

Friday, November 30, 2007

News Nuggets

Teacher Sexual Abuse of Children: Disgusting! Scandalous! Preventable? Our country's print media, talk shows and newscasts flooded with "deplorable news" after the Associated Press released a report on teacher sexual abuse of students. The Associated Press reported that one teacher in 10,000 to 100,000 abuses children. (Fuzzy numbers…estimates because the problem is so underreported.)

Sidebar

AP: Teacher Sex Abuse Cases Reveal Patterns

CNN: Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports

AP: Sex Abuse Laws Can Fail School Kids

Google Search "Associated Press Teachers Sexual Abuse of Students"

A flood of these news stories are surfacing, much to the chagrin of honest, ethical, caring and law abiding teachers. Teachers know that these crimes happen, maybe even in their own school district.

What are the reasons that teachers remain stoic in the face of this "bad press?" What are the reasons that these criminals, who cast a pall on the teaching profession, seems to slither with impunity, unimpeded across our school districts' landscape? Want Failsafe Schools? Pay the Price! Logic dictates that even one case of a trusted adult (teacher, priest, rabbi, minister, imam, counselor, therapist, physician, nurse) abusing or molesting a child is "one too many."

Therefore, all such folks should be: Screened

Prosecuted, and if guilty, jailed

Registered and Tracked, if they are ever paroled

Banned from any further contact with children In addition, school district administrators that "hire, harbor, shelter, cover up these crimes or otherwise allow these criminals to "roam at large" should be: Fired

Prosecuted and if guilty, jailed

Barred from future school district employment

Banished from contact with children or child-service organizations But, none of this will happen.

Our public will wail, then the "outcry" will smolder and the embers will cool. The ashes will soil our schools, but "nothing long-term, definitive, solid or substantial" will be done.

The Reason: Solutions would be too expensive!

Sure, the vocal outcry proclaims unequivocal support for ensuring that no "Perverted Perpetrator (PervPerp) is hired; or, is allowed to remain employed in our school systems. Sidebar To really protect our children, we'll need to screen employees of all private, parochial and charter schools.

If we can vet Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, we can screen teachers! The technology and procedures for investigation exist. This process will only take time, people and money.

Lots of money! If we really mean business when we profess our desire to protect our children, we can build the national database, create an identification (ID) system, integrate biometric scanning and install video surveillance system in our schools.

We can also build maximum punishment into the legal and justice systems, and stiffen punishment for PervPerps.

We will need to harden our schools to make them impenetrable, impervious and impermeable to the "Scums and Scummetes" that would betray our children.

Of course, this would cost too much since we would be tracking down devious criminals, wolves with chalk dust on their fingers, who blend in…and are often great teachers. Sidebar PervPerps often put a lot of work into becoming well-liked, proficient teachers. This helps them disguise their predilections, and brings them closer to the children that they prey upon. Other Suggestions: Create a national reporting hotline, similar to the state Child Abuse Hotlines. This needs to be national in scope because these PervPerps prowl across state lines

Remove the "Statute of Limitations" from the crime of teacher (and trusted adult) sexual abuse

Make "covering up the crime" by failure to report every incident to authorities a felony. Try associated school administrators in a court of law as accomplices…as "Accessories After the Fact"

Make school district administrators "Personally, Jointly and Severally" Liable for Financial Suits brought by victims

Make lawyers that shield PervPerps from justice jointly liable for the crimes of their criminal clients If we were serious about protecting our children, we could: Build more prisons

Make room in existing prisons by expelling petty drug users (unless they were caught selling drugs to children)

Build in an upgrade path for the punishment for a second "PervPerp offense" to death row

Build a teacher licensure system Understanding the Status Quo Although understanding how school district officials (or any normal person) could sanction continued PervPerp employment in our schools, little will be done.

"The AP found attempts to stop particular offenders, it also found a firm resistance towards identifying and preventing abuse. Fellow teachers often ignore the abuse or believe they cannot help. School administrators cut backdoor deals to

sidestep lawsuits or bad press. In state governments and Congress, lawmakers are loath to impose harsher punishments or any national policy in fear of harming the teaching profession. Source: Teacher Sexual Abuse Of Students Increasing Neddermeyer, Dorothy M. PhD

How could stiffer penalties harm the teaching profession? What would a national policy do to corrupt the teaching profession?

Instead, what will happen is…PervPerps will continue to work in our school systems

Principals and superintendents will continue to fail to report sexual abuse crimes to the police

Superintendents will fail to alert other school districts (in state and out of state) about the depredations and dalliances of the PervPerps

Teachers will remain silent about their suspicions about colleagues for fear of being retaliated against (by district administrators)

Closet deals that rid one school district of the blight of a PervPerp employee will let that criminal skate, slide and slither into another district. School administrators will "Look the other way," make deals, and claim "ignorance of the facts" as the PervPerp skinks off sneakily into the sewer. "Beyond the horror of individual crimes, the larger shame is the institutions that govern education have only sporadically addressed a problem that's been apparent for years. 'From my own experience -- this could get me in trouble -- I think every single school district in the nation has at least one perpetrator. At least one,' says Mary Jo McGrath, a California lawyer who has spent 30 years investigating misconduct in schools. 'It doesn't matter if it's urban or rural or suburban.'" Source: Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports

If a lawyer can "get in trouble" for whistle blowing, so can teachers.

It's a dynamic so common it has its own nicknames -- "passing the trash" or the "mobile molester." Source: Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports

So, why the conspiracy of silence?

Sidebar Classroom Toolkit explored this conspiracy of silence in a previous newsletter article, *Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers*

The Real Solution: Convicting the Innocent to Oust the Guilty There is only one real solution for ousting the PervPerp Criminals from our school districts. Honest, caring and innocent teachers have to speak out.

Hard-working, dependable, caring teachers have to be willing to lose their jobs to report instances of child abuse when they suspect that their colleagues are abusing children.

The paradox is that only by decent, innocent teachers being willing to take the retribution from district administrators for "Whistle Blowing" will the the dark deeds of dirty PervPerps come to light soon enough to protect current and soon-to-be-future victims.

If you know about an incident where abuse has happened, report it to campus officials, counselors, the district superintendent. But, also use the Child Abuse Hotline and the Newspapers.

Sure, you might become an unemployed, unable to get another teaching job "hero," but you will be a hero (unsung, under appreciated, maybe broke and homeless); but a hero that you can respect in your own conscience.

"Buckle up" your courage.

The chances are only 1 in 10,000 or 1 in 100,000 that one of your colleagues are one of these "lowest of the low" student sexual abusers.

But if you encounter one, do your duty. Report! Report! Report!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Short Article

Should Schools be Run as a Business? What Business? Critics moan and gripe that schools should be run as a business. By this, the critics mean that schools should operate within budgets, "cut out the fat" of wasteful extravagance, and focus upon core competencies…and quit engaging in unproductive activities.

The critics also mean that schools should have every student on grade level at the same time, and that the money allocated for this target is more than adequate. (For schools that cower and ask, "Please a little more, Sir," the answer is "You can be replaced by a more cost effective and efficient model" (of teacher, principal, director, superintendent).

These critics also calculate shrinkage (technical term for lost product) of students (students that fail to graduate on time and within budget) because students are categorized as products. Sidebar The shrinkage (loss rate) should include: Drop Outs: (School leavers). There is a conflict in the critics' thinking on this issue since they sometimes categorize students as products, and sometimes categorize students as "customers" Defects: Students that can't function or perform at grade level at the specific school month that performance is measured Theft of Service: Teachers on the dole, drawing and undeserved paycheck because students have not progressed to specification Parents as Customers Parents could also be considered customers, as in "The customer is always right." Of course, teachers see this philosophy as administrative "waffling" and lack of support.

The corollary to this belief is, "If parents are always right, then teachers who disagree with them are always wrong."

If students were to be treated as "always right" customers, then classroom management and discipline degrades to "The inmates are in charge of the asylum" level of control. Sidebar Teachers should be solicitous in fulfilling each

student's learning needs.

What is detrimental is when one student places demands on the classroom system to the detriment of other students. The classroom milieu needs to operate for the benefit, satisfaction and support of all students. All students' rights must be maintained.

Of course, the Special Education needs of some students may require classroom compromise, and adjustments must be made.

What the critics forget is that substandard and defective materials are thrown on a pile by factory-based businesses, then sold for scrap, or, dumped into any convenient, unwatched place that can be found (such as our oceans). Perhaps our run-schools-as-a-business critics would like to meet the children that they want to discard. But, back to identifying the "Business" that our school systems should be in.

Sidebar Classroom Toolkit identified the multiple, multivariate roles that teachers take, and we won't repeat these. Here is the link to that article, Teaching: The Science of the Art

Are schools diploma mills, job training organizations, college prep factories? Or, are our schools total care facilities, holistic personal service organizations or self-improvement agencies?

Are our schools flexible service providers that accede to the wishes of parents, bend to the will of the community, squeeze to the propaganda of the media or contort to the whims of politicians?

Are classrooms screening labs where experimental studies are designed to maximize learning outcomes? Or, are classrooms artists' lofts and environments of free expression, refuges of personal creativity and genius?

But as the Internet boosts efficiency and world-wide communication as it propels progress, business is moving from an Industrial Economy to an Information Economy.

With these economic realities, everything about business changes.

But, does the business of education change with the times and pressures of the real world? Does the curriculum change?

Some items that a competitive, business like school system curriculum would integrate (actually build from the ground up rather than just remodel) include:

Problem-solving

Decision-making

Strategic Planning

Project Management

Collaborative Task Group Operations

Marketing Skills

Relationship Building

Some things that social engineers who believe that our schools should be operated as a business agree upon include:

A focus on the job of teaching students

A mandate for schools to live within the cash flow (abundant budget for what is important, not administrator whims

To deliver results, not persistent excuses

To give the "paying public" (customers, clients) what they want. Schools must not tell customers, clients, community members what the schools think that these stakeholders need

Making innovation and testing high-priorities

Acting on complaints, making changes that work

Obeying the Law: Firing ineffective superintendents, administrators, teachers

Keeping our schools safe. Prosecuting sexual abusers

Providing sufficient, adequate training and supervision that encourages success

Note: Efficiency means "doing right things right"

Effectiveness means "doing right things well"

Practical Barriers to "Bottom-Line Thinking" Schools should heed the bottom line, but should not cower and crawl

prostrate at its feet. (Excuse the mixed metaphor. We all know that that a line has ends, but not feet.)

Schools cannot be run as a bottom-line worshipping business. Here are the reasons:

Businesses follow the 80/20 Rule. That is, businesses focus on the top, profitable markets.

Imagine if we decide to target (and graduate) the top 80% of our students, and let the other, harder to teach, less

motivated students flounder. Oh wait! For some of our schools operate with a 60% graduation rate. For these venues

80% would be a over a 130% improvement. Businesses drop unprofitable product lines

Businesses quit "making the thing" and quit offering the item or service that the public doesn't want. Oh wait! Aren't we

doing the same thing when we drop art, music, drama, health and P. E. classes? Aren't we doing the same thing when

we support high school athletics (such as football, basketball, baseball)? Aren't we doing the same thing when we focus

upon the public's appetite for "test score improvement" instead of providing a balanced and long-term focus on life-long

learning?

Businesses cut labor costs Fire them, outplace them, offer retirement bonuses, save funds by a reduction in force

Oh, wait! Don't we offer early retirement incentives to rid the school district operation of costly seniority (long-time on the

job) labor.

Of course, we loose lots of institutional intelligence in the process, but schools don't have the money to hire all those out

placed folks back as consultants; often for more money than they were making when employed.

Businesses go to great lengths to avoid litigation

Keep out of court, compromise with criminals when the cost of litigation (or bad public relations) exceeds the cost of the loss. Calculate costs before becoming embroiled in any legal proceedings. Oh wait! Don't we take prudent measures by pretending to offer Special Education students the services that they are "entitled to" by giving their parents everything that they want? Don't we continue to employ ineffective teachers who threaten to bring suit if they are fired? Don't we oust unpopular superintendents and pay them for the remaining years of their contracts (pay for no work), just to be rid of them?

If the mission of our schools is to act like a business, then our schools are performing this task with the noble skills of any bureaucracy. The Real Mission The real mission of our schools is to pull off an operation similar in complexity (but without the budget) of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) space program.

Here, fail-safe, i.e., expensive, multiple backup plans, feats of skill, engineering and an exquisite focus on collaboration account for success. Any margin of error is unacceptable, so every precaution is checked and rechecked to mitigate error.

Of course, fail-safe systems require backup equipment and backup employees. In the case of school districts, for example, what about a private tutor for every student that is "falling behind?"

Expecting "fail-safe systems" with "skimp and save" funding seems like the trait of someone that has been "sniffing moon gas."

If these "run schools as a business" rants typify the pontifications of our elected officials, we might stop and wonder who released them into the wilds inside the Beltway or through the metal detectors of our state capitals. An Educated Response to Critics So, the next time that folks say that schools should be run as a business, and do more with the resources that they have; ask them exactly what business they think that our schools should be in.

In a polite way, this simple questioning strategy will expose their ignorance, and, as long as you don't "rub it in," further gentle questioning on your part will make you look "very smart" in their eyes.

But, what do you expect the public to know about education? If school district executives and politicians don't know what it takes to teach children, how can we expect members of the public at large "to have a clue about the educational system that they complain so much about?" Executive Decision-Makers

Another way that schools fail to mark time with businesses is in the hiring and paying of executive talent.

Can you imagine a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) leading a corporation with \$33 million to \$1/2 billion USD working for \$100K to \$600K in salary & limited fringe benefits, few perks, and zero stock options?

Of course, the school district is not making a profit. All that money coming in is tax money or state and federal warrants. Well, if schools are not making money, why don't we let them? Schools making as much profit as they could would really be running schools like a business, would it not? Complex Challenges: Sound Bites too Small The challenges facing school districts are complex, and often inflicted from outside (such as from politicians and the media). Sound bites prove to be too small a package to communicate these issues, yet sound bites are about the size of the attention span of our decision-making, customer public.

If that public had a clue about the complexities of our educational system, they would give teachers an olive-branch crown to wear and lavish praise at our feet.

Anyone want to bet that this won't happen anytime soon?

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

Feature Article

"Fair Use" = Source of Unlimited Free Content: What's the Catch?

"Content is King" on the Internet, and content drives instruction in face-to-face classroom teaching. Content is required for training, no matter what "skills" are being taught, and content (knowledge, concepts, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation) build higher-order thinking; i.e., if there is no content, no thoughts are built.

Content also supplies the building blocks for creating and artistic expression. Projects, homework, reports, presentations and group interactions develop through interaction with content. Problem-solving and decision-making are hopeless abstract exercises with no long-term or residual meaning without working content that students investigate, manipulate and repackage.

So, what is the problem with that "ultimate, growing by quantum leaps every second" content colossus; the Internet?

Answer: Teachers have an ethical and legal obligation to use the Internet content carefully. That careful use is called, "Fair Use."

The problem is that most of the content that teachers would like to use in an unlimited and indiscriminate fashion carries a copyright. This type of content is called "intellectual-property." Sidebar In fact, everything that the teacher writes also carries a copyright.

However, in too many cases the school district where the teacher works may have a policy where the district takes ownership of the individual teacher's work, and no matter whether the work was written on school district time, with school district equipment and school district Internet access; or not.

The grab for Intellectual Property that school district claim in this type of policy is called "Work for Hire." These policies are a stretch from when the claim is legitimate, i.e., when the district pays teachers to come in during the summer to

write curriculum. When an employer claims the Intellectual Property rights of its employees when the employee was not paid directly for that work is a subversion of the Copyright Law, and school districts should not be allowed to continue with this practice.

Here are the problems with using content that you find on the Internet: Finding appropriate content items on the Internet can take a lot of time

This sample search for the term "Graphic Organizers" yields 1,750,000 search results.

Lesson plans are easy to find

This sample search for the term "Free Lesson Plans" provides search results for over 1,840,000 items.

Finding a lesson plan with the right level takes work. For example, you want a lesson comparing the holiday customs of plantation owners, slaves and native Americans during US Colonial times because this fits with the curricular goals that will be tested on the upcoming district-wide benchmark test. Or, perhaps you need to compare the progress toward independence among the United States, Mexico, Canada, India and Iraq for a history or government class. Good luck in finding anything this specific

Modifying a lesson plan that you find online (so that it is helpful and results in students' learning) takes time

Adapting the lesson plan to the instructional materials that you have also takes time

Link to a sample search for the term "History of Independence for USA, Mexico, Canada, India and Iraq + Lesson Plans" results in 302,000 search results. Then, the content items that you do find may be copyrighted and it takes time to sort through them, separating "Entirely Usable" and "Fair Use" items

Content by itself still requires your pruning so that it fits your instructional framework. Some material is written to at a level that is too difficult for the reading level of your students, other material is a too easy for your students

Some Internet material are boring to your students, and your students rebel if you force them to read it. Some Internet material is too salacious and you would get fired if you give it to your students to read. Sending students out to find their own materials is fraught with obstacles and danger (for both your students and their teacher). Students get distracted and waste their time (and yours)

Students encounter adult, "super controversial" or otherwise inappropriate material (racism, hate speech, hacking, bomb making, terrorism and anarchy recruitment, other "Constitutionally protected" but unsavory content. Access to such content is against The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), and teachers may be held liable for allowing students to peruse this content (in school, on school district equipment, using the school district's network). The end result of these "real-world realities" is that teachers are burdened and overworked with "unreal life and career demands" on their time. So, teachers migrate towards the path of least resistance. Stress, personal lifestyle needs, overwhelming expectations from district administrators (and the public at large); and, dodging burn out (for self-preservation) conspire to drive teachers to "just use the textbook."

After all, the research that goes into writing a textbook is based on the wisdom of confident and intelligent experts. And, textbook content is vetted by highly-paid editorial boards. It is easier to serve bland textbook fodder to a captive student audience, and to season this "without-taste" diet with personal color commentary and a little spice (as long as your comments are politically correct enough to let you keep your job). Color Commentary The strategy that most teachers undertake for using Internet materials, one that doesn't involve a "deal with the devil" (no pun intended) is to spice up textbook content with ad lib and ad hoc "color commentary."

Using this strategy, teachers can print Web materials and just highlight items. Then, teachers read these items, and make verbal, grade-level and job-protecting adjustment to the content on-the-fly during their "lectures"

Create note cards and stickies (Post It Notes #8482;), and place these in appropriate places in the teacher edition of the textbook where they are grabbing their "talking points" from

Post the edited notes online in free Blogs and Wikis. Then make this material available. But, exercise care since this reposting could violate the copyright owner's rights.

Pluck passages from the materials under the maximum size allowed by law, i.e., "Fair Use" and create student study guides from this compilation. However, these strategies require time and effort, adding more work to the teacher's day.

Sidebar Note: Teachers with different grade level and content-area/ subject assignments need different strategies for using Internet materials. Some of these differences between grade levels and content area subjects are:

Self-contained Elementary teachers teach six or seven subjects per day while Middle School teachers and High School teachers teach one (or more) levels of the same subject, multiple times during a single day

Early Elementary (K-3) focuses on basic skills practice while students in Intermediate grades (and above) focus on manipulating and constructing content. Fair Use and the Legal Beyond The rules for "Fair Use" are well-known to teachers, and repeated each year as part of the teachers' yearly, re-employment ritual; the start-of-school In-Service.

Of course, Classroom Toolkit leads you beyond the puny, pathetic use of content that is limited by "Fair Use" to what you can legally use. We introduce you to …

Public Domain materials

Private Label Rights (PLR) Articles

Content Spinners

Open Instructional Materials and Templates

Modular Tools Here are how these strategies and tools can make your teaching life easier. Public Domain Public Domain materials are old, but not obsolete materials.

The laws governing Public Domain materials are complex, here are some a clues

U.S. Government documents

State judicial opinions

Laws, regulations and other official documents

Ideas

Facts

Blank forms

Short phrases (but not Trademark™ phrases) which can be the real thing (no pun intended)

names, titles and slogans

"Off the cuff" extemporaneous speeches

Standard plots and stock characters, such as the dedicated, old-maid teacher who could never find marital bliss because her students came first

Documents written before 1922

Stuff where copyright was not renewed between 1923 and 1964

Source: New Rules for Using Public Domain Materials Lloyd J. Jassin, Attorney

Link to the article at CopyLaw.com…
Read the article at CopyLaw.Com, or do your own Google™ search…

Search for Public Domain Rules

As Lloyd Jassin points out, there are a lot of tricks and traps in trolling for out of copyright materials. However, there is one safe source.

The the premier source of Public Domain materials is Project Gutenberg.™

Project Gutenberg Banner

Volunteers at Project Gutenberg™ have done the copyright research, and the endless array of materials that you find at their site are completely free for your use.

The only problem with Project Gutenberg,™ like the rest of the Internet, is that there is so much material that it takes a long time to find appropriate items for classroom use. Thousands of no-cost articles, stories and books!

Sidebar Note: Our first Resource Bulletin package includes a product called The Public Domain Expert

CODE-BREAKER Report by by Tony Laidig which describes the process of finding Public Domain content in greater

detail. See the list of other items that are included in this package later in this article. PLR Articles Private Label

Rights--generic materials sold by content creators for others to change and use as they see fit.

The catch is that you have to purchase these, and abide by the license agreement that the content developers set for the materials.

Sidebar Classroom Toolkit has obtained some PLR Articles for you. And, we are on the lookout for more of these materials.

The PLR contents in our Resouce Bulletin is listed below.

But, you won't have to pay for the articles. You get these by joining our Resource Bulletin Program. The way that we can give you these articles at no cost (and maintain our legal obligation to the copyright owner) is by classifying our Resource Bulletin as a "Membership Program." Of course, because of the "Can Spam" Law, you can opt-out of the program at any time. But, why would you want to opt out if free-to-use, timely materials are one-click available on your desktop?

Sign up as a member of Resource Bulletin Program and have links to these materials sent directly to you by E-mail as we develop and post them.

Legal Reminder: This is a double opt-in process, and needs to remain in place for us to comply with "Can Spam" laws.

We can't just send these items to you because you are already a subscriber to our Classroom Toolkit Newsletter.

Check the license requirement of each package. You can use the content of these articles in any way you like, but some articles have restrictions on whether you can give them away or resell them.

"Tell-a-Friend!" You can tell your friends about about are opt-in program and send the link to the sign up page to them.

This way, your friend can friend request these materials without your having to send the 10 MB file to them.

The materials will be available immediately for download after the Opt-In Form is filled out. We would like to just provide a link, but the licensing for some PLR materials do not allow the materials to be given away without joining a membership program. (And, the Opt-in Form, required by the "Can Spam" Law exists for your protection.)

Sidebar Here is a sample of what a PLR License looks like… Private Label Right Summary

[Yes / No] You may add / edit or remove content

[Yes / No] Can be offered as a bonus for products sold

[Yes / No] Can be packaged with products for sale

[Yes / No] May be sold as a stand alone product for any price above \$__ (specified price)

[Yes / No] Can be added to paid membership sites

[Yes / No] Can be offered through auction sites for any price above \$__ (specified price)

[Yes / No] Includes sales letter

[Yes / No] Includes graphics

[Yes / No] Can sell Master Resale Rights

[Yes / No] Can sell Resale Rights

[Yes / No] Can be given away
[Yes / No] Can sell Private Label Rights
[Yes / No] There are no refunds
[Yes / No] We don't offer support to your customers
The PLR materials creator is able to define exactly what rights he or she is selling.

As you can see, even authors of Private Label Rights (PLR) have broad discretion in what can or can't be done with their materials.

PLR materials always come with associated rights, and it is necessary to check those rights before re-distributing these materials.

Sidebar

Classroom Toolkit will place a rights document at the beginning of any PLR Articles that we distribute without cost to teachers.

Note: to comply with the rights of some PLR materials, we must request that teacher Opt-In to our mailing list before we can legally "give these articles away."

Content Spinners"Content Spinners" are small computer programs that change article content, (such as PLR Articles). This software does just what you would do if you load the text PLR article into Microsoft Word (or another word processor) that contains a thesaurus. Then, you replace words (easy, or more difficult words) according to your curricular goals and purposes.

You can try out a Content Spinner for free at JetSpinner.Com

Link to the free JetSpinner tryout!

Note: Content spinners are used by Webmasters that want to make 200 copies of the same article for posting on tons of Websites with the same topic. The markup to make that happen will probably seem like "more work than it is worth" for teachers. We recommend the "Word Processor Word Strategy" (no plug intended), instead. Modular ToolsModular tools, such as Graphic Organizers, are "content structurers" and "thought structurers."

If Graphic Organizers were classified as forms, then they would not be copyrightable. Of course, publishers always add some little bit of art work that customizes the printed page and makes the page copyrightable.

SidebarFor a list of Graphic Organizers found on at Classroom Toolkit, check out our article, Classroom Toolkit Graphic Organizers Index Open Source Instructional MaterialsThe Open Source Instructional Materials project was started by Classroom Toolkit.Com Since then, Scott Nealy of Sun Microsystems started Curriki, another Open Source project. Classroom Toolkit remains a personal, self-funded project while Curriki is well funded and has gathered a lot of "big name" sponsors.

However, Classroom Toolkit provides a focused set of materials and a strategy that any teacher can use to manage an entire school year (or more than one school year). Curriki provides articles and 8,042 lesson plans.

Decide for yourself whether the Classroom Toolkit strategy of the Curriki lesson plan vault better suits your needs. But why choose, use both resources when you have time. (Note; Use Classroom Toolkit when you are pressed for time.)

If you are in a real hurry, use this search term to identify a chunk of the instructional materials that Classroom Toolkit Offers:

Link to Specialized Google search of Classroom Toolkit PDF formatted files.

Once the redesign of Classroom Toolkit is completed, all materials will be listed in a single Table of Contents and inventory page.Resource BulletinClassroom Toolkit's December Resource Bulletin package includes over 10 MB of "free-to-use" content, tips and surprises.Holiday Stories and Articles50 Children's Stories (Text that can be modified, edited, changed)

50 Children's Stories (PDF Format)

5 Christmas Fun (Five Text articles that can be modified, edited, changed)

5 Christmas Fun PDF eBook

Christmas Carols - Doc Format (Can be modified, edited, changed)

Christmas Tales - PDF eBook

Christmas Tales - Doc Format (Can be modified, edited, changed)

Holiday Stress - Doc Format (Can be modified, edited, changed)

RecipesOld Time Recipes - PDF eBook

Christmas Grill - PDF eBook

Holiday Recipes - Doc Format (Can be modified, edited, changed)

Candy Recipes - PDF eBook

Holiday Graphics

Christmas Family Photo Graphics - Photoshop (PSD) and JPG formatsBooks on using Public Domain

MaterialsPublic Domain Advantage - PDF eBook

Public Domain Code - PDF eBookJoin now

Quick Tips

Speak Up 2007: An Invitation You and your school district (or campus) can participate in this year's Speak Up National Research Project. Project Tomorrow, a leading non-profit group that focuses on science, math and technology K-12 education, facilitates this project.

The Speak Up project collects and releases an annual report that is "unfiltered" and authentic. (Real "Tell it like it is!") Project Tomorrow gathers these gems of experience and jewels of wisdom from K-12 Students

Teachers

Parents

School Administrators, Directors, and Executives Reach and Focus

Project Tomorrow gathers all data online, and every school district in the United States and Canada are eligible to participate.

The survey focuses on 21st century education and technology issues.

Survey participants come from every state.

The online surveys remains open for your comments until December 15th this year.

Why Participate in Speak Up?

There are several reasons why you should post your comments on the Speak Up 2007 Website. These are:

Speak Up gives you a direct voice in the development of national and state education policies and programs

The national data is shared each year with Congress, the US Department of Education, National Science Foundation and many State Governors.

If you participate in Speak Up, you have free online access to your own quantitative data with national benchmarks

Participate: Get the Report! If you participate in the Speak Up Project, you will get the project data in January 2008, in time for making planning, training, budgeting and purchasing decisions. Themes for Speak Up 2007: Big Ideas

The themes for Speak Up 2007 include: Opportunities and impact of technology on learning

Communications, self-expression, and social networking

Global awareness and international collaborations

Science, math, national competitiveness, and workforce development

Schools of the future Surveys Close: December 15th, 2007 Access to the Speak Up Survey remains open (online 24/7) until December 15th, 2007.

Students, parents, teachers and school leaders can access the survey from any computer that is connected to the Internet.

The survey takes between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Survey items include: multiple choice questions, and 1 (or 2) open ended response questions. The number of questions depends upon what survey you volunteer to take.

Register today! Tools to promote Speak Up The Speak Up website offers tools for making the 2007 Speak Up Survey a success. These tools include a Speak Up How-to Guide for Educators, a Speak Up How-to Guide for Parents, flyers for posting at your school, sample E-mail templates for communicating with other educators and parents, lesson plans, previews of the survey and more.

Visit the Speak Up Website or contact the Speak Up Team at: speakup@tomorrow.org Summary Project Tomorrow is a national nonprofit educational organization. Its mission is to promote and support innovative and research-based uses of science, math and technology. Project Tomorrow supports the use of these tools in developing critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity for all K-12 students.

Check them out. Non-Profit Partners Here is a list of Non-Profit Sponsors for the Speak Up Program.

This list is included to demonstrate that this is a valuable opportunity for you to get involved, and to motivate you to go to the Speak Up Website and register. Alliance for Excellent Education

American Association of School Administrators

American Association of School Librarians

American Electronics Association (AeA)

American Federation of Teachers

American Institutes for Research

Association of Materials Resource Centers

Benton Foundation

Cable in the Classroom

California Charter Schools Association

California League of High Schools

California League of Middle Schools

California Science Center

The Center for Educational Partnerships, UC

The Centers for Quality Teaching and Learning

The Children's Partnership

City of Seattle Department of Information Technology

College Board

Computer Science Teachers Association
Computer Using Educators (CUE)
Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)
Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Educating Future Generations (efg)
Educational Testing Service (ETS)
The Forum for Youth Investment
Future Scientists and Engineers of America
Gaggle
Generation Yes
George Lucas Educational Foundation
Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce
GreatSchools.net
iEARN (International Education and Resource Network)
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
Irvine Public Schools Foundation
Kidz Online
Maine Mathematics and Science (MMSA) Alliance
Massachusetts Building a Presence for Science
McKenzie Group
MassCUE
Math Forum @ Drexel
MOUSE
NASA Office of Education
The National Alliance of State Science and Math Coalitions
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
National Association of College Stores
National Association of Elementary
School Principals (NAESP)
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP, GEAR UP)
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers
of English
National Education Association (NEA)
National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA)
National Middle School Association
National Park Foundation
National Research Center for College & University Admissions
National Rural Education Association (NREA)
National School Boards Association (NSBA)
National Science Digital Library
National Science Resource Center -- Regional LASER Sites
North American Council for Online Learning
One Economy
Orange County Department of Education (CA)
Points of Lights Foundation
Professor Garfield Foundation
Public Education Network
Public Broadcasting Service
San Diego Science Alliance
Science@OC at the California Science Center
Science Buddies
Science Museum of Virginia
Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA)
State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)
TechCorps
TechNet

Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership
Think.com

United States Distance Learning Association
USATODAY Education

US Conference of Mayors
US Department of Education

Youth Science Foundation Canadalmpressed?

Now is the time to exercise your "democratic rights" because, if you work for a bureaucratic school district, your democratic rights are few.

Speak Up anyway! Your students educational future depends upon enough voices being heard.

And, while you are at it. Punch, pound, slap and kick The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and rid our educational landscape of this blight.

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

Top Tips

Classroom Toolkit Graphic Organizers IndexThe Classroom Toolkit Website contains a year (or more) worth of Graphic Organizers. Links to these files, in PDF Format, are found on relevant pages of the site.

Here is a Index Page with links to many of those Graphic Organizers. Of course, there are many other types of resources on the Website that will make your work day easier.

Consider this as your Graphic Organizer starter kit (if you need one). Cause and Effect Graphic Organizer

Compare and Contrast Graphic Organizer 1

Compare and Contrast Graphic Organizer 2

Content Area Discussion Graphic Organizer 1

Content Area Discussion Graphic Organizer 2

Current Events Fact Sheet

Current Events Reading Analyzer

Drawing Conclusions Graphic Organizers

Flexible Writing Template

Integrated Note Taking

Journal Page Template

Learning Project Assignment Plan

Making Predictions Graphic Organizer

Organizing Ideas Graphic Organizer

Problem-Solving Graphic Organizer

Read and Think Along Template

Reading and Note Taking

Science Fact Sheet

Sequential Order Graphic Organizer

Short Story Fact Sheet

Social Studies Fact Sheet

Solutions/ Choices Graphic Organizer

Storyboard Summary Graphic OrganizerA Better Graphic Organizer StrategyThe "run of the mill" strategy for using graphic organizers is to print a copy for every student, and attach these to other work.

Classroom Toolkit recommends a more effective path.

First, print a library of these forms, so that you have them ready to "mix and match" for flexible assignments, and for substitute folders.

Next, collate a booklet of these forms and bind them, such as with the plastic comb binding. Put this set of organizers between index stock/ cover stock (heavy weight paper, or even cardboard)

Then, let each student decorate their copy.

Now, instead of printing copies and doling them out to every student, have students create their own organizers on blank paper (even notebook paper) as the need arises.

Students learn more from the gross and fine motor movements of drawing out an organizer from the model in your sample book than they do from labeling a photocopied page that you hand to them.

Finally, keep a copy of these forms on a CD, USB drive or other storage so that you have them at home. That way, if you are ever absent and can't take your lesson plans to school, you can send copies of generic work to a colleague or to a campus administrator. Tools to Make Graphic Organizers for YourselfMost Graphic Organizers can be created from scratch using only the programs found in Microsoft Office Professional. A few other tools can be useful.

However, in this age of "technology integration" we forget that we can draw on a laser printed framework, and make scans of photocopies of the "dual-media" (laser printer output, pen and ink, pencil, marker) composite.

Quickness and capturing the immediacy of the moment counts more for student learning than publication-quality graphics.

Graphic Organizers are made for thought, not, "thought made for Graphic Organizers."

One final step: Share your creations with your colleagues. Your ideas may spark unexpected learning in students that you don't even know.

Helping students learn who you have not taught. What a concept.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Top Tips at 06:00

Teacher Resources

Free Camtasia Studio: Create your Own Desktop Videos

Desktop video is one area where existing Open Source software doesn't measure up to the commercial version. And, the "king" of commercial video creation software is Camtasia Studio. Sidebar Camtasia Studio is also much better than Microsoft's free Movie Maker software that is a free download for Windows Xp.

Link to the Microsoft Movie Maker Download Page

Now, teachers can receive a fully functional (previous version, Version 3.1.3) of Camtasia Studio for free!

There is no telling how long TechSmith, the makers of Camtasia Studio, will keep this offer online, so act fast. Sidebar Note: Classroom Toolkit is taking the unusual step of publishing this article early so that our readers can take advantage of this TechSmith offer. Our online strategy is to publish articles that are organized in a magazine-type collection once a month. However, this offer is too good for teachers to wait. TechSmith may pull this offer before the end of the month. We will also publish an article related to this free Camtasia offer in our Open Source for Education, section of the Classroom Toolkit 11-30-07 newsletter. This article explores the reason that your school district's IT Department can't take advantage of this free Camtasia offer and the reason that free Open Source software "seldom flies" in a school district network environment, either. Previous Camtasia Version: No Problem Even though this free version is an older version of the software, it is still superior to any available Open Source desktop video product.

Of course, TechSmith would like you to upgrade to the current version, Camtasia 5.0. And, TechSmith is offering an upgrade to this trial version for half-price, \$149.00 USD. Action Steps Here are the steps that you need to take to grab this offer:

1. Download Camtasia Trial Version

Download the 30-day trial to Camtasia v. 3.1.3

2. Install the Trial software on the computer of your choice

3. Request the Registration that will allow the software to "run forever," i.e., turn the trial version into a full version

Obtain a Registration Key (Note: You have to provide an E-mail address.)

4. Visit TechSmith's Educational Resources Page

TechSmith's Educational Video Resources 5. Create your instructional videos Fantastic Offer: The software license key that TechSmith sends you turns the evaluation copy that you download for free into a fully licensed version.

At the same time, TechSmith offers you a chance to upgrade the license for a the newest version at 50% off the new version (Camtasia Suite 5.0).

Upgrade Link: \$149.00 USD

(Note: This upgrade price beats the "Education Version pricing," and provides the full commercial license to this product.

Education Price: \$179.00 USD.) System Requirements It is applications such as Camtasia Studio that keep Apple and Linux from making headway in their competition with the Windows operating system. Of course, Apple provides its own free Audio and Video software, but Apple computers cost more.

Sidebar Contrary to what Apple and Linux supporters tell themselves, and would like to believe, i.e., that the education market drives the computer software industry; business and home users are really the engines of computer operating system marketing. Apple needs to provide better business applications at a lower price point, and Linux needs to be easier to use and needs to run Windows applications in a seamless way. Note: Apple computers run an application called Parallels Desktop 3.0 for Mac, that does an outstanding job of running Windows applications on the Mac. Of course, Apple computers are superior for desktop video and movie production. However, one application for Camtasia videos is to capture Windows desktop images to demonstrate how technology can be integrated into your curriculum. If your school district provides Apple computers for teacher and student use, then you don't need Camtasia Studio. Microsoft Windows XP or Windows Vista
Microsoft DirectX 9 or later version

1.0 GHz processor minimum ~ Recommended: 2.5 GHz (for PowerPoint and camera recordings.)

500 MB RAM minimum ~ Recommended: 1.0 GB

60 MB of hard-disk space for program installation

Optional: Camtasia Studio Add-in for Power Point; requires PowerPoint; 2000, 2002, 2003, or 2007

Optional: Production to the Apple iPod format requires Apple QuickTime; 7.1 or later

Optional: Windows-compatible sound card, microphone and speakers (recommended)

Optional: Camera video recording requires a USB Camera. Digital video (DV) cameras are not supported. USB Web camera

Benefits of Camtasia; (Either Version) Simplifies video for distance learning

Improves online content creation. You can post these videos on a Website or burn them to CD/ DVDs

Enhances classroom presentations. You can create video handouts and take home multimedia lessons

Strengthens teacher training. Workshop and Training program Follow-up procedures can be posted for online viewing or

downloading

Great for technology integration

Super for Computer Lab demonstrations and student self-help FAQs

Wonderful for student learning centers Features of the Latest Version Unless your Classroom is "High Tech" (or you are a Curriculum Specialist, Trainer or Webmaster); you won't need these latest features.

And, although there is a learning curve, it is not as steep as with many other high-end software products.

(TechSmith; also provides Camtasia; video tutorials to get you "up and running" quickly.

Sidebar Link to the TechSmith; Learning Center

Camtasia; Studio publishes videos and MP3 files for portable media players - even the iPod. It enables you to share videos with anyone, even with the use of Flash"

You achieve this miracle by being able to record anything on your computer monitor screen, including narrated PowerPoint; slides and web cam video. Then, you can even edit multiple audio tracks, reduce background noise and equalize volume on these tracks.

The new version has a the ability to "AutoZoom" to investigate sections of the screen in greater detail; great for demonstrations.

There is also the ability to create interactive videos that can contain surveys and quizzes. The interactive videos can also contain "hot spots" that launch programs and Websites. Work During the Holidays? Sidebar Creating instruct videos might be a "fun" way to spend your Winter Solstice Break (Note: Politically correct phrase for those or you who work in a school district that has outlawed the use of the term "Christmas.")

Of course, district administrators haven't figured out that celebrating a Winter Solstice (while deprecating Christmas, Hanukah, Ramadan and Kwanza), honors a Druid and Wicca (Witchcraft) religious celebration.

Perhaps, in the current politically correct climate, "Freedom of Religion" means the freedom to practice nothing unless that practice is conducted "underground."

Note of the Note: These comments are a way that you can tell that this newsletter article is not an ad for Techsmith; but a helpful message for teachers. Advertisers would never risk alienating anyone by their insightful comments, and always keep their hype inane. Here, at Classroom Toolkit, we "Tell it like it is."

And anyone that doesn't take advantage of this TechSmith; offer because of our comments loses out.

So, take advantage of this offer from TechSmith; no matter what you think of our views.)

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Resources at 05:00

Book Review

Say it in Six Author: Hoff, Ron ISBN: 0-7607-3529-8 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1996 Publisher: : Barnes & Noble Books Pages: 153 Cost: \$ (List) Available: Amazon; at as low as \$10.36 (new) \$1.50 (used) - \$1.95 at

eBay; Subtitle: How to Say Exactly what you Mean in Six Minutes or less Say it in Six reminds us that brief speech is great speech. This is something that teachers need to remember when they deliver a lecture "to students"

instead of facilitating learning "for students." The Books' Topics: We talk too much

The "Burning Issue:" Linchpin of the six-minute speech

Cut to the chase: Slimming down to six means "Dump the junk"

The "Six-Minute Structure"

The style of the Six-Minute Speaker

Learning from the great Six-Minute Speakers of the world

Cutting costs and solving problems in Six-Minutes The central themes of this book are: Short communications, well thought out, tightly crafted convey meaning better than longer messages

Structured thinking leads to eliminating distracting information from your message

A focus on the audience, not yourself, leads to better communication

People fully pay attention only when the communication is about them Keywords: Burning Issue

Clothesline Structure

High Wire Structure

Six-Minute Structure: A Do-it-Yourself Kit

Toughen up your Message

The Six-Minute Speaking Style

The Six-Minute "Palm Map." (Single, Mind-Map Style Note Card for the Entire Speech) Main Idea: Almost everyone talks too much after minimal preparation. Better preparation allows us to shorten the time that it takes to deliver the message. A shorter message increases the amount of information that our audience receives.

Centering on the audience (their needs, their issues), counts more than lots of words and elaborate descriptions when we want to communicate clearly. (Don't we want to communicate clearly?) And, centering on the audience eliminates our self-centered, nervousness-generating focus upon ourselves. Quotes: "Six minutes disciplines the mind and tightens the message." (p. - 6)

"Meetings…are known mainly for their rambling arguments and eternal monologues. A well-made, six-minute speech would stand out like an exclamation point in a sea of commas." (p. - 11)

"The burning issue of this book: U.S. business wastes \$40 billion on mismanaged meetings every year. We look for all kinds of ways to cut costs and overlook the most obvious one. We talk too much." (p. - 17)

"Woodrow Wilson was asked how long it took him to prepare a 10-minute speech. 'Two weeks,' he said. 'How long to prepare a one-hour speech?' 'One week.' 'How long to prepare a two-hour speech?' 'I'm ready now.'" (p. - 54)

"Memorizing is the pits. It instills the fear of forgetting. A memorized speech becomes a 'performance'-- a 'set piece' which can be given to anybody. Audiences hate that. Every audience thinks of itself as different, unique, deserving of special treatment. You should memorize the structure. You can even memorize certain words and phrases that you know will work for your. But memorizing the whole thing, word for word, imprisons your thoughts rather than setting them free." (p. - 61)

"Juries remember only 60 percent of what they are told. Why? Answer: The case isn't about them. No matter how hard they try, people have trouble paying attention to presentations that aren't about them. Moral: Talk to the self-interest of your audience at all times." (p. - 74)

"Here in Washington, members of the House of Representatives enjoy a privilege that is denied to all of us and envied by most of us.

'When a member makes a speech on the house [sic] floor, stenographers take down every word--type it up--then it's printed in the daily Congressional Record.

'That is, printed after the member has gone over it, corrected it himself, changed his errors, resolved its bad grammar, and taken out everything that--for some political reason--he wishes he had not said.

'Receives of the Record get a version of what was said--corrected, purified, pasturized--and usually fairly dull and often pumped up by 25 to 30 percent.'" (p. - 87)

"Nervousness occurs when you are deeply concerned about yourself. Nervousness is very selfish. You're afraid you'll be boring. You're just plain afraid…mostly for yourself. How about being deeply concerned about the audience's problems that you have been asked to address? How about being deeply fearful for their welfare?

The sooner you transfer the deep concern you feel for yourself to the deep concern you should feel for your audience, the sooner you'll be over your nervousness. " (p. - 92) Issues Addressed by the Book: The book address the problem that meetings, speeches, presentations and other oral communications are too long because 1.) they are not well thought out and planned, 2.) they lack a focused strategy and a narrow focus and 3.) they will not be remembered or acted upon because the audience was lost, bored, or not paying attention. This waste of time, talent, productivity and opportunity costs billions in productivity and outcome payoffs each year.

The author is revolted by this state of affairs, and suggests that a "Say it in Six Revolution" is needed to halt the waste. The Book's Shortcomings: This book doesn't have any shortcomings because it focuses upon speech making. However, the book could also address what speakers have to do when they need to fill larger time slots with other kinds of communication, such as lectures, training sessions and presentations.

The author could also have focused a bit more on the skills required to color and spin the message with language that the audience understands, identifies with and uses. Comments: Teachers should take the Say it in Six message to heart. Not only should teachers clip, crop and curtail the amount of words that they spew to students, but teachers should demonstrate the Say it in Six technique to students, and assist students in improving their communication skills.

The other side of the Say it in Six strategy is to get students to talk. Teachers need to get students to lay ideas out on the table so that those ideas can be examined, not as a coroner examines a cadaver during autopsy; but as a botanist examines newly discovered species of flora deep in the rainforest. Student hinging must be nurtured, cultivated, celebrated and honored.

Therefore, it is OK if students ramble before they can deliver incisive speeches. Consider this to be like baby fat. Cute, cuddly, but later giving way to sleek, buff rock-solid muscle. Summary: Here are the steps for the Say it in Six Structure Get to the point. State the "Burning Issue." No burning issue, no need to talk

Brief overview: Short background summary

How the background leads to the main idea…

How the idea will pay off, create a benefit

What we need to do now. A "call to Action" required from the listener Just remember to apply and synthesize these steps with analysis and evaluation.

We want to avoid converting a learning aid structure into a maze or prison that boxes us in. Remember what havoc we wrought on students ability to write when we taught a generation how to write by "formula?" The "formula" created lots of

lockstep student output, devoid of interest, personality, spark, or charm or thought. Use the structure to multiply communication choices, not stifle and limit thinking. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Teacher Survival Strategies

"Don't Smile Before Christmas," Not!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be real!

Be a keeper!

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

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

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

Smile!

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

Professional Self-Development

Trouble with Data: Don't be Fooled by the Numbers Data seems solid, substantial, productive, professional. And, there is so much of it.

Sources of data are everywhere, and teachers are exhorted to use data in making instructional decisions and educated choices. No "true professional" would leave problem-solving and decision-making to intuition, creative serendipity, hunch, or chance when they could engage the superior qualities of their mind in goal-directed, data-driven executive-like skills.

But, there are leaks in the dike that solid data is supposed to provide, and the legs of the data step-stool are a bit wobbly; the underpinnings of data could crumble or collapse at any time.

Data would seem to fit "hand and glove" with the Science of Teaching; but, instead of a mortise and talon relationship, data and teaching are often "strange bedfellows." Problems with Data What are the problems with data if data is so scientific and professional? Data accumulates fast. It floods our minds and requires time and resources to collect and manage

So much of the data that we collect is raw, uninterrupted. By itself, data is without meaning

Data take time to collect, and even more time to separate, sort, and make sense out of it

Data can be trivial, but can look like it is meaningful. For example, grades and test scores Grades provide "constantly generating" data that has little meaning without the interpretation of the teacher that created them.

For example, does that "D" in English mean that the student

Nearly failed the big test

Was absent too many time and missed a couple of quizzes

Didn't turn in his or her homework. Hint: The dog ate it!

Didn't complete the research report on time and lost 20 points

Just moved from Mexico and doesn't speak English well, yet

Etc. Who know but the teacher? Test scores can also be misleading.

For example, the scores on the high stakes test can all be 71 in one class and 100% of the teacher's students passed.

In another class, the scores can all be 69 and 0% of the students passed. These teachers would look to be miles apart in their success, yet, their scores are statistically "dead-even."

In another test score example, the average classroom scores for one teacher are 4.7, exactly at grade level. However, another teacher has a class average of 4.8. When these scores are reported to the local newspaper and published by teacher name, community members come to believe that the second teacher with a "0.1" higher class average is a better teacher. But, nothing of the sort. These scores also indicate a "dead heat."

A Little Data is a Dangerous Thing Limited understanding of the conditions and environment where data were collected, and meager control upon how the data were collected can result in unwarranted assumptions. Here are some pitfalls: Comparing "square pegs" with "round pegs"

Comparing unstructured data to structured data

Comparing data related to "fuzzy" categories

Comparing data where subjects reside in multiple categories

Comparing minor differences because the numbers

Finding "false positives" and rejecting "false negatives"

Bogging down in data collecting and getting sloppy in data acquisition because it is too much work

Becoming stressed and overwhelmed by too much data, i.e., information overload

Collecting data without a clear plan for how that data will be used

Creating reports and presentations based on correct data but false assumptions

Missing the intervening variable

Identifying the wrong independent variable (The one you can change)

Measuring the effect of items that are beyond your control

Etc. ad infinitum "Grain of Salt" Data Management Plan The "Grain of Salt" Data Management Plan can also be called the "Information Overload Survival Plan."

Here are the rules to follow:

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Professional Self- Development at 02:00

Open Source for Education

How the Free Camtasia Offer (and Other Commercial Software) Demonstrates the Problem with Adopting Open Source Software in School Districts Everyone says that schools should save money, perform magic and operate within their budgets. And, software licensing is an easy target for this "fantasy script" since few people outside the district's IT Department understand Software Licensing requirements

The huge discounts that schools already receive on commercial software

The huge challenge presented in rolling out even "free" software

The minor cost (percentage) that educational software adds to the total cost of computer network operation

The reason that school districts can't let teachers and students install software (district licensed software, teacher or student owned software, Open Source software, Freeware, Shareware, Trial Software)

The file storage problem if every teacher and student could create their own videos The Camtasia Free Offer The Classroom Toolkit article, Free Camtasia Studio: Create your Own Desktop Videos provides links to a great offer from TechSmith, the developers of Camtasia Studio. Camtasia Studio is the premier desktop video creation program for Microsoft Windows personal computers (PCs).

Link to the Free Camtasia Studio: Create your Own Desktop Videos article Since Most school districts run computers using the Windows Xp operating system

Video is marvelous for building multimedia instructional aids, demonstrations, presentations and learning center activities

Teachers could use the same program at home to create instructional videos without cost to the district

The Camtasia Studio program could run on district and home Apple Mac computers that use the Parallels application software

you would think that grabbing a copy for each computer in the district would be a "no brainer."

But, not only is grabbing hundreds of "free" copies of Camtasia for your school district a bum idea, but, such a scheme is unworkable. An Offer Gone Viral TechSmith intended for this Camtasia Studio license offer to be available on a United Kingdom magazine CD, but the offer leaked to the Internet and Blogs, E-mail and Newsletters spread the word about the outstanding opportunity to obtain a previous version without cost, and to upgrade at an outstanding price, i.e., \$149.00 USD.

So, what's stopping every teacher in the US from downloading, installing and using Camtasia Studio Version 3.0.1 for as long as they use Windows Xp? Answer: Nothing!

What's stopping school districts from doing the same thing with every computer that they have? Answer Practical Logistics

High Cost

Staffing

Inability to Upgrade Effectively

Exponential Increases in District Network Storage Requirements

Exponential Increases in District Internet Bandwidth Usage In short, the problems with using a "free" version of Camtasia Studio parallel the problems with using lots of Open Source products in our schools.

Sidebar Of course, this problem pales in significance to the real problems with Open Source software in particular, and Technology Integration in General, i.e., The lack of 1.) a specific connections between technology Software applications and Measurable Student Learning, and 2.) the lack of Educational Intelligence that supports the investment of time, money and personnel resources for these strategies. Note: The lack of Educational Intelligence is the subject of our Open Source for Education section for our upcoming (December, 2007) Classroom Toolkit Newsletter.

What are these problems? What makes this scheme to use a world-class product without cost so unworkable?

First, the license keys that TechSmith provides are individual, rather than Volume License keys. Sidebar License issues are complex and beyond the scope of his article. Here are some references

Software Licensing Glossary from CDW

Software Licensing: Protecting Your Organization From Lawsuits

Camtasia Studio Licensing Prices

What this means is that instead of using a "generic license" that covers multiple computers, i.e., a "volume license," each licence key would have to be tracked individually. Even worse, if the product were to be upgraded, each individual license key would have to be supplied, by hand, at the computer keyboard (instead of remotely or automatically).

This presents several huge problems: License numbers would have to be tracked by computer and computer location Computers could not be "imaged," i.e., cloned in a fully operational state. (The problem is that every cloned computer would have software installed with the same license number), a violation of the licensing agreement

The software would have to be installed without the licensing number, and the licensing number would have to be entered by hand Open Source advocates might claim that the lack of license numbers is a benefit for Open Source software. Well, it might be, except that the Open Source software applications seldom have automatic update and

automatic patch (bug fixes) online. So, when software must be repaired the software must be handled, one computer at a time for Open Source environments, too. Sidebar There is one exception to this Open Source scenario, i.e., Novel's Enterprise Solutions.

Novel is the one Open Source system that scales to complex network needs, has all the components that a modern, robust school district network requires, is compliant with the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF), works moderately well with Microsoft's Windows, and has third-party support.

More on the Novel's solution later. Time is Money and Other Platitudes Managing a computer network with lots of computers is different than handing one computer at home. This is the same issue of scale as cooking lunch at home for four people compared to cooking lunch for a campus of 400 people.

Here is the math for what I call the "Five Minute Fix."

What you notice is that 1.) a "five minute fix," with 2.) five minute travel time between computers (for example room to room). and 3.) an average of 7 minutes start up (i.e., waiting for system to boot time, etc.) for 800 computers takes six weeks of full time technical support.

This means that...Computers must be kept as similar as possible

Maintenance and support must be automated

Lots more technicians need to be employed than most school districts actually hire

Small service requests are not trivial when dealing with large numbers of computers

The cost of a "free" update involving "five minutes" is the amount of wages paid to the technician that is performing the work for six weeks.

Service Level Agreements (Maintenance agreements that all districts should have to guarantee computer uptime) is very expensive The only realistic way for school district IT Departments to approach adding software to network computers is by cloning fully operational, fully tested, almost fully identical computer systems.

Sidebar And what about the Novel's Open Source Solution?

The Novel's Enterprise Solution is the only Open Source solution that is robust enough, scales to networks of the size that school districts need, and supports compatibility (and interoperability) with the Microsoft's server and desktop infrastructure.

In addition, the Novel's Enterprise Solution is Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) compliant, the only Open Source product that meets this standard.

So, what is the problem with this Open Source solution that the "free and no-cost" Open Source proponents fail to tell school district decision-makers. Answer: Novel's Enterprise Solutions are not free. While Novel's Enterprise Solutions may cost about half of what the Microsoft's Solution costs. The software is not free. In addition, the cost of network hardware and infrastructure, technical staff and technical support are equivalent to the costs of Microsoft's Solution (maybe higher, even a lot higher in rural areas where Novel's expertise is not readily available. And, service level agreements are also costly.

Here is what service agreements cost for servers at CDW-G, a price leader in providing hardware, software and support to school districts. Cost of technical support for Novel's

Here is what service and support cost direct from Novel's

Novel's Server Costs So, what if we install the software and don't purchase the service level support that is needed? Well, if network downtime, lost data, unhappy, grumbling students and staff and negative community reaction to the effectiveness of their investment in school district technology are important; then failing to provide service level support and relying on a "cobbled-together" conglomeration of free software is a quantum level more expensive. The Rest of the Story The cost of installing, managing and maintaining a computer network is so expensive that software costs represent a small fraction of total costs. Here are some costs: Computers

Servers

Wiring

Maintenance Contracts

Network Switches and Routers

Technicians, Network Administrators, Database Administrators, Server Administrators

Leased Lines (such as T1 lines, T3/DS3 lines, OC3 lines, etc.)

Internet Access

Staff Development Open Source advocates will argue that "With all these costs, why not save as much money as possible on software licensing?"

The answer is that "With so much money, time and staff invested in a computer network, wouldn't the investment be protected better by using tested, supported, maintained and upgraded software?"

One analogy might be the wisdom of purchasing an expensive new car, and running that car with balding tires. Sidebar The cost of hiring competent IT Staff is high for any platform, including Open Source professionals. Here are some recent average salaries, i.e., 2006.

These average salaries mean: School districts don't hire the technical help that they really need

The "Back End" programming and operations management that teachers and students need doesn't get done in most

school districts

Another Practical Whammy of Free Camtasia; Studio for Every Computer Imagine if every teacher and every student had the ability to create desktop video and store their creations. Disk storage is "cheap" now days, but video file sizes are large.

Would school districts have the funds to hire staff to manage student accounts, build individual accounts and "home directories" for students to store and retrieve their video creations, and provide a method that teachers could access (and grade) the work of their students?

Sidebar If the goal of our schools is student learning, and if multimedia presentations (such as student-created video) are learning tools; then the work that students create is "mission critical." Anything that is "mission critical" needs to be funded, stored, protected and retrieved on demand.

But, school districts seldom honor student work at a mission critical level because doing so is too expensive.

Making the decision to support students' academic files (including desktop video) is not an issue solved by free and no-cost licenses. Honoring and preserving student creations involves large expenditures in network upgrades, huge expenditures in technical personal, and humongous expenditures in hardware. The cost of software licenses is trivial compared to the total cost of protecting student work by a storage and retrieval infrastructure.

In the words of the season from the "free-software-wise-pound-foolish penny pinchers," "Mission critical student creations and demonstrations of learning, knowledge sharing infrastructure; Bah, Humbug! Another Great Software that Can't Work in our Schools Nuance; makes another software product that, like no-cost license Open Source, "won't fly" in our schools. The product is Dragon Naturally Speaking; This software allows computer users to speak into a microphone that is attached to the computer, or to import speech from a handheld device. The software then, in theory, converts this speech to text.

Imagine if you could type as fast as you can talk. That is the marketing promise.

But, wait! What's the catch.

For one thing, the software needs to be "trained." (Although the newest version of this software is supposed to not need training.) But there is still a catch, the software learns the individual speech of its user.

So, would the district need a separate Dragon Naturally Speaking; license for every student, a network log in and network storage for every student to store their sound profiles and text files, and the ability to access these files from every computer on campus.

Sidebar What would happen if students needed to sit at exactly the same computer in the library or lab, and another student was using that computer? Loss of productive learning time; What would happen in a 22-student classroom if every student had to use the same computer to use the Dragon Naturally Speaking software? Logistical conflict for the teacher; Besides, the microphones that work with this program are sensitive (and fragile). And, what happens in a lab (or the in a classroom when other students are studying, focusing) and one student is reciting with a loud voice into the microphone? Bedlam; Multiple students in a lab would have other students recitations entering the microphone that they were using. Resulting in garble in, garbage out. How productive is that? The idea is great, but the logistics and management prove unworkable.

The net result: Only Special Education students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that requires speech to text software will get the attention and unique treatment that is required (at increased district expense) to use this software. Dragon Naturally Speaking; great idea, wrong venue. Issues that IT Department staff understand. The same types of issues that plague the unfettered use of license-free Open Source software, too.

In the case of speech to text, the school district would find it more cost effective to hire a pool of stenographers and typists for students than to implement a large-scale project using a scheme like Dragon Naturally Speaking;

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 01:00

Monday, November 26, 2007

Teacher Resources

Free Camtasia Studio: Create your Own Desktop Videos

Desktop video is one area where existing Open Source software doesn't measure up to the commercial version. And, the "king" of commercial video creation software is Camtasia Studio. Sidebar Camtasia Studio is also much better than Microsoft's free Movie Maker software that is a free download for Windows Xp. Link to the Microsoft Movie Maker Download Page

Now, teachers can receive a fully functional (previous version, Version 3.1.3) of Camtasia Studio for free! There is no telling how long TechSmith, the makers of Camtasia Studio, will keep this offer online, so act fast. Sidebar Note: Classroom Toolkit is taking the unusual step of publishing this article early so that our readers can take advantage of this TechSmith offer. Our online strategy is to publish articles that are organized in a magazine-type collection once a month. However, this offer is too good for teachers to wait. TechSmith may pull this offer before the end of the month. We will also publish an article related to this free Camtasia offer in our Open Source for Education, section of the Classroom Toolkit 11-30-07 newsletter. This article explores the reason that your school district's IT Department can't take advantage of this free Camtasia offer and the reason that free Open Source software "seldom flies" in a school district network environment, either. Previous Camtasia Version: No Problem Even though this free version is an older version of the software, it is still superior to any available Open Source desktop video product.

Of course, TechSmith would like you to upgrade to the current version, Camtasia 5.0. And, TechSmith is offering an upgrade to this trial version for half-price, \$149.00 USD. Action Steps Here are the steps that you need to take to grab this offer and

1. Download Camtasia Trial Version

Download the 30-day trial to Camtasia v. 3.1.3

2. Install the Trial software on the computer of your choice

3. Request the Registration that will allow the software to "run forever," i.e., turn the trial version into a full version

Obtain a Registration Key (Note: You have to provide an E-mail address.)

4. Visit TechSmith's Educational Resources Page

5. Create your instructional videos
Fantastic Offer: The software license key that TechSmith sends you turns the evaluation copy that you download for free into a fully licensed version.

At the same time, TechSmith offers you a chance to upgrade the license for a the newest version at 50% off the new version (Camtasia Suite 5.0).

Upgrade Link: \$149.00 USD

(Note: This upgrade price beats the "Education Version pricing," and provides the full commercial license to this product.

Education Price: \$179.00 USD.) System Requirements It is applications such as Camtasia Studio that keep Apple and Linux from making headway in their competition with the Windows operating system. Of course, Apple provides its own free Audio and Video software, but Apple computers cost more.

Sidebar Contrary to what Apple and Linux supporters tell themselves, and would like to believe; i.e., that the education market drives the computer software industry; business and home users are really the engines of computer operating system marketing. Apple needs to provide better business applications at a lower price point, and Linux needs to be easier to use and needs to run Windows applications in a seamless way. Note: Apple computers run an application called Parallels, that does an outstanding job of running Windows applications on the Mac.

Of course, Apple computers are superior for desktop video and movie production. However, one application for Camtasia videos is to capture Windows desktop images to demonstrate how technology can be integrated into your curriculum. If your school district provides Apple computers for teacher and student use, then you don't need Camtasia Studio. Microsoft Windows XP or

Windows Vista

Microsoft DirectX 9 or later version

1.0 GHz processor minimum ~ Recommended: 2.5 GHz (for PowerPoint and camera recordings.)

500 MB RAM minimum ~ Recommended: 1.0 GB

60 MB of hard-disk space for program installation

Optional: Camtasia Studio Add-in for Power Point requires PowerPoint 2000, 2002, 2003, or 2007

Optional: Production to the Apple iPod format requires Apple QuickTime 7.1 or later

Optional: Windows-compatible sound card, microphone and speakers (recommended)

Optional: Camera video recording requires a USB Camera. Digital video (DV) cameras are not supported. USB Web camera

Benefits of Camtasia (Either Version)

- Simplifies video for distance learning
- Improves online content creation. You can post these videos on a Website or burn them to CD/ DVDs
- Enhances classroom presentations. You can create video handouts and take home multimedia lessons
- Strengthens teacher training. Workshop and Training program Follow-up procedures can be posted for online viewing or downloading
- Great for technology integration
- Super for Computer Lab demonstrations and student self-help FAQs
- Wonderful for student learning centers

Features of the Latest Version

Unless your Classroom is "High Tech" (or you are a Curriculum Specialist, Trainer or Webmaster); you won't need these latest features.

And, although there is a learning curve, it is not as steep as with many other high-end software products. (TechSmith; also provides Camtasia; video tutorials to get you "up and running" quickly.

Sidebar

Link to the TechSmith; Learning Center

Camtasia; Studio publishes videos and MP3 files for portable media players - even the iPod. It enables you to share videos with anyone, even with the use of Flash

You achieve this miracle by being able to record anything on your computer monitor screen, including narrated PowerPoint; slides and web cam video. Then, you can even edit multiple audio tracks, reduce background noise and equalize volume on these tracks.

The new version has a the ability to "AutoZoom" to investigate sections of the screen in greater detail; great for demonstrations.

There is also the ability to create interactive videos that can contain surveys and quizzes. The interactive videos can also contain "hot spots" that launch programs and Websites.

Work During the Holidays?

Creating instruct videos might be a "fun" way to spend your Winter Solstice Break (Note: Politically correct phrase for those or you who work in a school district that has outlawed the use of the term "Christmas.")

Of course, district administrators haven't figured out that celebrating a Winter Solstice (while deprecating Christmas, Hanukah, Ramadan and Kwanza), honors a Druid and Wicca (Witchcraft) religious celebration.

Perhaps, in the current politically correct climate, "Freedom of Religion" means the freedom to practice nothing unless that practice is conducted "underground."

Note of the Note: These comments are a way that you can tell that this newsletter article is not an ad for Techsmith; but a helpful message for teachers. Advertisers would never risk alienating anyone by their insightful comments, and always keep their hype inane. Here, at Classroom Toolkit, we "Tell it like it is."

And anyone that doesn't take advantage of this TechSmith; offer because of our comments loses out. So, take advantage of this offer from TechSmith; no matter what you think of our views.)

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