't care if products are Open Source, or not

There is not enough teacher interest to warrant a separate article each month

Teachers are concerned about instruction, not technology, and teachers don't care what company provides software, as long as the software is easy to use and solves their biggest headaches

The Open Source movement of Classroom Toolkit is about freely available content, not software
Online Research
I completed some research before changing the focus of this section of our newsletter. What I found was that almost no one searches for Open Source software for Instruction .

Classroom Toolkit always supported the use of Open Source tools for Microsoft® Windows to create modular (and interchangeable) learning materials. This would Streamline teacher lesson planning and save time
Shortcut the search for instructional activities, and save more time

Provide a vehicle to train students in the use of visual learning components such as Graphics Organizers
Implications for Teachers
I created a Website presentation to communicate marketing principles to the Texas organization.

Sidebar
I didn't share the Website presentation because I realized that the marketing materials that I created were even better suited as a tutorial for teachers in using marketing strategies to increase students' motivation.
For a preview of what these instructions look like before they are converted to a teacher-centric format, visit
Open Source Marketing Checklist

The basic tenets of marketing seem to be exactly what Master Teachers do as they get to know their students, and as they communicate in ways that make students eager to buy-in (learn) each lesson's content.

Eager to learn students are excited by teachers who implement the same principles as marketers.

Master Teachers are master marketers of the curriculum that they teach.

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