

Saturday, May 31, 2008

Site Progress

End of School Year 2007-08 Celebration: Change of Focus

School Year 2007-08 is closing, some localities have already finished the year. Summer classes for teachers are gearing up, or have already launched.

The Classroom Toolkit Newsletter has evolved from a text only, update (October 2005) our current, Blog-driven Newspaper format. Classroom Toolkit explored the world of teaching in the chaotic and bureaucratic maze of modern school district operations and management; and told teachers, "You are not the cause of the craziness or the cause of the stress you experience in your professional lives. It's the system that you work in…and the political system that the system that you work in labors under. Classroom Toolkit has taken on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and exposed this piece of politician treachery for what is is, i.e., a scheme to make public schools (and the teachers who teach in the) look incompetent…so that government money can be used to fund church schools. The Classroom Toolkit Newsletter has also taken on the myth of "Technology Integration" and we set the record straight. Classroom Toolkit revealed, "What needs to be done," "What was not done" and "Why what needs to be done won't ever be done." But, with the publication of our Feature Article, "Newbie Teacher Bailout: Stopping the School District Talent Leak" we finished this set of exposes and we complete our "how-to-fix" series. Classroom Toolkit is moving on. Evolution (not the Anti-Science - Seven-Days of Creation Debate / Debacle) Classroom Toolkit Newsletter launched "Professional Self-Development" and "Teacher Survival Strategies" departments, with the intention of migrating to a new focus. Our plan to drop the "Open Source for Education" Department was met with several request that we continue those articles. We did. Now, this issue of Classroom Toolkit marks its final resting place.

Where Classroom Toolkit is Going Classroom Toolkit announced a move toward a Counseling and Inter / Intrapersonal focus instead of a Technology focus several months ago. This includes a focus upon Neuro-Linguistic Programming Applications in Teaching and Learning, the Use of Suggestion, StoryTelling (Especially the Mutual Storytelling Technique, the Total Physical Response (TPR) and the Total Physical Response Storytelling Technique (TPRS). The new focus also includes explorations of the internal self-improvement landscape: Personal Goals and Insights from the Perspective of Personal Talents and Skills

Creativity and Idea Incubating

Creative Imagination, Imagery and Visualization for Skill and Outcome Development

Rapid Revision of Emotions and Memories with Imagery and Self-Awareness

Intuition, Dreams and

Habit Development and Training Automatic (Unconscious) Skills

Concentration, Meditation and Self-Awareness

Integration of Rapport and Genuine Interpersonal Relationships with Students

Etc.

One person cannot maintain the old focus on political and bureaucratic system chaos and the snail-paced, technology integration glacier. One person cannot do both. Our Rationale for Change Classroom Toolkit is rolling out these because only a minority of teachers are interested in Technology Integration…deep down, really, heart-in-it interested. But, in the current climate, teachers who fear for their jobs feel obligated to say that they support the Technology Integration in their classrooms. Of course, in most school districts, the lack of sufficient technology access for every student, limited network infrastructure bandwidth and unified network resources (such as online student portfolios), skimpy IT support staff and minimal support services limit technology integration anyway. School district IT Departments (and the hardware, software, infrastructure, training and professional development) are so under under staffed, under purchased, un-refreshed, under used and over taxed that any teacher that wishes can skate by without bothering to use the technology. Besides, the upcoming budget-crunch climate appears to be heading toward further restriction on school district IT Spending…particularly in light of the fact that few documented studies have discovered a connection between technology-mediated instruction and observable, measurable student curricular outcomes. Classroom Toolkit identified what has to happen before the technology use potential can become a reality and usable by teachers and students as a tool for learning. Hint: Plan, spend incredibly huge sums of money on back-end programming, systems, and professional develop, trainers, huge increases in IT Staff and employment of high-priced database and network tools programmers. In the words of the immortal bard, William Shakeup Bureaucracy, "It ain't gonna happen!" Prepare Yourself So, get prepared for the Classroom Toolkit move to the internal landscape of teachers…inside the psyche, soul and psychology of self-improvement, dreams and personal fulfillment…get set to become all that you can become.

Teaching is the most fabulous calling for folks that love children and who care for all the people in our society. Since the external system is not going to change for the better and create conditions that incubate the great potential of each of our students, teachers have to take on the job. Of course, teachers must exercise caution and share the good and best

of themselves under the radar, because bureaucracy abhors talent and enlightened success. But, the evolved Classroom Toolkit will set the stage for the underground, under-the-radar skills of personal accomplishment and student motivation. How can Classroom Toolkit make this Move? The move to professional development based upon psychological and spiritual strategies and the capacities innate in our minds and souls can only be approached by a newsletter that is independent and un beholden to our school districts and our bureaucracy. Classroom Toolkit is such an organization. But teachers who work in our public schools must act in an undercover manner. Overt personal ideals and the display of spiritual values "enjoys" a strange and odd existence… teachers are valued for calling dedication and personal achievement "professional development, but "tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail" (excuse the antiquated cliché) if they attribute any of their behaviors to personal or spiritual ideals. Classroom Toolkit has established independence… from the time that we decided that we would "Tell it like it is," and for go any chance of working for school districts on lucrative consulting and grant writing projects. There was no one on the landscape that was confronting the issues of bureaucratic bumbling, teacher stress and the need for real educational funding (instead of the pretend funding that we now "enjoy." But in evolving , Classroom Toolkit will explore an area that no one is traveling. So, join us. But, if you do not like the path that Classroom Toolkit is taking, there is a "one-click, unsubscribe link at the bottom of every newsletter. We hope that you decide to stay with us. The journey is worth the learning. Your students are worth the self-improvement that you will make as you complete your journey to personal self-discovery. And you are worth the time and effort that you will need to invest. We hope that you decide to continue on this journey with us. Special Bonus Link: Here is the kind of material that you can expect with Classroom Toolkit's new focus Millionaire Mindset eBook (248 pages) Millionaire Mindset Workbook

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Site Progress at 11:00

News Nuggets

Miami: Now a Majority Spanish-Speaking City

It's official. Miami is a majority Spanish-speaking city. And, this does not mean that like San Antonio, Los Angeles or Tucson that the majority population is of Hispanic origin. This means that the majority of the city's population speaks Spanish. This also means that folks that don't speak Spanish find job hunting to be difficult… and the job quest is becoming more problematic. Imagine the disadvantage of speaking only English and not being able to find a job because your language skills were deficient. Of course, this is the same kind of challenge that Spanish speakers face throughout the rest of the US. But Miami is not a hot bed of poor folks who got there by swimming the Brave River of risking dehydration in the desert. Miami is a cosmopolitan city, with high property values (fueled by a recent, unregulated, property speculation craze) and vibrant economic growth. And, Miami does not have a majority Cuban population anymore. The immigrant hurricane floods Miami with folks from Argentina, Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Central America.

So, what drew these folks to Miami… a vibrant business climate, an attractive social life, and ease of assimilation. Because immigrants speak the language of commerce, trade, entertainment and daily communication (Spanish); Miami is a natural haven in the US. But these are the same market forces that are driving English-speaking people out of Miami as if a leaf-blower was cleaning the city. So, speak only English and apply for a teaching job in Miami. Or try to get a job as a school nurse, counselor, teacher aide, custodian or food service worker. When the majority language changes, even little details change. For example, imagine… Students in the Bilingual classes will be native English speakers Assemblies will be conducted in Spanish with English translation for only a few crucial parts Spanish textbooks will be of high quality, and the English textbooks for the Bilingual class will be substandard School districts will siphon off Federal Bilingual money and use it for the Spanish-speaking majority, giving English-speaking students short-shrift

Cafeteria menus will reflect the ethnic food items that Spanish students prefer

School bus drivers must be able to speak Spanish in order to give orders to students

Coaches will need to upgrade their skills to learn to coach fútbol (i.e., soccer) to replace American-style football

Parent-Teacher conferences will require translators to be brought in so that Spanish-speaking teaches can communicate with parents that speak only English

So, begin studying Spanish now. The pattern of growth that Miami experiences may be coming to a city near you, even your city. ¡Buena Suerte! (Good luck!) References: In Miami, Spanish is becoming the primary language

Miami: the Capital of Latin America

English-only speakers disappearing from Miami-Dade

Repeal Is Likely for 'English Only' Policy in Miami

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

Short Article

Want to Keep your Job? Apply Business Rules and become "Fire-Proof" Perhaps you like your teaching job and you

would like to keep it. Even in times of political uncertainty, budget chopping and test-driven neurosis; teaching is the greatest profession on Earth. Despite the "objective teacher evaluation process" to the contrary, it is still the campus administrator and peer group (cliques, in crowd) perception of you that counts toward your keeping the job. Sidebar Despite protestation to the contrary, it is still the teacher's perception of each student that determines each student's academic success. So, why not employ strategies from the business world to keep yourself employed? Positive First Impressions through the Entire Year While you have 20 to 30 seconds to project a positive impression, you can scuttle that impression in one tenth of that time interval. Destroying your positive reputation takes only the blink of an eye. It is your task to protect your image. But barring any snafus or gross miscues, your job is to distinguish yourself in the eyes of your boss. (This is much like the corporate world.) Rules of "Fire Retardation" It would be fantasy to believe that the rule of "academic freedom" protects teachers. This might be slightly true in prestigious colleges and universities, but is mythical in public education. In public education, the rules of bureaucratic survival are in play. So, here are the rules that should keep you employed. (Go as far with these as your values and ideals will allow.) 1.) Come in Rarely, Stay Late (or both) At least arrive with time to spare. Late, or last-minute rushing to beat your students to the door are distractions to the positive image that you are careful to build. And, arrive to class with time to spare after lunch. Make sure that you don't strand a bunch of students, especially Middle School or High School "cut-up-clowns and socially-challenged-misfits" outside the locked door of your classroom when class is scheduled to begin. (Leaving the door open so they can carry on inside the room generated even worse consequences. Miscues like these will be duly noted by your supervisor. 2.) Accept Challenges Avoid the, "That's not what they pay me to do" syndrome. Instead, "step up to the plate, go down swinging if you have to, but give the challenge your best effort." 3.) Keep Cool Don't wear normal or typical classroom stress on your sleeve (or on your face). When stress climbs to extraordinary heights; find safe, rapid and effective outlets. 4.) Complete Deadline-Tasks Ahead of Time Turn in everything that you are required to turn in ahead of time (preferable), or on time (minimum requirement). But, be sure to get a receipt if you turn in a item early. Principals' secretaries and department-chair type folks are known to loose just about everything; then they blame the folks at the bottom of the chain of command. Sidebar Yes, campus secretaries outrank teachers on the de facto (what really counts) chain of command. 5.) Befriend High-Ranking Secretaries Some secretaries can "turn the screws" and make your campus life miserable. Others can act as a "power-of-authority stand in" for the campus administrator. But no matter what their level of reach and influence, "Don't cross them!" Besides, it's easier for a campus to replace a Math, Science or Special Education teacher than to replace a masterful secretary. (Secretaries hold substantial, irreplaceable institutional knowledge.) This institutional knowledge, plus the tendency of campus principals to "back up" their secretaries, adds to the secretary's power and influence; making them formidable foes. Sidebar Just as teachers should avoid "power struggles" with students because teachers cannot win, your chances of winning in a power struggle with a secretary are "slim to none." 6.) Keep Current - Keep Alert. Know what is going on on campus, and steer clear of trouble spots. Steer clear of controversy, and avoid creating complaints. School districts, like most bureaucracies, are "complaint adverse."

Do what it takes to resolve complaints, and keep complaints from being flagged by your supervisor as "warning signs" of your unsuitably and unfitness for duty. 7.) Get the Job Done, and Don't Complain about the Obstacles There are always obstacles. Glitches abound. Work with a plan, and have a backup plan. Remain cheerful. Use the energy that whining and complaining wastes to bolster your success. Expect positive outcomes. If the challenge really is "impossible," give it your all, anyway. 8.) Keep Improving your Skills Avoid the "I am an expert, and there is nothing that I need to learn" rut. Listen to your peers. Offer personal support and advice; not the self-serving "put-downs that "know-it-all" folks communicate with every "helpful" remark.

Help your colleagues, but don't expect help back. Just share your best. 9.) Keep Secrets Keep all confidential information confidential. Period! 10. Communicate Major Ideas in "Simple Terms" Learn to say it in six sentences, and be decisive. Provide just the amount of information that your supervisors can grasp. (Imagine that they have a palm the size of a three-year-old, with matching coordination and mental agility. This will help you communicate with your supervisors.) 11.) Keep Energetic. Keep a Positive Attitude Remain optimistic. Focus on "can-do." Share a positive outlook and a positive attitude. Be the person that other people are glad to be around. Summary

Follow these rules of business success and you will "fire-proof" your teaching job.

Come to think of it, these business rules for success are really a formula for success in life in general. Integrate these strategies into your skill behavior and habit patterns. These strategies will increase your on-the-job worth wherever you work.

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

Feature Article

Newbie Teacher Bailout: Stopping the School District Talent Leak

As school winds down, many teachers contemplate; consider, anguish about, worry over; changing jobs or "jumping ship" from the teaching profession. For many teachers, this represents the culmination of a stressful year of challenges. For teachers in their first five years of classroom work, this is "par for the course." But, what kind of "course" are new teachers playing? Maybe well manicured fairways; level, slick greens; or; woods, roughs, sand

traps, water hazards…or, if conditions are really "bad……coyotes in the woods, roughs designed by Mr. Magoo, sand traps "hopping with fleas" and water hazards slithering with alligators. Teachers leaving the profession in droves are on par with our epidemic student-leaving (dropout) problem. Of course, bureaucratic, one-program solutions miss the fact that school teacher leaving is not a "single problem requiring a one-trick, slight-of-hand solution." Some teachers leave the profession because…

They are inadequate teachers, and efforts to upgrade their skills for three or four years failed to bring their skill set to an acceptable level of performance. (This is a slim number, and these folks are "statistical outliers." Our job here is to discover the reason that these folks entered the teaching profession in the first place.

The teachers' spouse was relocated on their job. This is a "forced move, and no solution is possible.

The teacher took a better paying job in another school district, or the teacher took a job with a school district closer to home. (As gasoline prices skyrocket, this motivation for job relocation will continue to rise and finding employment closer to home becomes imperative.) Again, no solution unless the school district builds gasoline subsidies into its pay scale.

Teachers have families and children. A female teacher staying home to raise their children, or to home school their children because the local public schools are inadequate is a rarity. Teachers cannot afford the luxury of a one-earner household because their meager beginning salary fails to provide a financial safety net. The most likely scenario for this issue is the male teacher that must secure better pay to afford the expenses of medical care and the daily upkeep of the children. The possibility of a solution here, with the current bureaucratic mentality that manages our school districts: near zero

Teachers leave because the urban, inner-city school district is mismanaged, corrupt, inept incongruent or grotesque.

This problem cannot be resolved because the management system is in disrepair or collapse, and it will take years of solid leadership to shape up the mess

Teachers leave because the campus principal is so inept, incompetent or emotionally ill that campus morale bottoms out. Or, the principal overstresses on test scores and mounts a campus purge to rid the campus of "low-performing teachers that contribute to minimal campus productivity."

Or, the campus administrator is so dictatorial-authoritarian, flimsy-willed laissez faire, or "politically correct-democratic" that no one supports campus teachers. School system bureaucrats seldom figure out that many of the "teacher problems" that they believe they are addressing are actually symptoms of campus or district administrator ineptitude. Of course, this misfeasance is difficult to discover because campus principals "talk-the-talk"; and campus staff in the know; i.e., teachers, are afraid to talk. Campus principals "butter the political bread" where it counts, i.e., to further their careers. Teacher retention plans seldom identify the principal as the underlying cause of a "teacher-out-migration." And, "chain-of-command pampering& tends to support "upper-lings" (principals and executive staff) in favor of the "underlings" (teachers). The chance of a bureaucratic solution to the administrative causes of the teacher-leaving problem: Slim to less-than-slim

Teachers leave because the campus administrators change. And the change of administrators brings in "new blood," brings in new ideas that include new implementation directives and new cliques. Change-resistant teachers (that don't fit in), bail out. The chance that a bureaucratic solution to resolve this teacher-leaving issue: Slim to none

School District Response Some school districts welcome the emigration of teachers because because leaving teachers also abandon local leave and local personal days that are funded by the district. In addition, many school districts encourage teachers to retire, sometimes even offering retirement incentives; so that newbie teachers can be hired as substantial salary savings. (And, half of these Newbies will be gone within three to five years.)

However, ridding the teaching profession of Master Teachers serves no interest of the common good. Inner City Teacher Exodus The teacher exodus from Inner City schools drives the teacher leaving number to the heights that they attain. And, this is a source of national shame.

Unfortunately, the executives and administrators of these districts cannot solve the problem because they cannot see that "they are the problem." Who wants to teach in a "low-performing" school? Who comes to such a school with a satchel of enthusiasm and idealism; only to flee, yelping, tail between their legs? The surest way to ensure that 90% of new teachers leave the teaching profession is to place them in a "no-can-do, no-help-for-you" school. These schools that accelerate the profession abandonment rate require a solution that "money cannot buy." The lack of adequate funding may be a problem, but budget shortfalls are not the cause of the instructional and societal catastrophe that these schools perpetuate. Even the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), focuses its efforts on these school districts. Of course, the NCLB motivation is to show that public education is sub-standard so that our government can fund church schools with tax money. But the plight of the students in these schools is only used to bolster the political case that our public schools are "dens of inefficiency, inept management and absent learning." Unfortunately, teachers are blamed for the problems in management and performance of these school districts, and that is the reason that they are "bailing out." Out of one of those districts and into the suburbs, or out of the profession altogether. Why would a teacher want to "tough it out" with students that need the best teachers when they can show better test results with less work, with less stress and with greater safety. The challenge for those inept school districts is to produce better instructional results, get student behavior under control, pay more (super-much more in the way of incentives) for Master Teachers who will be amply rewarded for taking on these classes. Schools also need to turn the management of campus programs over to teachers, then have school administrators reporting to both teaches and the community. Of course, the communities that need this huge infusion of educational resources have deteriorated taxing ability and low property values. So, these are

the districts least able to "do what it takes" to get the instructional job done.

And what does it take? Here are some starters:

Policemen at the doors and Texas "Road House" bouncers in the classrooms, working as Teacher Aides in tranquil moments

Drug-sniffing dogs as mascots stationed at every school entrance way…and periodic, random sweeps of all school facilities at least three times a day

Individual tutoring for every student whose teacher requests one-to-one help

Part-time, during-school and after-school jobs for students in tutoring younger students

Teams of curriculum developers that tailor-make materials for classrooms, groups of students and individual students

Partnerships with local businesses with subsidies for work study students' salaries, so that students earn full professional pay for the quality work that they do

Anything else that works of fits in to local conditions

Of course, the folks who are in charge of these school systems will continue to blame teachers for substandard student performance, but these folks are the ones that should be leaving, not new teachersNo New NewsThe clamor for "doing something" about the teacher-leaving problem is decades old and seldom addressed.As "baby boomer" teachers retire, the problem of finding qualified, remaining-in-the-profession teachers will increase. This is because these Master Teachers are providing the only support that most Newbie teachers receive.SidebarWhen Master Teachers leave, they take more "institutional knowledge" with them than Newbie teachers do.When both Master Teachers and Newbie Teachers leave, the school is left "dead in the water" for three to five years.Of course, bringing these Master Teachers back as part-time "teacher support consultants" at lucrative salaries and full benefits (that don't diminish retirement checks) is an obvious, but expensive option.Otherwise, schools will be flooded with a larger crop of Newbie teachers that bail out in three to five years.This will further fuel the mistaken perception that there is a "teacher shortage."SidebarActually, the number of certified teachers in the workforce exceeds the number of teacher job vacancies at any one time.This probably means that certification is an inadequate measure for vetting the folks that enter the teaching profession.This fact leads to the conclusion that the quality of pre-service training is inadequate. But, actually, it is the post-employment support that is inadequate.So, blaming teachers and building strategies to "bring teachers up to snuff" is wrong-headed and off target…even though that seems to be the approach almost every school district with a teacher-leaving problem embarks upon.

These non-functional proposals include…Saving money on teacher support, and spending the money on teacher recruiting and teacher retraining

Miscalculation (and under reporting) teacher turnover costs, including advertising, recruiting, human resources paper work and training

Failing to connect NCLB compliance costs for "low performance" with the teacher-leaving problem

Attributing the teacher-leaving problem to problems inherent in the sub-standard teachers that were hiredA Targeted Teacher Retention StrategyWhat school district need to do instead is provide for teacher empowerment, teacher job security, teacher morale (from being valued, participatory problem-solvers), and from providing whatever help the new teacher needs.Of course, the first step is for the school district to realize that there is a problem. The second step is to realize that the problem lies with the school district executive and management staff, not the new teachers.The third step is to decide to spend money that would be wasted on the teacher-leaving cycle, and become proactive. This means spending the wasted money on teacher support before it is "poured down the rat hole" of advertising, recruitment, paperwork and indoctrination of the replacement teacher.Unfortunately, costs for replacing teachers remain hidden, while the costs associated with retaining teachers (although absent) seem glaring and excessive. Again, wrong-headed thinking by executive and management (bureaucratic) types contributes to this myth that teachers are to blame.Unfortunately too, solutions require funding for support programs that cross campus and departmental jurisdictions. Solutions require creativity, shared problem-solving, shared decision-making, flexible action plans, and test-as-you-make-progress action steps.There are too few school damaged school districts that can turn the corner, and implement a change strategy that will salvage the next crop (cohort, battalion) of teachers. And, teachers approaching this challenge are like foot soldiers charging into a reinforced line of enemy pillboxes. Expect to take casualties.Realizing the Teacher-Leaving is a SymptomWholesale teacher-leaving of the profession is a symptom, not the problem. And this is a symptom of our school systems' stagnation with bureaucracy and with the factory-based Industrial Age school model.Of course, everyone who signs on as a teacher wants to succeed. And these folks know that teaching is one of those occupations that pays back plenty (in non-monetary ways) in personal satisfaction, self-development and positive emotional well being. Teachers can consider themselves blessed by their relationships with students.But, the working environment holds negative "slings and arrows" that fate most new teachers to an early exit from the profession, often blaming themselves for a miserable situation that just wasn't their fault.Sadder and wiser, teachers who jump off the school district "mule train" find themselves looking back at all the potential that never was.Real Support for New TeachersSchool districts are lulled into a false sense of security because, for most teaching jobs (except Math, Science and Special Education), there are more applicants than there are jobs. Of course, many of these applicants are the same folks who are bailing out from one "frying pan district" to take a job in a "what they hope is a greener grass pasture," but is actually a "deep fryer or a roaster." Rather than low pay, it is the lack of teacher support by supervisors and administrators that fails the new teacher.And, the cause of supervisor and management support is, the folks "can't,

won't, don't know how" to fund what is required to help teachers. Sidebar Teaching is often considered a self-funded profession. US teachers spend an estimated \$1 billion USD each year to acquire the resources and materials that the school districts that they work for fail to provide. This is another face of our national teacher-support disgrace. But, how are school districts to offer support that makes a difference in the working lives of teachers? These support programs would require flexibility, the employment of additional tiers of professional support staff, and less administrators. These support programs would require less bureaucratic administrators and supervisors; but many more "action-taking, can-do, no excuse leaders" who accept accountability. Real support also erases departmental lines of jurisdiction. Especially when the problem is the campus administrator. Teachers must feel free (of retribution) to get inept supervisors removed, and removed quickly. However, the current "chain of command" practice of school district executives supporting faulty supervisors in the district's "Administrators' Club" torpedoed teacher support efforts at removing administrative causes of teachers leaving the profession. And outside researchers seldom finger campus administrators as the cause of so many teachers (new teachers and long-time veterans) seeking employment elsewhere. Poor campus administrators sink many teaching careers. The reluctance of researchers to expose the raw nerve of campus pain and discontent (terrible administrators) means that school districts (and the public that funds them) receive less-than-accurate evaluation data about the teacher-leaving issue. This leads to the (traditional, most parroted) misperception that the problem lies with teachers. Sidebar Paradoxes of a just plain bogus issue? There are more trained and certified teachers in the job force outside teaching. Most of the teachers that leave the profession within five years received positive teacher evaluations. What does this mean? Anecdotal evidence, observation and candid discussion with teachers reveals that inept and incompetent campus administrators are a major cause of teachers leaving the profession. Unfortunately, it is safe to predict that teachers will continue to be blamed as the cause of this symptom. Hard-Hitting, "Tell-it-like-it-is" Analysis! It's time for hard-hitting, tell-it-like-it-is analysis to "get to the bottom," or is that "get to the top?" of the teacher-leaving issue. Blaming teachers for the "whole kit and kaboodle" distracts us from examining the real causes of early and mass teacher-leaving (especially during their first three to five years of service). A practical and realistic problem-solving approach might be to …

- Identify new teacher support models
- Identify sources of additional revenue and funding
- Implement these models with enough funding and enough testing to ensure success
- Document the approach and share successes with other school districts

Of course, nothing is more difficult for outsiders to detect than administrator indifference (or sabotage) of an improvement project. What would happen as soon as the model project begins to identify … The need to ramp up huge amounts of additional funding?

The incompetence, misfeasance, or malfeasance of principal and administrators; and a need for personnel changes in those positions?

Past, stupid administrative decisions, edicts, policies and "innovations" and other catastrophes that are currently being covered up?

Under-the-rug sweeping" and "around the lawsuit dancing" in dealing with criminal behaviors of teachers and principals?

New models must reject the traditional belief that pre-service teachers require better career counseling so that they learn that they are not "cut out" to be teachers before entering the rigors of classroom work. (There should not be any "rigors," and if these really exist, teachers should receive lucrative "hazardous duty pay" incentives.) Sidebar! If there is more work than a teacher can perform during a normal eight hour workday, then the management answer is clear, "hire more staff!" No other requirement is reasonable. For example, if paperwork and useless documentation is really required, then hire secretaries that perform that work for teachers. And, make those secretaries accountable to those teachers. For example, teachers hire and fire their own secretaries, without the interference of the campus administration. Another option: Pay teachers overtime pay for any work over eight hours per day/ 40 hours per week. Of course, is the "instant solution" because, if school district administrators had to pay teachers for the "Mickey Mouse" work that they require, hours of non-essential, trivial tasks would disappear instantly from their directives. If anyone can show that data analysis improves instruction in any way, then the district could hire data entry clerks, statisticians and computer programmers to process that data and deliver updated dashboards that indicate precise, high-priority strategies that are identified by the data. But, there are a number of factors that will likely maintain the status quo, and maintain a lack of teacher support. These include: Teaching remains an activity of supervisor and colleague isolation, and a lack of meaningful collaborative opportunities

Joint (dual relationship roles) for supervisors (supervisor, evaluator, coach, confidant) hampers honest communication between supervisors and teachers. (Teachers are reluctant to reveal real issues and shortcomings to the person that will evaluate them.)

The academic and theoretical content of in-service programs relates more to the philosophy of campus administrators than to teachers' real needs. Teachers require specific, rather than theoretical answers. The Streamlined Solution To focus upon the real causes of teacher-leaving, school boards could implement strategies that make top level executives and administrators accountable for the problem (since their actions are a major cause of the problem). Tangible ways to get school district executives and administrators to pay attention to their culpability in the teacher-leaving problem would be to …

- Reduce their pay

- Shorten their contract year

Reduce their rank or position level

Open their personnel evaluation to community observation, rather than the current, behind-closed-doors method of employment action

Summary The cost of recruiting, hiring, and training teachers should be reported to the community along side the actual expenditures for teacher support. This will highlight the fact that "failing to support teachers" actually costs the district more than the absent support would have cost (if support had been provided).

Non School District Teacher-Leaving Issues As gasoline costs skyrocket, more teachers will choose employment that is closer to their home unless

• Four-Day Work Weeks are implemented (Parents and Community Members will object because the cost of child care and babysitting would drive many parents into bankruptcy)

Driving-Distance Stipends are provided for new teacher that cannot afford to commute otherwise

Business as Usual Clearly the "Business as Usual" strategy of letting new teachers flounder is too expensive for our school districts. This is true in the sense that the cost of our students leaving (dropouts) is too costly for our society to bear. Maybe it is time to sound the alarm and address the real issue, i.e., bureaucratic inefficiency, teacher "unimplemented" Industrial Age management models and "Top-Down" Chains of Command. It's time to show our communities the actual cost of teachers leaving the profession, its time to hold school district executives and administrators accountable (because these folks seem to be the major cause of the problem), and its time to own up to the responsibility of funding our schools at a level that compensates our teachers in a far more lucrative way.

Besides providing real-time, confidential, and answer-focused support for our teachers, it is time to come to grips with the major myth that allows school district managers to place the blame on teacher-leaving upon teachers. That myth, that "Teachers receive such rewards from their interactions with students that teachers should be glad to work long extra (extra long) hours without additional compensation" needs to die a quick and ignominious death. An accurate antidote for blaming teachers, "If school district executives, administrators and managers were doing their jobs, teachers would not be forced to work huge numbers of hours without compensation." And new teachers would receive the support they need to build solid skill sets and become the Master Teachers that they are capable of becoming.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Featured Article at 08:00

Quick Tips

Want to Upgrade your Technology Teaching Skills?: Don't Try this Summer Conference Trip

If after bludgeoning gasoline prices, you have any disposable income, you might try out-of-town travel to educational summer conferences. Most trips to educational conferences should provide some measure of tax-deduction relief, but check with competent tax professionals, and don't claim that you learned your "creative tax deduction strategies" here. The theme of the conferences that we suggest that you NOT attend is the O'Reilly Open Source Convention (OSCON). Sidebar

Note: This is not an advisory against the OSCON program. This an outstanding program that offers marvelous learning opportunities, but few benefits of value for classroom teachers.

It may seem strange to offer a "don't go" recommendation for a teacher "Quick Tip" article. But, this is a companion article to our review of Moodle! in this Classroom Toolkit issue. Sidebar "Moodle! Why this Open Source, Course Management System "Can't / Won't / Will Never" Catch On in K-12 Education" Actually, this Quick Tips article is a companion to the Moodle! article, because this article show exactly why Open Source (on its current track, like Technology Integration in general) is doomed to lurk on the outskirts of education. The problem, Open Source in its current incarnations doesn't offer much for education except "free and cheap" solutions. And the corollary: "Free and Cheap" solutions mean

• More "Brute Force" Work by Teachers to make anything valuable happen from that "Free and Cheap" stuff

More Teacher Time Spent on the "Free and Cheap" stuff, and less time on productive instructional tasks

More Guilt by Teachers that they are not "Integrating the Technology" the way that they are supposed to

Lots of Manual Steps in interconnecting the "Free and Cheap" pieces of the Open Source stuff that don't work together

No Direct or Observable Link between the "Free and Cheap" stuff and Measurable Student Instructional Outcomes

A trip to OSCON in Portland, Oregon, July 21 - 25, 2008 will prove these points. identify in this article is "Technology Integration" in your classroom. Technology Integration: Not a Teacher Priority Technology Integration does not make the top of ordinary teachers' "To Do Lists." Not even close! Though a minority of teachers express a real, heart-felt interest in Technology Integration, almost every teacher is forced to "Talk the Talk, " even if they "Walk the other way." Most teachers have yet to see a viable implementation of Technology that delivers sustained, measurable, reliable, replicable student content-area learning improvement. This is the key to the Technology Integration problem. An OSCON will unlock nothing this summer. Here are the particulars of the conference

• Now celebrating its tenth year, OSCON is a vibrant meeting ground for the open source community to inspire, debate, make deals, motivate, and connect face to face. OSCON 2008 will feature the key players and issues influencing open source today, and explore the greatest potential for open source tomorrow. Source: O'Reilly OSCON Note: Education and Learning are absent from the list of benefits. "OSCON 2008 is happening July 21-25 in Portland, Oregon. Join over 2,500 open source developers, hackers, experts, IT managers, and users at OSCON 2008. This year's convention will include 40 tutorials that go deep into open source technology and over 400 sessions focusing on Administration,

Business, Databases, Emerging Topics, Java, Linux, Mobile, People, Perl, PHP, Programming, Python, Ruby, Security, Web Applications, and much more."Source:O'Reilly OSCON

Note: Teachers are not listed as "Key Player" and, unless the teacher is a teacher of computer programming, these topics are foreign and useless."OSCON is the crossroads of all things open source, bringing together the best, brightest, and most interesting people to explore what's new, and to champion the cause of open principles and open source adoption across the computing industry."Source:O'Reilly OSCONNote: The agenda that these folks push is to get you and your school districts to adopt Open Source software. No mention of learning or instructional outcomes. Then, look at the list of sponsoring vendors:Atlassian™

EnterpriseDB™

Etelos™

Google™

IBM™

Ingres™

Intel™

Jasper Soft™

LinAgora Group™

Microsoft™

Mindtouch™

Mozilla™

Novell™

OpSource™

Silicon Mechanics™

Sun Microsystems™

White Oak Technologies™

Yahoo™

Zimbra™

ZDNet™

These are solid, technology companies. However, except for Disney™, Google™, Microsoft™ and (maybe) Novel™; teachers have no contact with these companies. And, Disney™ seems to have little in common with "Free" because Disney products are not "free to schools." Learning Tracks Here are the learning track for the presentations…Administration (Network Administration, not School District Administration)

Business

Databases

Desktop Applications

Emerging Topics

Fundamentals

Java

Linux

People

Perl

PHP

Programming

Python

Ruby

Security

Web Applications

Great topics for computer programmers and Senior IT folks, limited interest to teachers. Speakers We are not going to belabor the point by listing the speakers and their affiliations. Non are from school districts, none are speaking about education topics. See for yourself…Link to the OSCON Speaker Schedule

But check out this teenage speaker, and the description of his topic…

"Samuel Baldwin (Teen on Linux) Teenbuntu: Reaching Out to Teens Samuel 'Shardz' Baldwin is a 15 year old gnu/linux/bsd geek living in Massachusetts. He's been running various linux distros since he was 12 years old, and programming since 10. His interested in hacking started when he saw 'something new' (red hat [sic]) on his grandfathers other computer. Immediately he took up an interest in unix and hasn't stopped learning since. He programs in C/C++, Perl, and dabbles in Haskell from time to time. He triple boots with Arch GNU/Linux, Gentoo GNU/Linux, and Kubuntu GNU/Linux. He also runs an OpenBSD server, and has a strong interest in Plan 9 From Bell Labs."Source:OSCON Program Summary While there are a lot of conferences, organized so that teachers can travel to visit family and friends in various parts of the country, and still get a 20% tax break on travel expenses; the OSCON conference probably won't even pay off for teachers if they have family members living in Portland. The reason: Attending OSCON is not "Free or Cheap." The full conference plus two tutorial days cost is \$1,740 (early) and \$2,090 (walk-in). Session attendance costs \$1,145 (early) and \$1,445 (walk-in). Two days of tutorials cost \$945 (early) and \$1,245 (walk-in). However, if you want to

visit the Expo Hall and talk to the technology vendors, the cost is "Free." To register if you wish to register for OSCON, follow this link: [Link to register for OSCON](#) …
But, if you want to improve your teaching skills, look elsewhere. Classroom Toolkit is a great place to begin your search.

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

Top Tips

Kerpoof Scholastics: Online Art for the Storyteller in You (and your Students) Kerpoof Scholastics ™ sounds like a dream … Creative Activities are Free

No Software to Download (and Aggravate your School District's IT Staff)

No License to Purchase, to Keep Track of, to Renew

Art that is Accessible from any Internet-connected computer

Lesson Plans and Connections to Standards for Three States (Maryland, Texas and Washington)

Check out Kerpoof Scholastics ™ at: [Link to Kerpoof](#) Check out Kerpoof's Educator Flyer at: [Kerpoof Teachers' Flyer](#) Kerpoof ™ provides the drawing tools that create art from scratch using:

Background Scenes

Characters

Objects and Artifacts

Better yet, Kerpoof creates animations for pictures, stories and movies. Kerpoof is great for kids home during the long, dull summer months (without their school fix) … with nothing to do but play "shoot-um-up, fight and kill" video games. (Oops! I forgot the auto theft, beach-volleyball and pilfering "ancient cultural artifacts & games.") And, the Kerpoof ™ interface is available in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Italian, Chinese and (I think) Polish. Although, the language interface is only skin deep, and quickly reverts to English after the initial menus. Dreams that Never Come True

Kerpoof ™ seems like a dream until you scratch deeper into its Terms of Service and Newsletter Archives. Here you will find some "gotchas" that "turn your smile upside down." Here is the "Tell-it-like-it-is" rest of the story … You can make Avatars, i.e., persona characters, but the Kerpoof ™ folks are going to charge you \$4.39 per month, \$27.79 for six months or \$44.79 per year

The newsletter will be halted during the summer (when many teacher ramp up their yearly planning)

The Lesson Plans lack breadth and depth, in both curricular savvy and broad curricula application

You cannot copy and sell the pictures that you create with Kerpoof

Kerpoof ™ Terms of Service states that the company (Kerpoof, LLC) owns all rights to the art that is created by you or your students. So, what seems like a a cannon of a usable teacher tool becomes only a pop gun toy for curricular and instructional use. Out of Touch with Real Teaching Kerpoof would be valuable if the company didn't place outlandish requirements on the use of its software. Imagine the Open Source advocates anguish if Google ™ announced that its online word processor, Google Docs would remain free to use, but any and all documents that teachers and students write with it become the property of Google ™. Take a tour of Google ™ Docs …

This would be enough to shift these Microsoft ™-hating folks into a "paranoid-rant" against Google ™. (Of course Google ™ folks are way to smart to pull a "bone head" maneuver like this.) This Terms of Service miscue on the part of the Kerpoof Developers prevents teachers from using the software in curricular ways such as illustrations for … Storyboards, Worksheets and Graphic Organizers

PowerPoint ™ Presentations

Desktop Videos

Writing Prompts

Pictographs

Holiday Bulletin Boards, Banners and Other Motivational Art

What the Kerpoof ™ product developers fail to understand is that creating graphics is time intensive, and that no creative teacher that is using a drawing program for curricular purposes is going to put in the work if they do not own the copyright to the completed writing project. Sidebar Note: This is the reason that Classroom Toolkit always allow participating and partner authors to retain full copyright for any of their contributions. The Kerpoof ™ Terms of Service also violates many school districts' policies about owning the rights to all the work that their teachers do. In the case where a teacher works for a school district that claims that all work that the teacher creates is "Work for Hire," these teachers must exercise caution since when using Kerpoof ™ since Kerpoof ™ also is making a claim on their work. Another shortcoming of the Kerpoof ™ product is that the characters and objects seem bound to certain scenes. So, for example, a creative student is not able to take a vampire from a Halloween scheme and let this character face the inevitable conflict with Cupid from a Valentine's scene, or maybe with Santa from a Winter Holiday scene … a splash of cold water on some students' creativity (no matter how warped that some might think that creativity to be). Sidebar One other thing that teachers must be able to do with the graphics they create using their valuable "free" time is to take screen shots of those graphics for use wherever they want, whenever they need. The premier program for doing just that is TechSmith ™'s Snagit. (Note: Free trial available.) Slap at Student

Self-Esteem Worse than Kerpoof; claiming ownership of teachers' creative work, Kerpoof; claims ownership of students' work as well.

This is the opposite of what Master Teachers tell students, i.e., "All your work is your work and valuable in its own right. Be proud of your work because you own the copyright to it, and your right to that intellectual property is protected by law." Final Review The folks at Kerpoof; seem to be moving away from a teacher-support focus towards one of business and money-making. In addition, there may be some legal and security issues if a teacher tries to upload user accounts for students that in any way compromise those students' confidentiality.

But, if time (and creating Kerpoof; represents a substantial investment of time to create and edit a picture) is compared to measurable student outcomes, then teachers cannot afford to direct students to activities that do not show and document measurable student curricular outcomes.

So, in an era of one-computer classrooms because of budget shortfalls, this leaves teachers only to recommend Kerpoof; to parents and students as an after school and weekend diversion. If students derive any academic skills or curricular learning, then so be it. Otherwise, teachers will retain their instructional outcome focus. So, recommend Kerpoof;, but be sure to caution students that the work that they create will not be their own. This shortcoming of Kerpoof; can become great fodder for a class in Civics, Debate or Government where students can explore and express their opinions about whether this policy is fair. An issue such as some company claiming ownership of their work should motivate students to express the injustice, and prompt vocal outcries for protest and class action. Or, this discussion and strong reaction can be fodder for a Math class where student opinions can be tabulated, tallied, and graphed. Sidebar Better than fiddling with Kerpoof; for Math class, use software that was made-to-order for math, i.e., Kidspiration; Inspiration; and Inspiredata;. (Note: Free trials of each program are available.) These software programs are probably available in your school district, now. And, you can use the output of these programs to do many of the things listed in this article that the Kerpoof; Terms of Service do not allow you to do. In summary, Kerpoof; offers free online drawing tools that have game-appeal for young students, but limited practical value for teachers. And, the Kerpoof; Terms of Service preclude our students learning that everything that they create is valuable. This spark (of intellectual property ownership) to our students' creativity and self-esteem is far more valuable than any cut and "paste, drag and drop" online tool that our students might use in their free time.

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

Teacher Resources

Using Online Technologies to Create "Sparks" in Learning

Technology has become more reliable and ubiquitous. So have teacher laptops and classroom LCD projectors for their personal use. These "advancements" provide resources that can spark student interest in content-area learning, add color and content for student presentations and contribute to an "all-around" depth of understanding. But, all is not well in paradise. These online resources harbor terrors and troubles of their own. And, with any "not approved by someone higher-up" resources, teachers must preview and screen everything that passes through that laptop and projector on the way to students's bright eyes and tiny ears. Access to the Internet is like "dropping into the Wild-Wooly West, saloons, brothels, gunfights and gore. And, like the settlers guarding the wagon train at night, a lapse in vigilance can come back to bite. Teachers that fail to preview and supervise find themselves, staring at the floor in front of a desk on the other end of their supervisor's wrath. Resources to "Die For" In the old days, these technologies could have caused "tech-centric" teachers to swoon with joy and appreciation. Now, they are ho-hum, common place. So what are these technologies, and why do they take up so much of a teacher's time? Internet Audio What's Available: music and newscasts, interviews, information from other countries Technology Needed: Real Player; or Windows Media Player; Cost: No additional cost Comments: Podcasts require 1:1 preview time. If the Podcast is one hour, the teacher must spend one hour previewing the audio. Online Newspapers What's Available: Access to just about any major newspaper in the world Technology Needed: Computer with Internet access. Sometimes a printer is valuable. Cost: Mostly free. Some charge a membership fee. Comments: Some sites require registration with name and E-mail address. Video Conferencing What's Available: One-way and two-way broadcast of all manner of curricular information. Technology Needed: High-end system with cameras, document cameras, microphone (maybe voice activated), digital white board and codec.

Cost: Expensive. Generally out of reach for an individual classroom. Campuses are lucky to have one such system in place. Comments: The amount of use that these systems receive seldom makes up for the high initial cost. The model for use of these system is often the "lecture or seminar" format. Movies What's Available: Movies in DVD, CD, Video Tape, Online, Steaming, Flash and other formats. Technology Needed: DVD/ CD Players, VCRs, Internet Access, Desktop video capture software Cost: Video production and video use rights are very expensive. Comments: Production costs are high and production is extremely time-intensive. Preview time for pre-packaged video is 1:1 and difficult for teachers who want to perform "due diligence.*" Note: Teachers can use almost any film resource, even rented DVDs and VCR tapes if they follow certain rules. These rules generally require a written lesson plan, targeted student activities, starting and stopping the movie and conducting focused class discussions, etc. Podcasts What's Available: Lots

of audio content. Technology Needed: Computer with sound card, iPod™ Zune™ or other MP3 Player. Computer with sound card, portable sound recorders, sound editing and file Cost: Little or a lot. Some sound editing solutions such as Audacity are Open Source. Comments: You get what you pay for in regard to sound clarity and professional quality. Special microphones and mixers are required to add background music, group interviews and other audio components to podcasts. Be prepared to spend a lot of time learning the ropes to get audio production right. Be prepared to spend a lot of time previewing audio content before presenting podcasts to your students. Online Games What's Available: Tons of Online Games are available.

Technology Needed: A basic computer with an Internet connection and always updated Anti-Virus and Anti-Spyware programs Cost: The Anti-Virus software and Anti-Spyware programs have yearly subscription fees. Comments: Caution - Many of the games that students like to play are magnets for Spyware and Trojan virus-type programs. The Spyware and Trojans are hidden in the code of the game downloads. Beware! YouTube and TeacherTube Videos What's Available: Everything you can imagine, and a lot of stuff that you don't want your students to see while you are supervising them Technology Needed: Content filtering software on the school district's network to prevent the most egregious of these videos. Cost: Content Filter services are expensive, but required by the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). Sometimes, content filtering services block the entire YouTube site, and block access to TeacherTube in the process. Comments: TeacherTube is safe and focused upon instructional Translation Sites and Services What's Available: Nothing of real translation value, but lots of "down and dirty" (not in the same sense as the YouTube videos) curriculum content that can get students evaluation the quality of the materials that were translated. This engages all the higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving and decision-making resources that students can muster. Cost: Free. Never pay for a software or "machine" translation. No product is good enough, yet. Comments: Great devices for building interest in content lessons, humor and student interaction. The Entire Raft of Google™ Online Products and Services Classroom Toolkit reviewed these earlier… Summary: Technology works for instruction and curricular outcomes if you work it. But don't think that automation will give you a "free ride down easy street." In fact, setting up and managing Technology Integration is more time consuming than not using the technology. Worse, previewing media and supervising students as they use some of these technologies creates an extensive drag on teachers' "free" time. But if you like the technology, use it. Your students will be glad that you did.

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

Teacher Survival Strategies

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

lot more work than the grantees ever imagined. Etc. What to Do... Here are the guidelines that you should follow in order to receive lots of grant funding. Remember that success breeds success, and the more grants that you acquire, the more that you will receive.

Also remember that a real grant requires lots of uncompensated time that you have to spend on record keeping, paper work, purchasing, documentation, follow-up report writing... as well as the grant implementation itself. (Are you sure that you want to take on that much extra work for no additional pay?) And, oh yes, the rework (Plan B) that is required to squeeze any success at all out of the project. This is because successful grant projects are more rare than grant-giving folks like to announce. After all, they funded many projects, but only a few "pan out." To gear up for grant success... Show that your students are on the verge of success at whatever the grant-giver's mission is. In order to do this, find out what the grant-giver's mission is. Look at annual reports, Websites, brochures, previous grant recipients, anything with clues, etc. Research Grant Funding Agencies and Foundations. Know what the organization is backing, and what the agency wants to accomplish based upon its mission. There is no profit in completing a grant application for a grant that mismatches your curriculum situation. For example, if the grant targets Japanese students and you teach a bilingual class of Mexican-Americans and Central American immigrants, you are wasting your time (and the time of the grant reviewer that must attach a reject slip to your proposal). Then, once you find a grant agency with a good fit to your instructional program, read the grant's Request for Proposal (RFP) the way that a nuclear physicist reads a technical paper, i.e.; line by line, with margin notes, by creating charts and checklists, by building timelines. This is a time to "suspend" your speed reading skills... read slowly and deliberately. Read for clues the way that a Crime Scene Investigator reads clues. Avoid reading the way that an English teacher reads... i.e., set aside literary (and other) criticism. Another description of this process, "Do your homework as though you were the most paranoid person you know (except your supervisor)." Develop checklists that include every single requirement of the grant. Make sure that you can accomplish each of these. This is super-important. Don't ask for the money if you can't deliver on the grant project. Identify budgets and project partners, and check with them to ensure that they can 1.) work with the grant during the grant timeline, 2.) offer support and value 3.) add to the perceived expert status of the project team. Round up evaluation help. Grant agencies expect that someone else, generally with a positive reputation and independent status will review and evaluate the progress that you made during the grant implementation process. Make sure that the grant evaluator has the credentials to perform this service. Prepare all Letters of Support, budgets, project plans, Scope of Work, project specifications, Requirements documents and other mandatory materials. Make sure that the project budgets include indirect costs, which are costs added to the project (or subtracted from the money you have to work with) to cover incidental costs such as electricity, extra janitorial service, delivery of project items, whatever... Be aware that partner organizations are likely to tack these charges on to their participation budgets, too. These costs can run for the teen-percents to large fractions. Be careful to check this out! Be prepared for site visits from the Grant-Giving agency, if these are required. Hidden Pitfalls You are undertaking a huge commitment, without financial compensation. But, also be prepared to give away any status credit that you earn to your supervisors and other higher-up school district executives. After all, they won't allow you to move a finger on any grant without their approval. And, in most cases, only the Superintendent (or designee) are allowed to obligate a school district (contract with the Grant-Giving agency). So, while you do the "lion's share of the work," you receive a "kitten's share" of the credit. Still, garnering grants creates a fabulous addition to your resume or curriculum vita. And grants that target fantastic benefits to your students are worth pursuing. When you find a grant that is a congruent fit for your instructional program, go for it!

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

Professional Self-Development

Embracing eLearning: Why your Career Depends on Online Skill Improvement Teachers are often ambivalent to eLearning. Why? One answer: Because bureaucrats often beat the "rhetoric drum" about how computer and online course material that will, one day, replace teachers. But, teachers should ignore this "never gonna happen" nonsense; or, just ask the basic question, "How old do learners have to be before computers and online teacher substitutes become effective?" Or, as the corollary question, "If school districts cannot afford the technology infrastructure (computers refreshed at least every three years, high speed data backbone, redundant and failsafe server farm, one IT staff member for each 66 computers) for a one-computer classroom, how will a computer for every student become affordable?" Advice: Ignore this debate and find a more productive focus for your time and energy. Online Learning is a Teacher's Friend Online learning is a teacher's friend because online content represents the only place that teachers can learn the survival skills that they need for the modern teaching world. College classrooms and district-sponsored in-service programs fail to target the "need-to-know now, must improve my skills of..." that comprise the day-to-day needs of teachers. Mandated school district training, if it targets anything useful, targets school district problems. But, how likely is it that the school district's challenge matches a teacher's need? Most often, the school districts problems are either... Bureaucratic snafus that teachers are being blamed for Problems related to one or two teachers, that all teachers (not only the offending ones) have to suffer for The result of long-term mismanagement and inept decision-making. (More of the same, applied to in-service training, will fail as well

So, expect little from school district-sponsored training, and you won't be disappointed. How Teachers Really Learn - and Improve Sitting on the receiving end of an avalanche of "pearls of wisdom" during a training program has failed to demonstrate positive application outcomes for teachers. In other words, teachers learn something, but find nothing useful in most in-service training programs. The reason that seat-time training is the myopic bureaucrat's "solution" of choice is that the "pay once, document that many teachers were given a boost in skills" approach creates the illusion that the district is "addressing student outcome shortcomings" by shoring up "teacher shortcomings." Of course, teacher shortcomings are seldom the cause for the effect that these strategies are supposed to allay. (Telling teachers about a new theory or strategy doesn't boost student learning.) But, talk is cheap, and bringing in an "expert" to pontificate is the cheapest "pseudo-remedy" that has a modicum of face validity. But, online learning faces no competition from "politically connected consultants, even though online strategies connect authentically with real teacher needs. The reason: School district officials seldom wish to pay for online learning. In fact, teachers seem to resent paying for online learning, too. Sidebar It is a curious bit of irony that the very folks who hold to the mistaken notion that online learning can replace teachers are the same folks who are so reluctant to pay for online learning for teachers. Go figure... What about In-House Online Training Creating online training in-house is costly. Those pesky trainers want to be paid before they do the creation, and they are not even in front of trainees. So, this downtime (when the trainers are developing, rather than training) seems like a waste. And, developing an entire course is a waste because teachers are busy, and teaches seldom wade through the entire course. Teachers only want to extract usable segments of the training and skip the rest. How Adults Learn: Especially How to Apply Skills and Habits Adults waste their time if they slog through information that they already apply skillfully. But, repeat information that is not applied is intellectual-only ballast that only adds "drag" to any progress that the teacher makes in improving application and skill. If a school district wants to improve the skill sets of teachers, then folks in charge need to figure out how adults learn. And the fact that usable adult learning is global, holistic, non-sequential is important. These folks must also figure out that application of a skill by one teacher will take a different time track and application focus than for other teachers. Navigating a sailboat provides an analogy for the complexity of improving instruction for teachers. Different skills are required to navigate during the day than after dark, different skills are use in northern seas than in tropical currents; and navigation during storms differs from navigation during periods of intense calm. And procedures change in patrolled coastal waters compared to what must be done on lawless seas where pirates ply their barbaric trade with impunity. A sailor might be soothing sunburned skin one day and bailing storm water from the bilge the next day, and fixing the bilge pump the day after. Nice, orderly, sequential jaunts through a training curriculum with the leisure of a Sunday excursion in the park; as though the sojourn is a self-guided tour... neatly labeled, all interesting and pertinent facts researched... well planned, nothing out of place. Let's get real Online learning must be... Modular

Interactive

Focused on real-world teaching needs

Friendly

Confidential

Competent

If these word fail to describe any online course that you know, than you have experienced courses that are designed to earn course credit. These courses are great for meeting certification and job advancement needs. But, these models of academic design are useless for practical, day-by-day, what teachers need to know how to do now, teaching. Enough "Gloom and Doom" Description of the Status Quo! Tell us "What Works!" Requisites for online training include: Confidentiality: The teacher must be assured that supervisors and upper echelon school district management cannot discover that the teacher is communicating, asking for, exploring, examining. All interaction that the teacher makes with the online system must be secret. Otherwise, teachers are not free to direct inquiries toward their real needs Personalized: The online instructors must know the teacher, know them intimately, and be able to devote an hour or two, that day; to each teacher's specific learning needs. If this means that someone must employ lots of online experts, that is correct. A body of knowledge, even with an artificial intelligence front end is still "stupid" when compared to human intervention.

Online Trainers with Real-World Experience: Hot-shot theorists who avoided classroom "boot camp and special forces" training by an academic charade are ill equipped to teach, let alone advise teachers. Colleges and universities my still employ these idea-oriented researchers, but Real-World units, such as classrooms in real schools are no place for them (or their influence)

Ad Hoc: On call, no wait for helping response. Answers to today's questions tomorrow means a missed window of opportunity.

Information Storage and Retrieval System: The online learning system learns from the experiences of others, and offers case studies (with confidentiality maintained) and best practices.

Follow-Up until Resolved System: The online learning system needs a "no stop until forbid or opt-out" mechanism. This means that once an teacher enters a skill-development challenge, the online system is relentless (and unrelenting) in providing support for learning that skill... until clear mastery is achieved... and the teacher has resolved the issue

Tested Focus and Referral System: A system cannot be all things to all people, and issues that are beyond the scope,

expertise or legal mandates must be referred to other agencies. For example, a teacher may focus upon improving personal-supervisor relationships when criminal abuse, negligence or misfeasance becomes apparent. In such a case, the system must direct the teacher to the appropriate crime unit or whistle blower infrastructure. In other cases, it may become evident that a teacher needs psychiatric or mental health services, rather than improved instructional skills. The system must be able to deal with such issues

But, it is fantasy to expect that school districts develop an insightful and intricate online training system. And, legal issues and the cost of talented staff appear to be obstacles that would prevent a private organization from developing such a program without contract guarantees and retainer fees. So, teachers teachers will continue to get their training "catch-as-catch-can, piecemeal, and on-the-fly" as they have always done. Sure, school district employers have an obligation to their students and their community to provide superior training and focused help for their teachers. But, most haven't provided anything of value to their teachers, yet. So, it is delusion to expect that they have the wherewithal (or the intention) of starting now.

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Open Source for Education

Moodle! Why this Open Source, Course Management System "Can't / Won't / Will Never" Catch On in K-12 Education
Open Source advocates like to promote the Course Management System (CMS), Moodle!, as the antidote for Blackboard®; and WebCT®;. These commercial products are "high-priced" and funding for them seems out of reach in a time when school funds are evaporating. Wouldn't it be wonderful if an Open Source product could do the job that Blackboard®; and WebCT®; do, without the high cost? Unfortunately, the Open Source Course Management System, Moodle! is not up to the task, at least for teachers in K-12 Education. Moodle! may be up to the task in higher-education where the dynamics of course preparation and delivery differ from K-12 Education. For example, a college or university professor may teach a "full time load" of 12 or 15 quarter or semester hours (15 hours is sometimes considered an "Overload"). And, with the rule of three hours of preparation time for each hour of face-to-face class instruction. This schedule results in a full, or overtime load. Public school teachers, on the other hand, spend about six hours a day in front of students, maybe 2.5 times the number of hours that a teacher of a college-level class per week. But, planning time for K-12 teachers is generally 45 minutes or (50 minutes in a generous schedule). So, the numbers look like…

This table shows that K-12 teachers spend about three times more time in class delivering face-to-face instruction, and K-12 teachers receive one-tenth the preparation time.

These data demonstrate the reason that a Course Management System for K-12 teachers must have a streamlined interface and be optimized for time-saving. A complicated interface and tedious course development and management process fail to meet the needs of K-12 teachers…and are not viable course management and instructional delivery solutions. What are the Problems? Moodle! does what it says it will do, i.e., manage online courses. So, what are the problems that affect ordinary teachers? The first problem stems from the "database backend-handcuffing" by the product. The backend database interface is slow and tedious. Instead of being able to use the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) system that would automate sending the course updates to the online server, each piece of instructional material (title, description, activity, image, graph, video link, etc) has to be copied and pasted into an online database form. This backend database "adding and updating" method prevents teachers from using cute and time-saving tools such as "global search and replace." The backend database "copy and paste" Moodle! method of course management also prevents the streamlined use of templates. Moodle! also lacks a checkout feature. Sidebar

A checkout feature means that when someone else is working on the course materials, you cannot work on that same component, too. This prevents one person on a development team from overwriting the work of another. This feature is vital for collaborative instructional design and team-teaching.

Another Moodle! shortcoming is a course update feature that depends on a crude "backup /restore" strategy. This is a "full database replacement" strategy that allows only for the restore of the entire course database. This means that you cannot update just a chapter, section or subsection of a course, but this means that you must backup the entire course when you want to update in this way. The only way to add section and subsection content in a Moodle! course is to "copy and paste" the new content (title, description, text, image, link, activity, etc.); one-by-one, bit-by bit into the online database. Or, teachers can work on a complete copy of the database, and replace the online course with a complete, new copy of the course. The problem with this strategy is that once data (such as student records, student contributions, student grades) are backed up, the old records are copied over (over written) and no longer exist. Therefore, the course update process only works correctly before students start to use the online course. Desktop Development Environment and Development Servers Moodle! provides a "desktop development environment" that works with Microsoft®; Windows. This is useful for developing and prototyping a course. What this means is that teachers must have a complete working database on their desktop, and they must copy the entire database to the server. But team teachers cannot have more than one copy of the full database on their desktop computer unless they are able to share that desktop

somehow. Sidebar Caution: Do not attempt to share the Moodle! Development Environment (MDE) on a school district network. The MDE lacks any of the basic security features that members of your school district's IT Department staff demand. What this means is that teacher teams cannot develop courses that fit together. The method for more than one teacher to work together is to use the live, online database. Fortunately, Moodle! has a way of allowing courses that are in the development stage to be hidden from the view of students. Sidebar What teachers have to do if more than one person is working on a course is to assign (delegate, deputize, shaft) one person on the team with the job of entering everyone's course contributions. Of course this requires double work for one person. And, as our graph shows, teachers do not have time for double work. What Moodle! needs is the ability for multiple members of a teaching team to update courses in a modular way, rather than its current "all or nothing" database strategy. Multiple Workstations - Multiple Team Teacher: Moodle! Catastrophe The lack of a modular course management structure creates another course management nightmare for Moodle! Unfortunately, teachers must use computers at work and at home, and keeping a database synchronized is next to impossible. The only solution to this issue seems to be to develop Moodle! in separate courses on a development server, then copy the separate courses to the production server once the course is completed. The alternative, if each teaching team member develops course with the individual desktop development environment, is to "copy and paste" each individual component and send those components to one of the team members; the one that will copy and paste the individual components to the active server. This strategy represent "triple work for one team member; and will never get done!"

But, in these days of "test-stress-driven" curriculum objectives and minimum preparation time, teachers barely have time for their first level of work, i.e., face-to-face instruction of students; let alone course development work in triplicate. Consequently, "gung-ho techie teachers" are the only folks who might to manage a K-12 Moodle! course after the first, time-intensive week. "Mulish" Lack of Flexibility Teachers must be able to save and reuse course components and templates when developing courses. Flexibility to "mix and match" course components, and flexibility to share components across-courses must be available. But, these are missing in "mulish Moodle!". The requirement of "backup and restore" of the entire database hampers efficient development. Just keeping database copies in synchronization is next to impossible by a single person, let alone multiple teachers. Of course, with college classes where the professor prepares the entire course syllabus in advance (Remember Higher-Ed folks have ten times more planning and course development time as K-12 teachers), Moodle! functions quite effectively. But, college courses are packaged into neat quarter or semester packages with a limited number of class meetings. Compare sixteen sessions in a Tuesday-Thursday semester course with the 90 sessions that K-12 teachers meet with their classes per semester. Adventurous (or masochistic) teachers must break courses into "units." But even so, these units will be "supplemental materials, not core course components. Desktop Development Security: A System that can't Connect to the Internet can't Develop an Online Course As mentioned, Moodle! provides a local desktop development platform. Unfortunately, this development environment lacks basic network security, and cannot be used on a network such as the kind of network that school districts employ. Teachers cannot connect a computer with this MDE installed to the Internet from home, either, especially with an "always on" broadband connection (DSL or Cable). Besides the local Windows; Desktop Development System (that most teachers require), creates that same dual database issue. What happens when the teacher wants to work on the desktop at school as well as at home is "confusion." Needed Usability Features What Moodle! needs is a front end interface similar to the "Dreamweaver; Contribute; system, with version control and checkout components. Updates to courses should be "one-button, FTP-enabled." And, Moodle! course development needs to be both "cut and paste" and "drag and drop."

The software needs to work with templates and modules, both used as "course building blocks." Building every course from scratch is an effort in futility that few teachers have time for. Instructional Inadequacies Instructional planning and course design can be streamlined by using templates, modular elements and reusable forms. Moodle! needs to create this flexibility. Copying entire courses using a "backup and restore" function is equivalent to repeating every minute (starting again from the beginning) of class instruction each time the class meets.

Besides, several teachers, building components of a course would still need to delegate one person to copy (integrate) their contributed components into the final version. Double or triple work that every teacher abhors. Practical, Logistical Issues There were other practical and logistical issues associated with deploying a Moodle! course:

For example a Fourth Grade teacher with 22 students, teaching seven classes a day... Reading

English and Spelling
Math
Science
Social Studies
Health

...would require an inordinate amount of course development time. But, Moodle! course development is too time-intensive for teachers to manage for so many classes. Besides that, every student must have complete access to a computer for every class. Otherwise, only a select few students could use the course at one time. And, only a few students being able to profit from the extended time that the course development takes makes course development impractical. Sidebar Teachers can only afford to automate instructional components when these multiply the effect of their work. Any process that gouges into teachers' limited planning time cannot be justified because such methods squander time, a teacher's most precious resource. So what about students accessing the materials at home for review?

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