

Monday, June 30, 2008

Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills

"This will Change your Life" - Stephen Pierce Self-help Audio Program

Here is a link to an audio presentation that you owe to yourself to listen to. I call it the "Make More Money Model of Instruction."

Stephen Pierce is a dynamic speaker and platform presenter. But, he has a message for teachers.

Although Stephen Pierce focuses upon prosperity in this audio presentation, the same notions can be used to bring prosperous amounts of learning to your students. Economics and capital can be metaphors for instructional outcomes. So, listen to the presentation.

Then, adopt Stephen Pierce's formula for…Affirming personal competency

Stopping negative self-talk in its tracks

Taking positive action

Here is the resource…

Examining the multi-sensory, multi-modal components of your thinking can extract you from self-imposed ruts, and keep you above substandard performance.

And, Stephen Pierce's focus on taking action provides a roadmap or blueprint for making better and more productive choices about what you invest your instructional time and teaching efforts in.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills at 10:00

Short Article

Consistency: Start Now, Build Solid Habits During the Summer when Stress Levels are Low

Get your act together and develop a consistent teaching strategy. What better time to start than now? When students attend your classes, you must provide a way for those students to learn. The term for this is, "instruction."

But, creating a learning environment is difficult until you learn the nuances and subtle techniques that are required for you to motivate students and deliver instruction.

You can not expect to walk into class, parrot the methods that you were taught with when you were of school age; and hope to succeed. And it is folly to expect that the latest and greatest Instructional Fads will pay off by launching student into accelerated learning…acquiring concepts and skills in minutes, hours, or even overnight.

You will succeed by improving your teaching a little each day, testing the results of that work (not by testing students for content learning), and repeating the instructional strategies and processes that result in increased, positive student outcomes.

You will succeed further by testing what you try, then quitting the use of strategies and techniques that do not pay off in student achievement.

Consistency is the key to your ultimate teaching success.

Consistency is required for almost any self-improvement and instructional endeavor that you wish to turn into a pay off with positive results.

For example, if you want to lose weight, you must keep your diet on track, you must lay off the high calorie foods, you must stop drinking super-high calorie alcohol, and you must keep exercising. Failing to stay on the diet or slacking off on the exercise program will result in wasted time, needless hunger pangs, ridicule from your friends; and a static (resistant to change) overweight condition,

Another example: Learning something new, or becoming an expert in a new field requires consistent study. Expecting to learn while you sleep, while you eat and watch television, or by casual association with experts; is fraught with failure.

And, you cannot learn by an initial burst of effort, and dwindling attention to review and practice. The failure to integrate new material into your short and long-term memories results in learning failure, application failure and failed performance.

So, consistency is required if you are to enjoy positive results from your teaching efforts.

However, the problem with consistency is that a huge goal (such as teaching students for a school year) requires a multitude of tasks that must be completed. This huge list of known activities…and all the surprise, unexpected tasks that pop up like mushrooms after a rain; seem overwhelming. Then too, we have a tendency to put off overwhelming tasks in favor of the "easy to do, easy to see results" kind of tasks.

But, if you break these huge goals into daily tasks that are limited in scope, then nothing about the daily items will seem difficult. This is the secret of successive small steps ending at the finish line of a long journey. (You take tasks, one doable item at a time, highest priority tasks first, and get busy.)>

To be successful in teaching, you must approach instruction and self-improvement in the same manner. It is fantasy to believe that all you have to do is purchase the latest book on educational theory, purchase a magic black line master booklet, and put your teaching and self-improvement efforts on "AutoPilot."

Here is the fiction: That activity creates learning, and that you just create some…Homework

Student Projects

Internet Assignments

Reward Systems

Data-Driven Instruction Software

Student Online Portfolios

Parent Communication Blogs

Technology Integration Plans

…to ensure exponential increases in observable student outcomes.

You would never fall for such an outrageous proposition, would you?

But if you want to real instructional success, the "real secret to education," you must…Listen to your Students

Every DayAnd, to pull this off, you must:Avoid Projecting your Ideas, Motivations, Beliefs, Ideals upon your Students

Believe that your Students Possess an Innate Wisdom about their personal learning

Find Areas of Student Motivation that Attract them to the Curriculum Content

Provide Emotional and Personal Support for Students' Demonstrations of Creative Thinking, Problem-Solving and

Decision-MakingSuccess ToolsTeaching success tools are not high-priced software (or even the free Open Source

software products. Teaching success tools are not the latest launched super fad books and repackaged educational theories. The secret teaching success tools are a calendar and checklist.

And, the Office Productivity software that you already use has this capacity, built in to the E-mail and task-tracking program, Microsoft™ Outlook. But, some printed paper forms placed in a notebook will serve just as well. Even an online service such as Google™ Calendar could be useful.

The secret is not in the software or the forms, but in following-through with the tasks that you identify.

What helps you track your strategies is sufficient. This could be a daily planner, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) [such as a Palm Pilot] or a basic stenographer's notebook.

All you need is something that tells you at a glance 1.) what you completed, and 2.) what needs to be worked on next.

Consistent use of a calendar, schedule book and checklist system can mean a the difference between a a highly successful school year…or a static, lackluster school year…or a year with nothing at all to show for it.

So, learn to use these tools to keep your teaching focus consistent and outcome-oriented. And summer is the best time for you to get a head start on the upcoming school year.

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

Feature Article

The Case against Open Source

The Case against Open Source is really a case against the "Free and Cheap" mantra that some Open Source Advocates chant when they solicit action (and wrong-headed decisions) from school district leaders. This is a case against folks (who know little about instruction and even less about the needs of teachers); who, despite their lack of knowledge, pitch this "save-money fantasy (delusional) strategy" to school district executives (who should know better than to listen, but don't).SidebarOpen Source Advocates who pitch the "Free and Cheap" strategy could even be well-meaning educators who love technology and want to see technology solutions available to students at any cost. (See the irony here?)

These folks could even be school district employees, Techies, who have used Windows™ Open Source software (the most prevalent kind); but, most of these folks are "outsiders" that…Don't know how teachers work

Don't understand what teacher want or need

Don't sympathize with, empathize with, or relate to the plight of teachers

Don't comprehend the compatibility issues that are associated with running software within a school district "technology ecosystem"

Don't realize that Technology Integration is a failed concept…unless an entire program is funded to an adequate level, with additional funding contingency funding

Don't have a clue about how software costs add a minor (almost trivial) expense in the overall success of a technology program

Don't mind blaming teachers for the failure of Technology Programs to show a Return on Investment (ROI)

Forgot to do the basic research that would show exactly what Technology Tools, applied in exactly what way, result in exactly what measurable students curricular outcomes

Never pitch the one Open Source Solution that meets many (but not all) of a school district's needs, i.e., Novell™

Enterprise because Novell™ Enterprise is neither "Free nor Cheap."

Fail to recognize that Apple™ computers provide better solutions to their arguments for "Free and Cheap Open Source" than Open Source software does Classroom Toolkit documented the case against Open Source in a series of articles. These articles represent the rationale for requiring school districts to "do their homework" before dumping (dissipating, diffusing, wasting) huge amounts of money (which they claim that they don't have) on failed Technology Integration programs.

Technology Integration must be focused, solidified and shored up before Open Source software, or any other technology strategy can become effective.

This article clarifies the Classroom Toolkit position on what it would take to make an Open Source project successful.

Hint: it would take plenty of money, and would be neither "free" nor "cheap." "Straw Man" Argument: Only a Distraction…with no Heart There actually isn't an argument against Open Source software in our schools because Commercial software, Freeware, Bannerware, Pirated software and Open Source software are only tools.

For example: While it might be patriotic to buy a hammer or screwdriver that were "Made in the USA," the origin of the tools (or the raw materials that they are made from) does not matter to the nail or the screw. Neither does the origin of the tool matter to the "home fixer-upper" that needs to build or repair a home furnishing that is broken before company arrives.

This analogy holds exactly for school districts that implement a software tools initiative. Sidebar Software tools are only tangentially related to Technology Integration. Note the meaning of the entire phrase: Integrating transparent technology use and skills into the Curriculum

- Integrating the use of technology by teachers into instructional delivery and instructional management

- Integrating the access to rich materials, including the Internet, into student research

- Integrating thinking skills, problem solving and decision-making skills into student assignments so that students analyze, evaluate and discriminate authentic sources from the plethora of sources available in libraries and through the Internet

- Integrating communication skills including speaking and writing into person-to-person and person-to-group interaction, whether that interaction is local or world-wide

However, the failure of the Technology Integration movement and the failure of an Open Source effort of marketing to teachers reflect issues that more extensive than simple "hammer and screwdriver-type home repairs." If either Technology Integration or adopting Open Source software were singular issues that assured that students and teachers received benefits, both ideologies would be further along on the trek toward making inroads into our schools…and progress would have been made.

Rather, the Technology Integration movement is more like attempting to build apartment buildings and high-rises by only providing hammers and screwdrivers to the carpenters and electricians

Many more tools are needed, and these tools (training and professional development; Back-End programming; compatibility, scalability, interoperability) are very expensive. Programs that implement quality technology tools do not come "cheap." Teachers a.k.a. "Scapegoats" for Technology Integration School districts perform an "under-budget-and-blame-teachers" slight-of-hand ritual, every time they pretend that they are implementing Technology Integration projects.… The "fall-guy teachers" are blamed for laziness (slacking off and not working hard enough), or blamed for incompetence (working in a slip-shod manner, just being there to collect a paycheck), or blamed for failing to use technology to produce measurable student outcomes (i.e., in increasing test scores).

Sidebar The classic "blame-game" dialog goes like this… We gave you a computer and installed a computer lab (shared by 48 classrooms), why haven't our students' test scores risen high enough to satisfy our critics. When will we recoup the major investment that we made in the computers and infrastructure? The Role of Software in the Budget Formula Software plays only a minor role in the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of a Technology Integration program. Infrastructure, equipment, technical support and refresh rates (how often equipment is replaced --should be every three years) are one; but not the most expensive "cost center."

A second cost center, training and professional development, should be at least 30% of project cost.

For example: If a project costs \$30 million USD, then training and professional development costs should run about \$10 million USD. But, school districts seldom allocate more than single-digit percentages to training and professional development… funds for stipends, trainers, follow-up support, release time, software and equipment for teachers to use at home, etc. School districts skimp and under fund in this area, and the results (as observed nation wide) is technology that is un used, under used and under utilized.

The third cost center, and perhaps the most expensive of all is the funding that must be allocated for the "Back-End" technical support, software programming and development, customization… compatibility, scalability and automation. This is the "behind the scenes" work, produced by highly-paid computer professionals (project managers, software engineers, database developers, database managers, server specialists, analysts, programmers, Web designers, Web Masters, etc.)

Without the Back-End support, technology (whether Commercial or Open Source) remains too difficult to use, lacks compatibility, lacks interoperability with other programs and lacks scalability. Sidebar Compatibility: Data files from one program should connect with, load, be read by other programs

Interoperability: Data that is captured in one program should be available to every other program to prevent duplicated

effort (teacher labor) and to ensure that data input errors are minimized

Scalability: Technology integration requires that computers be added anywhere in a school district network. But, costs matter if you add 1 computer or 1,000 computers to a network. Every computer must function.

However, as the complexity of the network increases, costs skyrocket. Network administrators and managers know this. But, most software-only Open Source advocates don't understand IP Addressing, Super-Netting, V-LANS, DHCP Servers, or device priority; such as when IP Telephones operate on the same network as video, and data; where telephone conversations must be given a higher transmission priority than video, and video must have a higher-transmission priority than computer data. (Note: when computer data is resent, the network just appears slow. If telephone message packets have to be resent, the call is garbled.) The size of the Back-End programming, customization, support and automation components of a Technology Integration package dwarfs the size of the training and professional development costs. How a Real Budget (i.e., Having a Chance for Positive Measurable Outcomes) Plays Out Even if school districts skimp on the Back-End costs, these should approach 30% of the total Technology Integration program budget. For example: For the \$30 million project, \$10 million for hardware, software and infrastructure, \$10 million for training and professional development and \$10 million for Back-End programming, interoperability, automation, development and support.

But, school districts spend little or nothing on the Back-End programming, automation and support.

And, it is this lack of Back-End integration that diminishes the actual value of outcomes from any expenditure on Technology Integration, bringing the ROI down to the lowest common denominator; i.e., whatever sheer personal (and uncompensated) efforts that teachers put out; mostly on their own time. Another way of framing the issue, if teachers put in "above and beyond the call of duty type" efforts to compensate for the minimal funding of Technology Integration programs, then the Technology Integration initiative can be salvaged. The "Zero Funding Option" for Real Technology Integration If IT Directors (and other folks in the know) understood how teachers work, and how learning takes place, these folks would explain the full (actual) costs of a successful Technology Integration program to school district executives and meddling politicians.

Then, most enlightened school district executives would propose a "Zero Funds" Budget. In-the-know education leaders would decide to allocate "zero" expenditures for a "not ready for prime time" Technology Integration effort because they would reason that the school system could not afford to waste money by launching a "partially funded, minimal chance or return, only for show" project. Enlightened school would allocate Zero funds because they would understand what a "real chance of success" (a real Technology Program) would cost.

These enlightened leaders would also understand that IT folks failed to dialog with teachers and that IT folks failed to demonstrate the direct connection of technology expenditures to measurable improvements in student achievement. (You can only control what you can measure.) Sidebar If you lack adequate funds for the successful implementation of a program; the sane, rational and competent approach is to cancel the program, rather than launch a "sham, pretend that we are addressing the issue" initiative. Technology Project Intelligence Myopia The problem is that people know what they can see, and everybody sees the computer.

If a computer system could be purchased for \$400 USD, and Open Source software were free, the cost of purchasing, installing the computer is: Computer: \$400

Installation: \$60

Three Year Warranty: \$125

Network Drop (to connect the computer to a Switch): \$130

Cost of Port on the Network Switch: \$125

Analysis: The cost for the computer connection to the server about doubles the base cost of the computer.

But, computers with "Free and Cheap" software will continue to sit idle unless teachers are trained. And, the professional development that teachers require is not software training, but specialized curriculum training, geared to the subject and age level of the students that they are teaching. Another miscue of the Technology Integration movement was to deliver software training when subject matter professional development (with the transparent use of technology) was required. Sidebar Curriculum training using transparent technology skills is the Technology training that few school districts engage in because delivering useful training of this type is too expensive. A cadre of (extra) teachers (from each content area) would need to be assigned to assist (mentor, support) every teacher. A program like this might require 20 times the number of trainers that the district now employs. (And, trainers are looked upon as cost-centers, i.e., overhead. (Note: teachers are profit centers, because school districts are paid for the warm student bodies that sit in classrooms under the watchful eye of teachers. How to calculate how many trainers are required? Four or five grade for the elementary grade levels (Do you count Kindergarten?), trainers for each middle school content area subject, trainers for each high school subject, etc.

And, trainers must be teachers that have proven their expertise by actually demonstrating positive student improvements in learning by the use of the Technology Integration that that they are presenting. (School districts that deliver software-only training without a focus upon exactly how every teacher can apply the curriculum lessons deserve to be punished.)

A transfer to the Training Corps is the last place that mediocre and under skilled teachers should be assigned. (And, avoid promoting these folks to principal, too.)

The guideline of allocating 30% for professional development breaks down with small Technology Integration budgets.

Until expenditures reach "critical mass," i.e., large amounts of money for hardware and infrastructure, training and professional development costs will actually be fixed costs. (This means a larger percentage of the Technology Integration budget must be allocated for smaller project. This also means that large numbers of real teachers will need to be hired as trainers, curriculum developers and learning specialists so that teachers can be trained by folks that actually know and have successfully implemented technology integration projects where real student achievement has been measured. And, this training cannot be a "one session- no follow-up" "one-script-fits-all" wonder. Training sessions must contain follow-up, and be tailor-made for each teacher.

This training and professional development must also include: Release time for teachers

Substitute pay (to cover the release time)

Corresponding training and professional development for campus administrators

Facilities for training students, by their teachers, or by training specialists

Parent training and support (evenings and weekends) Back-End System, Programming, Connectivity and Compatibility:

The "Sin of Omission" But by far the most expensive cost of a Technology Integration program that really delivers is the crucial (mandatory, keystone, "It-will-never-be-effective-without-this,"

"Don't-do-this-and-Technology-Integration-efforts-wither-on-the-vine") Back-End programming.

But, this part of the Technology Integration piece almost never gets done.

Why?

Answer: Because…The professionals with the technical knowledge to do this work earn more than most school district superintendents, and are worth every penny of their salary (Note: some of these professionals are billed for their services at from \$150.00 to \$300.00 USD per hour!)

There are not enough of these professionals residing in the US, and the US Government will not grant more H-1B Visas so that we can get the talented professionals we need from India, Russia and China

The ramp up time where those talented professionals learn the "Educational Process" (Educational Intelligence, Business Intelligence) so that they can integrate and automate Back-End processes is lengthy (think months and years)

The ramp-up and hiring of these talented professionals would "bid up" the salaries and make programs like this even more expensive

The only database product that can scale to the level required for this level of complexity is Oracle™ (Note: SAP™ also has this capacity, but SAP implantation projects take one or more years of planning and require huge start up budgets (Think tens to hundreds of millions.)

Project Managers capable of managing the required Back-End projects earn (and are a bargain at) twice or three times what an average school district superintendent earns

For school district budget managers, the costs of building out a Technology Integration program…training and professional development, infrastructure, and Back-End support system are inordinate, excessive and budget-breakers.

To fund a "Real" (i.e., guaranteed to pay off) Technology Integration program would require that all school district funds be funneled into the Technology Integration arena. Then, school district would need to hire 25% more teachers to

provide the training and professional development, 400% more technical support staff members, and a large cohort of highly-paid computer professionals (programmers, database developers, project managers, Web designers, graphic

artists, etc.) would need to be added to the district's staff. Sidebar Note: Just hiring this large technical staff is inadequate because these folks require time to learn the basics of "Teaching Intelligence" before they can create the Back-End

infrastructure and conduits required to integrate all the systems that are connected to the school district's network. In

addition, all of these folks require high-end computing equipment, development servers and office space.

Training facilities would need to be built, and at least 25% more office space would be required.

Bottom line, school district will fund hardware and infrastructure projects, refresh computers at a painful rate, and blame teachers for the lack of students' progress from using the equipment.

Bottom line for teachers: Speak out and let everyone know that Technology Integration is a failed, fabled, fantasy unless major awaken and a major funding commitment "gets real." Real needs of Teachers Teachers need transparent

computing. This means computer systems that are easy to use, and this means computer systems that fit with how teachers work.

These computing needs must mesh with the over-worked lifestyle and the economic realities that teachers face. These include: Teachers have spouses

Spouses work for business and industry

Teachers do not have money for more than one computer in the household

Teachers do not have the skills to develop virtual or dual boot computers, not the time to waste in learning these technical skills

Most of the planning and lesson development that teachers perform is conducted at home

Most of the technology materials, test banks, auxiliary software provided by textbook publishers is Window and Mac compatible

Therefore:

Until Open Source software is compatible with the Industry Standard operating system, the Windows™ operating system is the logical choice for school computer systems.

"Tip of the Iceberg" Needs for School District Technology But teachers' needs are just the "Tip of the Iceberg" when it

comes to compatibility requirements for Open Source software.

The choice of an operating system must be based upon the software programs that must be used do the jobs that are required. The choice of operating systems always depends upon the applications that must be run to perform mission critical work. Then, hardware and peripherals with the required capacity to run the applications and Operating System are chosen. Only the uninformed, the folks with a moneymaking conflict-of interest and Open Source Zealots fail to follow this "industry standard" decision-making practice. Applications that School Districts must Support The applications that a school district operating system must support include: Business Office Software (Payroll, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Purchasing, Reporting to State and Federal Agencies Food Service Menu Planning, Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility and Reporting, Point of Sale (POS) systems Transportation Systems, Route Planning, Student Population Density Mapping, School Boundary Analysis and Reporting

Library Automation - Card Catalog, Book Loan and Tracking, Bar Code Generation

Grade Reporting

Reading Motivation and Student Performance Tracking

Test Score Analysis

Administrative and Counselor Access to Dashboards for all Student Achievement

Student Online Portfolio Software - With Administrative Review

Textbook Inventory, Tracking, Management and Cost Recovery Software

Test Bank Software

Master Schedule Software, and Wireless Student Schedule Queries using Handhelds

Special Education Individual Education Plan (IEP) Generation and Tracking software

The Operating System must be compatible with these and countless other applications. For example: First Grade through High School Mind Mapping

Geometry Software

Science Probeware Software

Scientific Calculators Software

Primary Grade Reading Testing and Test Scoring

Reading Motivation

Math Improvement Tracking

Remedial Reading Software

Grade Recovery Software

Computer Aided Instruction Software

The argument that the Open Source Desktop has superior specifications is mute.

And, teachers don't need a free office application program. They need seamless compatibility with mission critical applications, one-click ease of use and interoperability so that data does not have to be re-entered from one application to another.

There is a movement to provide this interoperability. This is the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF). Microsoft, Apple, big-name and educational publishers are involved. The only Open Source vendor to be SIF certified is Novell. Other Open Source folks don't appear to understand this school district need for interoperability, and the issue is ignored. One possibly the reason that Open Source Advocates ignore the only Open Source Product that is ready for prime time, Novell; is that Novell; is neither "Free or Cheap."

But, Novell; has done the homework that other Open Source vendors need to do, i.e., build a Back-End system. First Step Fundamentals But, building an infrastructure, training teachers and developing a Back-End support system only makes sense if there is absolute, irrefutable evidence and solid proof of a direct connection between Technology Integration and positive, measurable student instructional outcomes.

And, these connections to instruction must be super-substantial. The instructional outcome connections to Technology Integration must show that not only can Technology Integration obtain results, but those results must be better than the results that less-costly methods produce.

These connections cannot be vague and tenuous; or open to alternate explanations.

Of course, after billions in spending on hardware and infrastructure, asking for this connection between instruction and technology is past due.

If only school folks had attended to "First-Step Fundamentals" and had discovered the direct connection between technology and student achievement; instead of spending 15 years "chirping the tune" that "Technology assists learning, but we can't prove the fact."

It has been this failure to prove the exact role of technology in supporting student achievement that is responsible for so many "easy target Ed Tech" funding cuts. Open Source Strategies for the Real (Teaching) World To gain traction in US schools, Open Source Advocates must learn how teachers work and learn how teachers think. This requires that Open Source Advocates; Focus upon compatibility with school district mission critical software Move to full SIF Compliance

Make the software "one-click easy"

Standardize the software interface, institute a version control and upgrade system that matches the school district yearly

(summer) hard-drive-imaging and upgrade cycle

Provide the conduits to full data interchange between application and conduits for back end automation
Implications for Open Source
The primary call to action for Open Source Advocates is to "Cease and desist" in the "misinformation" campaign that confuses "already budget-distressed and stressed" school district executives by offering them false hope of technology savings.

The current "Free and Cheap" persuasive dialog is similar to sending travelers on a cruise…then leaving them to discover that the ship didn't take on fuel, that the ship is dead in the water; and, if they don't want to die upon the deep, they better figure out a way to start rowing.

Promoting a "Free and Cheap," "easy-way-out" strategy to over stressed, under involved, uninitiated…"Only give me a summary, not the specifics, because I can't get my mind around details" mindset is unethical. Of course, the Open Source Advocates are well-meaning and sincere…but "majorly uninformed."Open Source Advocate: "The Must Do"
What Open Source Advocates need to do to gain mind-share and market share in our schools is to go to schools, discover what teachers want, make sure that the technology component of the software is transparent (i.e., invisible) and make sure that each Open Source software product runs on Windows™, Apple™ and Linux.

The amount of work that our teachers are (asked, requested, badgered) into doing is incredible. Teachers have zero frustration tolerance for tinkering with software before the software will function and perform real work. And, the skills that teachers need to perform an effective job of teaching parallel what employers say about high school and college graduates…technology skills come in near the bottom of what teachers need to be effective teachers.

Until Open Source Advocates develop Open Source software applications that are "one-click-easy" SIF Compatible, and interoperable with the industry standard Windows™ Operating System, these Advocates need to do their homework.
Summary and Call to Action
Open Source Advocates should not feel insulted or defensive when they learn that Open Source is not ready for Prime Time in our schools.

Open Source software is not ready because Open Source Developers have not gone into our schools and studied what teachers and students need. They can't be expected to know what is required in the educational arena if the executives and managers in our schools don't know, haven't figured it out, and don't ask teachers, either.

It may be difficult for Open Source Advocates to accept that their clamor for "Free and Cheap" software for our schools is detrimental.

But, what they need to be advocating is...Research to show exactly what technology results in exactly what measurable student achievement

Back-End Integration and Database Development

Adequate budgeting that includes:

30% for training and professional development

30% for Back-End programming

30% for technical support

Seamless automation

Compatibility with School system Mission Critical Software

Compatibility with Microsoft™ Office

The use of Open Source software for Microsoft™ Windows

Note: Most of the Open Source software that is in use in the world is Open Source software that runs under the Windows™ Operating System.

So, Open Source Zealots must put aside their disdain for Microsoft™ and build a loving, caring and concern for the needs of teachers.

And the best way to do that is to stop filling school district executives with false hope that the magic of Technology Integration can be solved with one quick and easy fix, i.e., by adopting of "Free and Cheap" Open Source software.

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

Top Tips

Do Students Need More Technology Access? Well, as Long as its Safe!

Here are some facts from the i-Safe Incorporated…

More than 30 million children use the Internet

53 Million K-12 (Ages 5-17) students have access to the Internet

And, these children like to play games, visit social network sites, chat and visit inappropriate sites."Data collected by the National Assessment Center (NAC) during a 2003-2004 survey of more than 30,000 K through 12 students throughout the United States revealed that American kids and teens online are highly "at-risk"!Source:iSafeAdopt a School

Toolkithttp://isafe.org/imgs/pdf/i-Adopt-A-School_Toolkit.pdf

Here are other statistics:11 percent are online for more than eight hours a week

12 percent spend more time online than they do with their friends

54 percent like to be alone when "surfing" the Internet

40 percent have visited an inappropriate place on the Internet (18 percent more than once)

40 percent trust the people with whom they chat on the Internet
9.5 percent have been asked to keep their Internet friendships a secret
10 percent have been asked by someone new (a stranger) on the Internet to meet face to face
10 percent have actually met face to face with a new person (stranger) from the Internet
45 percent have copied music from the Internet
37 percent believe their parents would either express concern, restrict their Internet use, or take away their computer if they knew where they were surfing on the Internet

Source: iSafe Adopt a School Toolkit http://isafe.org/imgs/pdf/i-Adopt-A-School_Toolkit.pdf

Subsidized Safety? The US Congress funded the i-Safe organization in 2002 to protect our students. Now, the program is conducted in all 50 states, in 221 Department of Defense Dependent Schools in 13 countries. Here is the organization's mandate:

"To educate and empower young people to safely and responsibly take control of their Internet experience by providing them with the awareness and knowledge they need to recognize and avoid dangerous, destructive, or unlawful behavior, and to respond appropriately." Source: iSafe Adopt a School Toolkit http://isafe.org/imgs/pdf/i-Adopt-A-School_Toolkit.pdf

In fact, when supervision is absent, students try to conduct very un educational activities on school district computers…in classrooms, labs and libraries. Sidebar To forestall, but not eliminate this misuse of school district computer property (and tax payer money), school district install "Content Filters." In theory, these services "block" access to less-than-useful sites, and allow safe Internet access. Of course, most home computers don't have Content Filters, and even fewer homes have adult supervision. So what's the point? Content Filtering is important because access to inappropriate sites creates a major distraction in classrooms. Sure, students will go home and do exactly what they cannot do in school. But, that behavior does not provide justification for allowing the behavior at school. For example, only a few students engage in sexual activities at school, a tiny subset of the number that engage in such behavior at other venues. Because our society fails to halt the sexual explorations and conquests of children (as evidenced by the teen pregnancy rates), our schools must become more vigilant. The reason is that the safety and welfare of our students is our responsibility, not because we stand aghast at the morals of our children. And, what is worse: "A pregnant child lives under the shadow of poverty for a lifetime because they had to drop out of school?"; or, "A student drops out of school because the school district where they reside provides a sub-standard educational experience?" Causes: Different…Effects: Similar. What does i-Safe do when the organization "Adopts a School?" The i-Safe program is a strange combination of grass-roots advocacy and political "end-run operations" against our schools. The purpose of the I-Safe Toolbox is to bring "advocates" into our schools because our schools are not doing the job of protecting our children. And, these advocates are just concerned citizens. They may not even be parents. Of course, a certain kind of person is apt to be incensed enough to take action and move to build an advocacy assault on immoral Websites and Sexual predators in our society. Do we really want these folks in our schools? But, how do school leaders just say, "No" to these morally superior citizens? And the money that these folks raise to run their program…could that money be better used if it were in the hands of teachers? What may answer some of these questions might be found in the contents of the i-Safe Toolbox. Contents of the i-Safe Toolbox

The i-Safe Toolbox contains:

- Four Parts of the i-Adopt-A-School Program
- i-SAFE Curriculum
- NAC Assessments
- Sample Sponsorship Request Letter
- Event Announcement
- Sample Press Release
- Advocacy Activities
- Sample Elected Officials Letter
- Recommended Financial Guidelines
- i-Adopt-A-School Implementation Plan
- i-SAFE Inc Internet Safety Tips for Parents
- i-SAFE Inc Identity Theft Tips
- Media Sign-In Sheet
- Donor Pledge Cards
- 501(c)(3) IRS Determination Letter

Decide for yourself when you read the contents of the i-Safe Toolbox, Well Meaning, Unintended Consequences? No doubt the motivations of people of "Moral Rectitude" are right. And, everyone can agree that our students should be kept safe.

But, is the i-Safe program fated to trod the path of the D.A.R.E. Program, the "Abstinence Only" Snafu, or the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Even experienced teachers may be hard-pressed to identify one socially or politically-motivated program or initiative that has proven to be a benefit to children.

Of course the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program seems to enjoy some success. However, the focus of the RIF book giveaway is to support reading and instructional.

And, whether the i-Safe program delivers "helpers" or "hinderers" probably depends more on the specific people that join a local affiliate organization than the bylaws and mission statement of the umbrella group.

Just keep an eye out for these folks if they show up around your school grounds. And try to opt your class out of their program, if you can devise a career-protecting reason that your supervisor will buy into.

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

Quick Tips

Create a Master To-Do Log/ List System

Whether you use a Planner-Diary (such as a Day Timer™), a Personal Digital Assistant (such as a Palm Pilot", or a computer-based system such as Microsoft™ Outlook…you need a Master To-Do Log/ List System. Why?

The reason that you need a Master To-Do Lot/ List System is so that activities and tasks don't fall through the cracks. When you keep track of everything that you must do, you decrease the amount of stress that you experience…especially the kind of stress from being reminded by a supervisor that the three or four hour task that you forgot about is due tomorrow morning, first thing!

The second part of the system is the To-Do List, or, better yet, the "Take Action on Priorities" List. Components of the System The Master To-Do Log/ List System must be flexible, and you need to customize this system to how you work.

The crucial strategy is to ensure that: Everything that is important is Listed

Highest Priority Items are "Acted Upon" first

Urgent Items don't take over and keep High Priority Items from happening The Master To-Do Log The first part of the System is a Master To-Do Log. This lists all the tasks that you have to do. You write everything that you have to do on this Log form.

This is the list that almost no one uses. The reason, because it gets filled up with recurring tasks. And for a teacher, the amount of work that is required is overwhelming.

The useful Master To-Do list is kept trim and lean.

What this means is that routines, habits, standard methods, scheduled tasks do not get written on this list.

For example, items that a teacher would not bother writing on this list might be: Taking class attendance and entering attendance data in an attendance or grade book

Making breakfast, getting dressed, combing or brushing your hair, driving to work

Picking up your child from After-School Care

Checking E-mail and Postal Mail

Fixing dinner in the microwave oven, pouring milk on a bowl of cereal

You get the idea

On the other hand, it might be useful to add trivial tasks such as:

Return videos to the library (because the fine is \$2.00 per day, each)

Keeping your medical, dental or psychiatric appointment because there is a charge for missed appointments

Showing up in court to contest that traffic or parking ticket, showing up for jury duty

Purchasing gifts and cards for birthdays and anniversaries of significant others

Etc.

The challenge is to list everything without overdoing the list making. You need to take action on items, rather than spending your time just writing and copying lists.

It might help if you categorize the items on the Master To-Do Log. The To-Do List Maintaining the Master To-Do Log is bearable until the list becomes so long that you begin to feel that you will never catch up.

That is the reason for coding the Log items.

Some systems use an "A-B-C 1-2-3" system. This places tasks in the A1 category (Important), down to the C-3 category (Low Priority, Can Put Off until Later).

For teachers, the problem with this approach is that teachers have little discretion over their time. For example, tasks can be Important or Unimportant, Urgent or Not Urgent.

This leads to a situations where teachers must do Unimportant but Urgent tasks, while putting off Important tasks that are not Urgent. (Absolutely the wrong approach.)

A third system is the "Is it worth it" System. With this system, you just take items from the Master To-Do Log if they answer the question, "Is doing this worth it?" The answer must be, "Yes!" And, not a pint-sized, pipsqueak "yes," but a shout-it-out, "YES!" To-Do List Management The To-Do list is not written the day when you want to accomplish things, it

is written the day before…sometimes a few days before.

Write out Action Items. Try to identify 20 take-action tasks per day (or less). Taking action on between 15 and 20 items is about all that you will be able to accomplish.

It's easier to start the school day if you already have a written To-Do List. This allows you to start completing your list when you are fresh and when your mental power of concentration is most focused.

Later in the day, after stress and excitement take their toll, your energy level and your ability to concentrate diminish, and your productivity decreases. Save routine tasks (such as grading homework papers) for this time since you don't need high levels of focus or skill to accomplish such trivial tasks. Sidebar Of course, you should avoid assigning trivial homework, but grading the homework should be easy on the teacher. And, cross the completed item off the To-Do List. You may enjoy the satisfaction in seeing the large number of tasks that you have completed in a week or two.

And, that satisfaction is one reason that paper lists often leave you with a greater feeling of accomplishment than when you use an electronic task tracking device or program.

Crossing off each action item leaves you feeling like you have accomplished something. What about Left-Over Items? So what happens if I have one, two or more left over action items?

Just put them at the top of the list for the next day.

And, if you like the feeling of accomplishment, you can add these tasks to another page. The flip of the page can give you a sense of accomplishment.

Lesson Plans Inadequate?

Teachers often believe that Lesson Plans are enough to drive efficiency, but the lesson plan is a guide to what students are going to do to learn.

The lesson plan document is your communication with your supervisor, and a legal record of your classroom activities.

What the To-Do Log and the To-Do List do is ensure that you keep all the important To-Do items in plain sight and in reach. Your Beliefs about Time Management Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists have their place in your time management strategy. However, external factors such as these tools can distract from the internal change strategies that can streamline daily planning tasks.

Two factors that impact your efficiency as much (or more) than Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists are: Our Beliefs Our Intention

Our beliefs either limit or expand our ability to get things done.

And, how we view time has an incredible impact upon how productive we become.

Future Classroom Toolkit articles will explore the impact of belief upon planning and time management.

For now, it is sufficient to explore beliefs that are more useful to have, i.e., beliefs that… Provide flexibility rather than constraints

Expand capacities rather than restrict abilities

Identify opportunities rather than highlight difficulties

Empower our action rather than restrain our behavior

Flex our capabilities rather than handcuff our strengths

Promote our maturity and confidence rather than prop up our child-like dependencies

And, our intentions have a power that brings situations and outcomes to fruition in ways that our plans only hope to achieve.

So, examine your beliefs and your intentions to determine ways to empower your actions.

For example, replace beliefs like…"I have to…" with "I choose to…"

"I wish I could…" with "I intend to…"

"If only…" with "I want to…"

"There is nothing I can do…" with "I can consider these options…"

And consider ideas and belief that you hold, examine ones that fail to achieve what you want, and replace those ideas and beliefs with more functional options.

Easier said than done?

Actually, surprisingly easy if you open your mind as an adult and question the limits and limitations that you learned as a child.

What you have to gain is a brighter, open, freer viewpoint that allows you to manage your Master To-Do and To-Do List with greater flexibility.

And flexibility accomplishes plenty. See for yourself.

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

Teacher Resources

Open Source Resource Switchboard

Classroom Toolkit is participating in the National Educational Computing Conference (NECC). This is in the EduBloggerCon and Open Source sections. The demonstration for low-cost Open Source tools for teachers is available Online.

The issue of Online tools for teachers is different than the issue of "Free and Cheap" software for use in the our public schools.

See our article, The Case Against Open Source in this issue of Classroom Toolkit What does the "Demo" Demonstrate? The Open Source Resource Demonstration shows what teachers can do with Online hosting and "Free," "one-click" installation.

The application programs that are installed for this "Demo" include:

Blogs: (Blogger, Serendipity, Wordpress;)

Forum: (Simple Machine Forum;)

Content Management System (the Switchboard - Joomla!)

Learning Management System (Moodle!)

Wiki (PHPWiki)

These Online "Demo" resources took "one click" to install, and were provided without extra charge by the Web Hosting Company. Domain registration cost \$9.91 per year, or less, and Web hosting with automatic installation of application programs like these (and many more) cost as little as \$4.00 USD per month.

The Switchboard application (Open Source Content Management System - Joomla!) links and launches the other applications.

Here are the links; Open Source Resource Switchboard

Open Source Resource Blog

Open Source Resource Forum

Open Source Resource Wiki

Open Source Resource Tutorial The Real Purpose of the "Demo" Site Teachers need a demonstration of the easy, online capacity as much as they need the successor to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

What this "Demo" site is for is to deliver a workshop on what it takes to build a Technology Integration Program, and what Open Source Advocates must do in the way of "changing the tune that they sing to school district executives" about "Free and Cheap" solutions.

Our students deserve quality programs, not half-baked, minimally funded, doomed to failure schemes to save money. Financial Wisdom: "Either fund a program fully, or kill it in its tracks."

Last year, Classroom Toolkit produced a series of articles for Open Source at NECC that focused upon marketing Open Source Solutions.

These articles comprise most of the articles posted in the Open Source Resource Blog. This year, the focus is upon finding a method for documenting the direct relationship between technology and observable, measurable student outcomes. (Yes, maybe even test scores.)

Open Source Solutions will remain stalled in our schools until school districts get the Technology Integration component functioning. Until now, Technology Integration has been; Focused upon technology, not instruction

Focused on technology specifications, not teachers' needs

Under funded

Missing the huge training and professional development funding that it needs

Missing the even more huge Back-End programming and "one-click" integration funding that it needs

Null Hypothesis Experimental design requires that we use a "Null Hypothesis" because we cannot prove that something exists.

Instead, we disprove that something does not exist.

The Classroom Toolkit presentation contains a slide show, an online presentation, a wireframe, and mind-maps.

Here are the links: Open Source Resource Switchboard

Presentation Wireframe (Graphic Overview)

Technology Integration: Fire, Aim, Ready! Slide Show

Experiencing New Technology Integration Mind Maps

Exploring Emotional, Social and Motor Learning: Technology Integration Mind Maps

Personalizing and Applying Technology Integration Mind Maps

Synthesizing and Structuring Technology Integration for Measurable Student Outcomes

Evaluating Technology Integration Mind Maps

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

Teacher Survival Strategies

The Skills and Technology of "Getting Down on Yourself"

There is a skill and a technology for "Getting down on yourself."

What does this mean? First, "Getting down on yourself" is a kind of intrapersonal scolding that you perform to get yourself to do better the next time;

Or, to get yourself to do something that you failed to do;

Or, to get yourself to start something that you have been putting off, or avoiding.

So, what distinguishes "Getting down on yourself" from a "pep talk?"

"Pep talks" are positive, "You can do it," "It's a piece of cake," encouragements that you plant as you are attempting a task. Of course, the task must represent a challenge, otherwise, if the job is actually that easy, the only reason for the pep talk is because you don't believe in your abilities.

What distinguishes a "Getting down on yourself" episode is the harshness or severity of the internal dialog. The dialog also contains elements of a put down, complaint, criticism (maybe a reflection of the way your disciplining parent talked to you). (Maybe your reaction to yourself, now, is similar to to your reaction to your parents, then.)

These dialogs can be characterized by self-talk statements like…"How could you be so (stupid, dumb, idiotic)…"

"I can't believe you did that."

"Where are your brains?"

"You idiot, you should have…"

"You should have known better than to have…"

"What in the world were you thinking?"

"How in the world did you expect to __ if you _?"

Etc., ad infinitum…SidebarCome to think of it, this is the same language that has been heard in the hallway, spoken by teachers "kind" enough to scold students privately, or through the closed door for teachers that "Have had it" with one particular "thorn-in-their-paw" student.

Of course, this particular kind of incident is relegated to the "old days" of corporal punishment and "paddle to the seat of the pants" justice. Such scenarios would never be perpetrated in modern, enlightened schools…at least not when students (or their parents) can sue for infringements upon the student's civil rights. And, just like the berated, belittled, recalcitrant student will live to offend another day; un phased by the teacher's diatribe; so too will the stubborn and obstinate part of yourself "backslide, backbite, even backstab" and create problems for your future success.

Treat yourself Kindly when you "Get Down on Yourself"

Treating yourself in a "mean manner" is ineffective (except for the devoted masochist, but that is another problem).

Mean, stern, harsh-discipline-type words and "get tough self-talk" fail to create the supportive internal environment that you need to motivate yourself.

One clue, "If you would have been embarrassed to say out loud to others what you are saying to yourself in private, then watch your intrapersonal dialog, too.

But, involve all parts of yourself, your positively and negatively motivated selves, in a productive, negotiated settlement. Allow "win-win-win-win" management of your self, and gain the internal cooperation that you need to engage for your success.

Building a kindly attitude to all portions of yourself will "take the edge off" your "Getting down on yourself."

And who knows, you might come to like yourself as much as you like that loveable crew that you call your students.

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

Professional Self-Development

Make Cognitive Rebuilding a Summer Professional Development Priority

Summer tasks center upon cognitive rebuilding, especially at the end of a school year, or at the end of a college degree marathon. And, this rebuilding is "cognitive, conceptual" i.e., in the realm of memory, idea integration and consciousness. The building metaphor fits…but, if the wind-down from the stress and attention of the school year is followed by relaxation and release; insights and ideas can grow. After an academic and cognitive year… relaxation and reverie seem like a caravan that requires respite and recharging at an oasis.

The cognitive rebuilding is "foundation work." It is the cognitive restructuring needed to shore up the underpinnings of thought and professional performance.

This building should avoid research and study. Focus and concentration are inferior to musing, daydreaming, puzzling over memories, napping, and incubating meaning.

The idea (or blueprint) for building this cognitive foundation is simmer and stew the experiences of the prior school year, making meaningful connections, anchoring ideas to the foundation that support them.

In this way, when the foundation is renovated, remodeled with a fuller immersion and enriching experience, the professional cognitive framework is enriched, too.

This process is a collaborations and integration of internal professional talents and skill-states. Not Generally NoticedThe layering of complexity during the integration of knowledge, skill and ability is a naturally occurring process that results (over time and through application and practice) into an integrations that can be called an "expert" level of performance.

This process creaks along, usually unnoticed due to the flurry, scurry and stress of the daily grind's hubbub.

But, if you can sit back, relax, catch your breath, and just think-feel-be; you can reunite the visceral, mental, emotional learning.

The process accelerates, streamlines itself, if you avoid imposing pre-sets; and if you pose "What if's?", "What caused?", and "What happened?" questions…Instead of trying to squeeze or contort (or reject outlying information

that doesn't fit the pat answer), instead of trying to align experience to the "current jargon-theory" about education; listen to your experience, and really learn about how to teach, communicate, relate to your students.

For example, at one time, chemical elements were considered to be a simple atom. Later, atoms were understood to be composed of three building blocks (i.e., protons, neutrons and electrons). Now, the building blocks are known to be composed of building blocks of their own…and some parts are even defined as left-handed, right-handed…and there are hints that certain building blocks may "pop in and out" of the material universe. Matter once was simple, i.e., it existed or not. Now, there may be "dark matter," "anti-matter" "proto-matter," and who knows?

Light was once a beam, then a particle wave, then both. Light was thought to be a phenomena, but now evidence suggests that light seems to respond (be influenced, interact) be self-aware of the people who are observing it. And at one time, Light was the absolute, fastest movement. Now, evidence suggests that the entire observable Universe grew to 85% of its current size in a few billionths (13) of a second. This means that the first light from one side of the infant Universe would take hundreds of millions of years to reach meet the light from the other side, and hundreds of millions of years to reach the far side. Clearly, this "super-bang" process occurred faster than the speed of light. So, when older and existing theories no longer satisfy; constellations of thought and experience "morph" into theories that provide more useful explanations…explanations that provide greater accuracy for driving application, performance and achievement. A Contemplative, Meditative, Reverie Process Contemplation, meditation, reverie, daydreams…these activities (altered states of awareness?) contain the spark of creativity, the current of intuition, the incubation of ideas that knits, sews, folds, hems and resizes the cognitive foundation that next year's activities will be build on.

And, rather than stressing over how the fabric of these thoughts and insights will come together, the gentle art of intention is all that is required.

Intending that insight and understanding will resolve in the images, sounds, flashes and prompts of imagination is sufficient to launch this innate capacity.

Sufficient that is, if the process is free, unhindered, allowed to range wherever, allowed to roam without tether, untied to theory and previous learning.

And with the freedom to become whatever these open-ended thought processes create, the magic of ideas takes form in specific insights and objective reality.

In summary: Relax, trust your internal capacity for creativity, insight, intuition and problem-solving.

You may amaze yourself at your ideas. And, you won't let yourself down.

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

Perfecting Personal Talents

Creativity: Fountain of Ideas…Temple of Awe

Left-brain exercises, with vise-like squeezes of words and ideas, struggle to cage a crafty and elusive creativity. But the tools designed to capture creativity; i.e., words and language, prove to be elastic bars of putty and smoke. Creativity remains aloof and a large, dancing inside, dancing outside, dancing around and through the nets that language sets to trap and capture it.

But why constrain and constrict and mold what's fresh and free? Compartmentalizing creativity, dissecting its processes…as though it was an object, turns its active and dynamic energy into stagnant short circuits, converts exciting into boring, transforms alive and growing into frozen and dried out.

An animal, alive and pacing is creative…a taxidermy (mummy of its former self) is the equivalent of creativity defined and analyzed.

Creativity is like a barnstorming--bi-wing airplane…shuddering, dangling, spinning and thrilling. Definitions of creativity are like commercial airlines with flight paths, schedules, control towers and taxi lanes.

Of course, no one wants the jumbo jet's landing gears to be tickling trees on the airport approach. Sparking run-ins with fighter-interceptor Top-Guns over military air space is equally to be avoided. So, avoid danger. But, freezing and capturing creativity by taking the over-safe route, by avoiding heart-pounding, white-knuckle, out-of-breath exhilaration is the boring path.

On the other hand, simile and metaphor fail to save lives when simple commands such as, "Stop! Turn Right, Duck!" are called for. Times of real danger call for stock phrases, drilled routines and canned responses. Real Experience Creativity bubbles up from a primal, intuitive, organic spring within our conscious (and unconscious) experiences.

Creativity is like a well. You can tap into it, prime a pump (incubate ideas and solutions) and dip out refreshment. You can also stop it up, poison it, pressurize it, and let it go to waste after you have drained it.

And just as a spring or underground river forms from a myriad of cracks, fissures, pools and reservoirs, sinkholes and cisterns; creativity wells up from myriad constellations of impulses, images, memories and intuitions within human consciousness.

And just as different methods find water…dowsers, test wells, study of hydrology land forms, blind luck…so too many methods turn the creativity spigot to the flow-position.

How each teacher stakes claim to the wellspring of creativity that lies within; how creativity surges with a desire to spout fountains, geysers or hydrants of creative expression; this is our unique stamp…our creative expression.

How each person stakes claim to the wellspring of creativity that is within represents access, but not source.

The articles in subsequent issues of the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter will examine these creative abilities…from many angles, from views with multiple perspectives…discoveries sounded as shouts, echoes, whispers, or thunder crashes.

Prepare for stories, sagas odysseys, explorations and sojourns into the unlimited abilities of psychic and creative consciousness.

Your journey to creative expression begins within. So, let's begin, now.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Perfecting Personal Talents at 01:00