

Thursday, July 31, 2008

News Nuggets

Fracturing Teacher Trust with Forked-Tongue Politics

"Speaking with forked tongue" and "talking out of both sides of the mouth" is standard fare from politicians. So are promises to teachers for additional money and job support. And, what politicians give, they can take away. A recent example showing how the precarious position that teachers salaries and salary bonuses (stipends) teeters upon the will and good graces of politicians surfaced in Florida.

In Florida, teachers were promised stipends if they went through the expense and ordeal of becoming nationally certified.

Here is what it takes to become a Nationally Certified Teacher…SidebarNational Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

NBPTS Assessment

NBPTS Fee Schedule (\$2,565.00 USD)

Note: Some Florida school districts did reimburse teachers for the hefty NBPTS assessment fees

But, hard to come by, harder to hold; Florida teachers that took the extra classes and paid for the certification exam, are being short changed. (What else is new?)

SidebarFrom the St. Petersburg

Times…http://www.sptimes.com/2007/11/13/Hernando/A_plum_for_6_who_teac.shtml

From The Ledger…

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20071216/NEWS/712160423>

And sometimes, teachers fork over large amounts of cash (and spend valuable personal time) studying to earn additional certifications.

When the promise to give teachers more pay for certifications meets reality, someone is certain to be hurt and disappointed in the "jilted" promises that ensue…and it won't be the politicians.

Why would teachers invest time, energy and money to become certified? Did promise of more money make them do it? No.

Most teachers realize that additional college classroom seat time is next to irrelevant in their actual, minute-by-hour-by-day teaching activities. Teachers improve teaching skill by teaching in the same way that students improve reading skill by reading.

But, teachers want to improve their professionalism and their status. The money is not sufficient to drive teachers down the long road to certification success, but the promise of more money probably tips motivations that are on the fence over to the "I'll do it" side of the internal debate.

Sidebar" In Florida, board-certified teachers earn an annual bonus of about \$4,000, and can double that by working as mentors.

A handful of districts go even further, offering cash bonuses to lure board-certified teachers from other districts or out of state. Some of those are large counties like Miami-Dade, which pays a one-time stipend of \$7,500, or Duval and Broward, which offer \$2,500 and \$2,100 per year respectively, according to the board.

But tiny Nassau County, with an enrollment of about 11,000 students, pays a \$1,500 stipend, and 35,000-student Lake County pays \$500 a year.

Hernando pays no extra stipend, and officials acknowledged they might be missing out on a useful tool to recruit and retain qualified teachers."

Source: Tampa Bay .Comhttp://www.sptimes.com/2007/11/13/Hernando/A_plum_for_6_who_teac.shtmlIn the State of Florida, what teachers thought was a "promise of marriage" turned out to be a "one night stand," or maybe if they receive some money, "a long weekend of romance…before being dumped."

What the Florida Legislature is up to amounts to an "annulment."

But, how do teachers feel when they are "dumped?"

Perhaps words that seem acceptable for modern, prime-time television (but are still less than acceptable in our classrooms) might describe the the new personal lows felt by some Florida teachers who trusted in the promises of their political leaders. Should Classroom Toolkit Publish this News Item? The danger that politicians (and their school district cronies) in other areas of the country might latch on to this "annul stipends solution" to ameliorate their budget ills, and sabotage other stipend programs.

Maybe in tough economic times, the choice between gasoline and electricity, heating fuel and a five-day school week comes down to scuttling stipends for…Special Education Teachers

Bilingual Teachers

Gifted and Talented Teachers

Coaches (except for the money-making men's football and basketball coaches) Come to think of it, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) focuses upon "highly qualified" teachers. So, why not make a Master's Degree the entry level for teachers?

This way, teachers with a Master's Degree wouldn't deserve stipends. Even better, teachers with only a Bachelor's Degree could enjoy a cut in pay.

And those PhD's and EdD's? Their degree was probably only theoretical or statistical...nothing practical for raising test scores...so they wouldn't mind forgoing stipends for their terminal degree, would they? Due Process, Hold Harmless and Property Rights Ordinary contract rights would not allow school district officials to dump stipends at will. There are Due Process and Property Rights, and clauses about Holding Rights Holders Harmless.

This usually means something like dropping the money that new folks might get, but not reducing the money that in-place employees receive.

The "loop hole" in this flawed thinking is when a State Legislature changes the law. This absolves school district leaders of what would ordinarily be a crime (and criminal intent).

But, politicians and school district officials who damage the professionalism of our schools should be open to class action lawsuits.

Contracts with teachers should be a commitment to a perpetual right. Political mismanagement or political meddling should entitle teachers to a class action recourse (preferable at public expense).

Money spent in lawsuits, legal fees and lost work time would be better spent by increasing teacher pay, anyway. The Danger of Speaking Out Job Endangerment Unfortunately, teacher talent, outstanding results and exemplary past evaluations are insufficient shields for executive-directed, rock-bottom evaluations the next time evaluations roll around.

Joining a class action lawsuit could mean retribution that costs more money than the loss of the puny stipend.

But since teacher salaries are low, the loss of a few dollars in stipend money seems huge...just ask spouses and children of teachers how many pleasures they are denied because family funds are limited. All of this leaves teachers feeling like the naive gal who wakes up to find herself alone in a motel room, with bus fare pinned to her undergarments...

Of course, with politicians as bedfellows, what else can you expect except "day-after" remorse, lowered self-esteem, a withering sense of professionalism, and depressed energy levels.

A bit of indignant anger and "vent-able" hostility might be appropriate, too.

But, in a political climate where education "takes a back seat" to most other issues, a teacher's best hope might be a gentle, collegial shoulder to cry on.

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

Short Article

Techie Advocacy: The Missing Relationship

Techie folks would like to advocate for Technology Integration in our schools because they believe that technology holds wonderful potential and promise for our students. Techie folks believe in hardware, software and infrastructure. And, they believe that the technology will continue to improve.

Techies also believe (erroneously) that, since students like technology so much, and since technology is easy for students to use; that the technology, by itself, can drive instruction.

Unfortunately, Techie folks believe more in machines and magnetic electron blips than they do in people... especially teachers.

And, it is this dichotomy that presents the greatest barrier, a wall that keeps Techie folks from delivering a service to education. Adversarial Relationship - Undercurrents Techie and teachers may appear cordial and collegial, but the undercurrents of distrust pervade their communication.

For one thing, the Techies tend to blame teachers for being reactionary, resistant and recalcitrant in integrating technology into instruction.

On the other hand, teachers tend to blame Techies for being out of touch, for being smitten with hard-to-use software and whiz-bang hardware, and for being the source of more work. Unfortunately, that extra work never seems to result in greater student achievement or improved test scores. Of course, just what the "Integration of Technology" means, specified in observable and measurable terms is seldom specified by either the Techies or teachers. And everyone argues as though they alone know what it means. Technology - in a Naturally Weak Position: Advantage - Teachers But, it is the Techies that must change their position and adapt to teachers' beliefs.

The reason: Teachers can exist just fine without doing anything, without changing, without using this expensive technology.

It is the Techies that have to change their attitudes, change their beliefs, change their view of teachers, and change their misguided feelings of superiority. Techie arguments clamoring for teacher change (change to the Techie way of thinking) reside on the downhill side of a steep up-slope.

Put another way, when Techies pitch good stuff, they have to shovel it uphill to reach teachers. But, when teachers dump garbage, they just let it rain down on the Techies.

But, in the real world, the "good stuff" that Techies have to shovel so strenuously if they wish it to reach teacher…looks like garbage to teachers…and teachers are content to let it flow back down (untouched) to the Techies…with the rest of the garbage.

To carry the metaphor still further (beyond everyone's level of tolerance)…

No matter how much Techies attempt to perfume garbage and package it with bows, teachers just have to let it slide.

It is as though teachers have adopted the motto, "Beware of Techies bearing gifts."

Previous Techie Advocates left gifts that breached the protective ivory tower walls and laid waste to teachers' free time, shattered teachers' peace and calm with unsavory stress.

Now, ever alert and vigilant; teachers are not about to let Technology Advocates pull another dirty trick like foisting technology on them.

Teachers's advice to other teachers, "When you see the Techie coming, beware!"

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

Feature Article

Total Physical Response: Building "Verbal-Physical" Connections that take Hands-On Learning to a New Level

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a strategy that was "borrowed" from Speech Therapy, Special Education and Foreign Language Instruction. These folks use the technique on "harder-to-teach-than-ordinary" student populations because the technique is effective. Because the technique is effective in teaching "higher maintenance" and "riskier" students (they are considered "At Risk" aren't they), the methods might seem "elementary," "less than sophisticated," and a notch or two below highest academic standards.

But professional teachers, confident, alert to any strategy that gives students an edge in learning seem unafraid to adopt the TPR Technique.

Of course, strategies that are delivered "one-on-one" or with a pair of students for one or two periods a week by a Speech Clinician need a bit of adaptation if they are to be effective with 22 Fourth Graders or 27 Eighth Graders. And, what about some "ultra-sophisticated Twelfth Grade "know-it-alls?"

These feeble and flimsy excuses (from recalcitrant teachers) for not employing TPR strategy fail to "hold water" because students at top-named colleges, studying under renown professors in accelerated language courses are more "sophisticated" than than the high school crowd. And these students learn by the use of TPR methods.

The TPR Strategy can be connected to other high-profile teaching strategies including: Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Multiple Intelligences

Hands-On, Project-Based Learning

The Mutual Storytelling Technique

Creative Drama

Community Service Learning TPR fits or dovetails into many models, including: Partners in Learning

Meta Cognition and the Construction of Knowledge

Role Playing

Basic Thinking Skills

Enhancing Creativity

Learning from Presentation

Learning Styles Sidebar See the Classroom Toolkit article that describes the Mutual Storytelling Technique in greater

detail. Not a "Cookie-Cutter" Strategy A strategy that consistently delivers productive learning outcomes from

Kindergarten to adult learners in in formal settings…a strategy that appears to be part of the process that toddlers and preschoolers use to acquire language…must look different for students in each age group.

So, what would we expect to see happening in a classroom that was being lead by an "ordinary" (non-special populations) teacher? Well, a lot more than choral reading or "Listen and Repeat" group chanting.

We would see props, physical action…as in acting out a behavior that exemplifies the words, meaning or concepts that are being learned. For example: I ride.

I ride a horse.

I ride a bicycle.

I ride a train.

I ride a tornado (like Pecos Bill). Or…I paint a glorious sunset on a canvas.

I paint my bedroom with Gothic Black paint.

I paint gang slogans on rest room walls.

I paint word pictures of a sunset to impress my sweetheart.

I paint the sky with a magic brush attached to an airplane. The actual content is not important. What is important is the pairing of ideas and concepts with words and pantomime action.

Other techniques include skits, mini-dramas, plays. But, the more that the TPR process retreats from active individual

participation to passive group observation; the more diluted the learning effects and measurable outcomes. Engaged Brains at Work Even oppositional-defiant students who resist following directions that are given by a teacher have to be so disturbed as to be unteachable if they cannot accept instructions given by themselves. In other words, students that innately desire self-mastery and personal competence self-reward learning with intrinsic payoffs, and these self-rewards are built into the TPR process.

Besides, auditory and speech sensation channels are activated when students talk out words and descriptions for what they are doing, while they are performing or mimicking the action.

And, making normally invisible thinking concrete and tangible assists teachers in assessing their skill in teaching. See for a Graphic Organizer that represents the progression from Physical Models to Abstract Words. This means that students have to talk during class. And, this talk needs to be about the curriculum.

The flaw in the "Be quiet and listen to the teacher pontificate" tradition (that was launched with the advent of factory schools during the last century) is that most students "hear" only the first and last words that the teacher sprouts; unless those words are humor, sexy, angry, lewd or obscene. (Students pay attention to the bad stuff, and learn inappropriate content with magnificent, one-trial learning ease.)

The uniform voice of a lecture or academic discussion; passive absorption; fails to activate the alert centers of the human brain. Uniform stimulation (input) deactivates the brain at the "Reticular Activating System" (RAS) level. For a discussion of the "Reticular Activating System" (RAS) and its effect upon learning see; A Language Learning Secret: Reset your Brain's Filter... TPR strategies are one antidote to the learning brain's RAS Filter because the student is providing lots of changes in the the learning environment, and the student's brain remains alert. Fear of Disorder, Disapproval and Public Censure Modern, lockstep instruction thrives upon physical control and an unnatural silence that is only broken by the incessant droning of "teacher talk."

So, while a teacher may agree, in theory, with the concept of students repeating words and commands aloud to themselves; the thought of a score of students (more or less doesn't matter) converting from "subtle, whispering in the ear" coaches into championship game cheerleaders sends ice-daggers through a teacher's spine.

"What if the students get out of control?" is the main fear. "Will I be able to settle them down afterwards?"

Answer: This depends upon the teacher, depends upon whether the teacher communicates expectations, communicates student benefits and how the teacher solicits positive student cooperation.

Dictatorial teachers, rule-enforcement-only teaching attitudes; and a belief in the "Students should be seen, herded, and not heard" mentality are strategies fraught with landmines and doomed to failure.

Careful rapport building with students, selling students on the idea that learning will become easier, more enjoyable, telling stories of other students or other classes that accelerated learning by means of the TPR method work well.

Another strategy: Pick several students, even single these students out for a reward. What you are interested in is connecting TPR activities with fun and reward. This is an application of the "Hawthorne Effect". The Hawthorne Effect is often referred to as the "specialness-feeling" that develops when a group of individuals is singled out for special treatment. Classroom Toolkit referenced the Hawthorne Effect in several previous newsletters; Classroom Layout and Design: It's not too Late "We've Lost that Lovin' Feelin" Staying Well with Guided Imagery But the goal is not to make the "volunteered" students feel special or even to them to learn more (although both should occur), the goal is to get other students to want in on a "good thing." Another goal is to allow the "singled out students" to deliver "unscripted testimonials" to the other students.

When students are telling each other that the TPR classroom procedure is rewarding, then the social group convinces any "prone-to-stray" student to "Not Mess Up!"

When students ask to participate, and when students convince others to cooperate, then teachers maintain a positive influence upon the class, and order is maintained at a high level of cordiality and freedom. Once teachers recognize the power, flexibility and effectiveness; not to mention the positive learning outcomes that come from implementing Total Physical Response (TPR) strategies; they can develop plenty of creative ways to use the technique for delightful and imaginative instruction.

Develop a strategic plan for adding TPR to your dynamic instructional "bag of tricks."

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

Quick Tips

Safe Instructional Videos: Too much to ask for?

TeacherTube; provides student-safe instruction videos. Better yet, most school district content filters recognize TeacherTube; as a safe Internet destination.

Access TeacherTube; at; TeacherTube; For the isolated school district content filter that blocks access to TeacherTube; we describe a way to download videos and save them to a CD or USB drive. Here is what you need;

First download the software that you need to manage this process:

Download the software

Second, download a free FLV Player from Applian

Download the FLV Player, or this Recommended One from CNet.

Note: These FLV Players may install a Toolbar if you just select the defaults. Be sure to uncheck the Install Toolbar options!

Next, run the Xilisoft Download YouTube Video application

Enter the YouTube URL in the Xilisoft application.

Save the output.

Play the video.

In addition, TeacherTube offers a companion product, Teacher Tube Desktop (in the Beta testing phase). This is a social networking tool.

TeacherTube and TeacherTube Desktop provide cost-free access to over 25,000 educational videos. And hundreds more videos are added by teacher members each month (as compared to the thousands that are added to YouTube; each second.

But, TeacherTube videos are child-safe, unlike Google's two, big video-serving behemoths.

Here is how innocent searches on YouTube go astray.

A recent search for the term "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" turned up multiple renditions

Besides the obvious interpretations by Madonna, versions by Chinese, French, English, Ukrainian singers were available. Great so far!

Since the goal was to find a variety of accents as a demonstration for a foreign language course, this set of videos provides an outstanding instructional resource

Where the project went haywire was when YouTube began to suggest other videos that might be of interest.

And, instead of maintaining the "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" search term, the YouTube system began supplying searches based on words such as the singer's name.

So, let's say that the French singer's name was Sheila Souffle. The YouTube algorithm, in all its wisdom, serves up a video about a "dish" named Sheila. But, Sheila is not a turkey with dressing, and not someone whose little piggies are in a blanket, or restrained by a wrap of any kind. Sheila is in-the-raw, au natural.

The reason that TeacherTube videos are safe is that real people monitor the content on TeacherTube.

Not so on YouTube where so many videos are submitted that Google would have to employ hundreds of thousands of reviewers to keep up with the pace. If that were to happen, the videos would not remain "free." Strengths of TeacherTube's content can be used by instructors.

But, if you do the math, you discover that 25,000 videos is a "drop in the bucket" compared to the needs of the curriculum.

However, this is a great start for a company that has only been in business for a bit over a year.

TeacherTube also partners with content-owners such as the American Institute for History Education.

Unfortunately, finding the "right video" is fraught with the same challenge as finding the "right lesson plan" on the Internet. That is: is it quicker and easier to create your own if you have a structured, modular plan.

With videos, you just need the ability to cut, edit and trim videos that you find so that the segments fit your curriculum; also to ensure that unwanted segments never reach your students' eyes and ears.

Of course, video editing is time consuming, tedious, even with superior tools.

So, summer is the time to get a head start on adding video to your instructional repertoire.

The other challenge with creating instructional video is that huge amounts of content are required for a standard (180 student attendance day) school year.

That is the reason that TeacherTube's 25,000 videos seem like an "echo in an empty bucket." TeacherTube also provides a number of "Channels" i.e., curriculum areas.

Visit the TeacherTube Channels here.

But, if a teacher created the thousands of videos that would be required to drive a year-long course, this collection of intellectual property would be worth a lot (really lot) of money. Even more money, if that collection of intellectual property increased demonstrable, observable student achievement.

Few teachers (and fewer school districts) are willing to share a year's worth of instructional content with the world without financial remuneration.

This leaves teacher scrambling across the Internet to acquire instructional content, and makes TeacherTube a rapidly rising destination for time and resource-strapped teachers. TeacherTube Desktop The TeacherTube Desktop is an interactive environment. This program works with a suite of applications, including a video server system that can manage a video user community.

This Web 2.0 application allows teachers to add any of the TeacherTube videos, plus a slew of gadgets (Widgets

And all this requires only the ability to browse the Web, and the ability to upload, copy and paste.

TeacherTube Desktop is in Beta test mode, and offering free accounts to the first 1,000 teachers that sign up.

Sign up at Teacher Tube Desktop High-End Video Like Techsmith's offer of a trial of Snagit 9, Xilisoft offers a trial of its converter software.

Xilisoft offers an army of specialized converters, but for less than the price of two specialized converters, you

can get a multi-function suite of tools.

Here is what the Xilisoft Video Converter Ultimate product can do… Main Functions: Convert between almost all popular video formats, such as MPEG-4, AVI, H.264, DivX, XviD, RM, FLV, SWF, MOV, 3GP, WMV, etc.

Convert between almost all audio formats, such as MP3, AAC, AC3, M4A, WAV, WMA, etc.

Convert video to almost all audio formats, such as MP3, AAC, AC3, M4A, WAV, WMA, etc.

Convert pictures of certain formats to video formats like AVI, RM, FLV, SWF, MOV, 3GP, WMV, WAV

Extract pictures from video files, and outputting them as JPG, PNG, GIF, BMP, SWF, etc.Key Features:Offer powerful video effects editing functions, including crop video size, edit video effects, add and adjust video subtitle, and add video watermark; 2.Clip any video or audio segment to convert, and merge them into one

Allow to convert one source file to several, or merge several source files into one

Can preview and compare source video and video customized

The snapshot provides you with image snapping, and also you can grab picture by setting the duration

Provides rich profiles for you to choose, and enables you to customize and save your profile for future use

Can customize the size of output audio and video file for different devices

Provides batch conversion and multithreading to convert multiple files at the same time

Can run in background for more efficiencyTo download the free trial…Xilisoft™ Video Converter Ultimate Free Trial

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

Top Tips

Snagit 9: Streamlined Screen Capture and Graphics Grabber…Nothing Else Comes Close

Techsmith™ released Snagit 9 this past month. So, rush to purchase this program at the educational discount price.

To download a trial version of Snagit 9, Select here…

Snagit was a "state of the art" screen capture utility before Version 9 was released. Now, the program leaves every other program of its kind in its wake.

SidebarSnagit 9 use the Windows™ Vista-style Ribbon Bar, and demonstrates what Windows Vista can do.

Snagit 9 puts other products, especially the Open Source products to shame.In the same way that The GIMP fails in any head-to-head competition with Adobe™ Photoshop, or in the way that Inspiration™ pales in comparison with MindManager™ or Mind Genius™; other rudimentary screen capture programs appear like tricycles racing against a Harley.Why get this Program, Now?Summer prep time allows for structuring and planning lesson content. If you know the grade level and subject that you will be teaching, now is the time to plan and create instructional materials.

And now is the time to create an entire library of stock graphics. The tool to use? Snagit 9.

Graphics work can be difficult and time consuming. Snagit 9 makes this chore as easy as possible.Too many Benefits to List HereSnagit 9 is so amazing that just a description of of everything that it does…and does so easily… would push this article past its editorial limits.

Here is an outline of just a few reasons that you want this program:

Ribbon Tabs - These apply tools and options instantlyAdding annotations

Editing images

Creating interactive hotspotsQuick Style Gallery Applying ready-made styles to the captured imageE-mail and Sharing -

Sends the captured image to:Selected programs

Clipboard

EXcel™

PowerPoint™

Word™

Camtasia Studio™

Sends Image as E-mail AttachmentOther BenefitsCut and Paste Capture

Recent Captures held Available

Batch Conversion Processing (Applies the same process to a bunch of captured images, or, changes a bunch of captured images from one format to another)

Ability to add tags, and to search for images by those tags

Search by the Website where images were captured fromWork with and Reuse CapturesSnagit 9 allow you to annotate and edit images. This includes adding text, call-outs, transparencies and shadows.

But, with ordinary programs, once you save the image, these enhancements become part of the capture…and these become difficult to erase or eliminate. However, Snagit 9 allows you to save the annotated and edited image with a ".SNAG" file format. Then these annotations and edits are reversible, changeable and erasable.Other, Time-Saving BenefitsHere are other time-saving, work-enhancing tricks that Snagit 9 can perform for you.Capture screen images and editable ASCII text

Record on-screen operations and save as a Windows® .AVI file
Capture all the images from a Website and save in graphics files
Capture a menu sequence for any application
Capture a printer output as a Snagit file
Besides this, you can customize Snagit with free accessories.
Get Snagit 9 now before TechSmith discovers how many enhancements are included in this program, and raises the price. TechSmith probably won't do this, but they could.
Get this program, and you will find uses for it every day that you work as a teacher. To download a trial version of Snagit 9, [Select here](#)...

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

Teacher Resources

Transforming Sandman-Style PowerPoint® Projects into Terrific Teaching Tools
Student presentations are a stock item often attached to student projects. But, instead of stupendous effort and contagious creativity, most electronic slide shows deliver stupefying (as in stupor-inducing) rubber-stamp sameness. Yawn! Petrified Point - What's the Point? Rather than a power surge that threatens to blow fuses with high-voltage energy, many student presentations seem to hold the charge of "played-out" batteries. But, this is only because teachers "underwent" training (indoctrination) by software-specialists instead of curriculum specialists and Master Teachers.
When real teachers mentor teachers, ideas for how to maximize instructional impact materialize. When creative folks brainstorm, think, focus upon higher-order thinking skills, share...then pipsqueak sparks become lightening bolts of excitement in student presentations.
And, a bit of creativity (and a small bit of work) put into project design templates can drive huge benefits in the improved quality of students' electronic presentations.
These template strategies can... Save the teacher a lot of work
Set standards for evaluating student presentations
Provide an antidote for "presenter's (writer's) block"
Level the playing field for Special Population students and reluctant/ recalcitrant/ dejected readers
Spark higher-level outcomes for Gifted and Talented students
Ensure uniformity of the presentations (all the requirements are included in the template)
Tricks of the Trade
Countless creative strategies can be developed once a teacher escapes from the traditional slide show, and typical student presentation project.
Here are some examples of exemplary tactics that transform PowerPoint projects from "ho-hum" to "humming along."
PowerPoint Sidekicks & Desktop Learning Spaces
Here is a list of items that you can find on Dr. Annette Lamb's Educape site...
Book Blasts
Electronic Stories and Digital Storytelling
E-Scrapbooks
Guidebooks
Journals
Problem Solvers
Inquiry Quests
Tutorials
Virtual Field Trips
Information Formats
Information Evaluations
Information Primary Sources
Information Sequencing
Adding Audio
Adding Charts & Graphs
Adding Video
Adding Visuals

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

Teacher Survival Strategies

Peep through the Eyes of a Principal and Broaden Your Perceptions
Teacher open their perceptions to the viewpoints that students carry to school because great teaching hinges upon: Communicating in the language that students understand
Explaining concepts by using relevant examples from students' experience is sound instruction

Sharing appropriate real-life experiences so that students develop the "The teacher was once like me" attitudes Reframing ordinary experience to a more mentally healthy and emotionally mature interpretation creates a climate for students' growing up But, teachers need to step into the stress-filled world of principals to develop an understanding of the oft-times "war-zone world" of campus administrators. Captain of the Ship-- Struggling not to "Go Down" with it The campus principal is in charge of a couple of dozen, to more than a dozen dozen faculty and staff members. And, most of those, the faculty members, are found with a independent bent, folks who spend most of their at-school hours in their own quadrilateral fiefdoms.

Teachers are difficult to control, even when their supervisor has them in sight and under thumb; but once they close the door of their classrooms, only the loud wails of (legitimately) complaining students rouse a principal's nose for snooping. Sidebar The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a weasel-in -the-hen-house law that seeks to prove that our public schools are ineffective. The purpose of this charade is to allow vouchers to be used to pay for students to attend church schools.

Showing that our public schools produce poorer than acceptable results reflects poorly upon the person at the helm, the principal. It is this pressure on the campus principal that teachers must take into account to overcome the natural tendency to place the principal in the "enemy or adversary" category. Span of Control "Out of Control" The span of control for our schools is out of control. And in the profit-making world, companies that implemented a similar system would fail. The Span of Control is the number of folks that a supervisor directly supervises. In the business world, this is generally "maxed" out at seven. Sidebar Come to think of it, the span of control for the students that teachers supervise, i.e., class size also exceeds the span of control by three to four times industry standards. What needs to happen is that the "report-to" pyramid needs more layers, so that seven (or less) folks report to the principal...and seven or less people report to each layer.

But, the span of control has to be real.

For example, supervisors must be able to hire and fire, make decisions, and be held accountable for their decisions.

So, a system of department chairpersons and grade-level leaders, acting as title-only lackeys…responsibility without authority…figurehead puppets…achieve no desired, positive outcomes.

This means that principals have authority over too many folks to guarantee effective supervision.

This also means that the number of hours that a campus principal must work each week eclipses the 65 hours that the average teacher works. The missing rungs of the span of control ladder explain most the principal's workload (overload).

First Teacher Reality Check: Principals spend more hours working than you do.

Competitive Edge Since few staff members understand just how much work that principals do, lots of folks would like to become principals.

What this does is put a job replacement pressure, similar to the pressure that teachers feel, on principals. Principals have to produce to keep their jobs.

The real competitive edge should be to help teachers perform better. Unfortunately, competition for the principal's job comes from...Home schooling, Independent schools, Charter Schools

NCLB's threat of vouchers (given to allow students to leave and enter private schools)

Competition for limited funds within the district

Competition with other principals to display (test) results

Competition to get the better teachers to transfer into their campus School Status Quo and School Reform Probably every principal in the nation would agree that school reform was an important goal, if reform meant that teachers would perform better and student test scores would increase.

But, a far fewer number of principals might agree that school reform starts with the principal mending ways, changing tactics, working smarter.

But school reform also means: Content area standards for every subject

Curriculum frameworks and curriculum standards

High quality, relevant professional development

Specialized programs for Special Populations of students

Specialized progress reporting to parents Second Reality Check: Principals face pressures on every side that conspire to prove that they are inadequate, pressures similar to the pressures that teachers face.

Corollary: Principals experience pressure to learn more (participate in professional development) to learn: More about Technology Integration and using the Internet for instruction

National and State standards that affect the teaching of each content-area subject

sMethods to communicate with and to involve parents in their children's education Dependent upon the Efforts and Performance of Others to Show Competence Principals depend on high-performing teachers to spark students to ever higher levels of performance.

This means that principals have two levels of dependency, while teachers have only one level of dependency to be accountable for.

But, where a teacher depends upon only 20 to 30 students, a principal may depends on 120 teachers and 1,200 students…and each must show improvement so that the collective, measurable progress paints the quality of the principal's supervision in a positive light.

Final Reality Check: The principal depends upon the performance on two dependency levels, rather than the single level

that plagues teachers. Summary When teachers place themselves in the heavy duty work boots of campus principals, they discover that the pressures affecting principals are much like those that affect teachers...only heightened and more difficult.

This leads to the obvious question: "Why would someone what a principal's job with so much stress and so little control?"

The money isn't all that great, either since a software or network engineer without a college degree can earn more (in business and industry) after about the same amount of relevant experience.

And while individual motivations vary, we can be grateful that there are enough dedicated (or naive) educators that are willing to step up to the plate and face the major league challenges of campus leadership.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 04:00

Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills

Catching Teachers Performing Well

Principals and school district administrators that evaluate teachers can have a snappy bit of technology in their hands. This technology ensures that teachers receive lots of credit for all the exciting and creative work that those principals catch teachers performing. This nifty strategy that leaves "no superior teaching moment unrecorded" is accomplished by a hand-held computing device, and a behind the scenes server.

Unfortunately, the self-same device can be used by stress-focused, vendetta-prone, "I'll clean house of all undesirable teachers" principals. Sidebar You wish that talent and effort proved to be adequate job security. But in the days of "NCLB-slapped" administrators, the insecure (or inept) among their ranks "sometimes go after teachers" to make the case that they are competent administrators. "It's only those no-account slackers that have to go, and I am on their case to ensure that they either do their jobs or leave." So, how does this sneaky hand held computer system relate to stealth teaching methods?

Answer: Whether the principal/ evaluator is "packing an always on" evaluation device, whether the principal is Obsessive-Compulsive; whether the principal is still rooted in paper and pencil checklists; teachers must maintain vigilance to ensure that they perform in a stellar fashion each time that they are "vigilanced-against."

The principal with the paper and pencil checklist can accomplish as much as the principal with the hand held computer, only the hand held computer accomplishes more with less effort.

Whether the principal is supportive, a laissez faire leader that always looks at your sunny side; or a henchman planning to wipe out your job, you need the same strategy.

Teachers must conduct class (from the first student meeting) in an "always being watched," "always aware of the scrutiny" pretending that the "hidden cameras that are running" state of alertness. Why Wouldn't a Principal want Such a Device? Imagine if principals could:

Always have access to student and teacher contact data

Record observation data in real time, without having to connect to wireless systems

Cut teacher evaluation and paperwork time in half

Improve the teachers' evaluation reports by listing more details

Have this system customized to the school district's evaluation conventions And, for large campuses, principals can also have mobile student data that includes:

Student attendance and schedules

Student photos and IDs

Student disciplinary records

Parent contact information What's more, the development company offers "no extra charge" for this customization and for their stellar technical support.

Contact: Austin Sky 877-759-7335 or visit Austin Sky A Cynic's View of Evaluation Evaluation of teachers is based more on belief and bias than on a perception of reality. And what principal, while conducting a drive-by evaluation; can grasp the skills, talents and abilities that a teacher has in play?

Just as sound bites have diminished our view (and our assessment) of political candidates, shrinking our perceptions around ten second sound clips...maybe 20 seconds if the media is biased in favor of the candidate...maybe 30 seconds if the media catches their "un favorite" candidate with a "colossal foot in his or her mouth."

The "thin slice of time" style of observation fails to animate a picture of a teacher's performance...not even as well as the stick figure drawing, thumbed for a fake animation, on the edge of a pad of paper.

The caution against the random sample, quickie observation is the same caution against evaluating a teacher based upon one or two high-stakes test days in April.

But, who can argue against saving time for the principal? Principal's Challenges Time-savings, less paper work, less work-related stress--in theory, this might mean a calm, cool, more hospitable and mellow principal.

But, these personal factors are more habit and conditioned behavioral responses than a reflection of the job situation.

What actually happens is that principals will still find their school day jammed to overflowing with attention-seeking issues and clamoring folks. Like the closet that is always full, no matter how large we build it; principals' workdays expand to fill every crack and cranny.

So, stresses never leave the presence of campus principals, and wishing for principals to mellow into a jovial mood is

fantasy.

However, if the principal can complete an observation with less work, then at that particular moment, the likelihood that the principal might project that irritation and discomfort upon the teacher that s being observed is lessened.

So, making it easier for a principal to conduct the observation seems to at least level the playing field for the teacher, instead of amassing obstacles that aggravate the referee (principal). Summary So, look into easing the evaluation load on your favorite principal by advocating the use of hand-held tools. Your principal will thank you for it… although your next evaluation may fail to show that undying gratitude.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills at 03:00

Professional Self-Development

School 2.0

Almost everyone hopes and wishes that our schools could improve. Of course, the various stakeholders of our schools hold varying ideas about how this should be accomplished. But two principles underlie these fantasies: The folks that want sky-high change for the better expect to accomplish this with budgets as low as a worm's arches

For idea that we support, adopt, implement; other choices, other options, other paths cannot be supported, adopted, implemented or taken So, for example, even if there were unlimited funding; students cannot conduct research on the Internet, play the tuba and quarterback for the football team at the same time.

Students can integrate some things, such as the report that contains science, social studies, English, math and health concepts.

But, the Techies that propose the ideal "school of the future" seem to believe that technology can enable multi-task-learning.

Let's see, maybe the quarterback can have a heads-up display in his helmet (no pun intended) that allows satellite Internet access when the defense is on the field. And, maybe tuba practice can be virtual note-reading and fingering for a midi-enabled handheld keyboard that is stored in his or her shoulder pads during the time that the offence is on the field.

Of course, the old-fashioned football coach would object because he insists that the quarterback pay attention to the on-field action, and, keep his or her "head in the game." No Shortage of Ideas Although technology… Devices Networks

Applications have yet to become interoperable and scalable enough, or powerful enough to meet Technology Integration goals; advocates can free to dream that these (not yet easy enough) tools might make a positive impact on education.

The biggest dream (fantasy really) is that the various school district stakeholders are going to agree to focus upon technology… and agree to get things done.

What things? you ask.

Here are the important factors, as Techie Idealists see them: Engaged, Independent Student Constructing Knowledge Performance-Driven Administrators

Collaboration-Driven Teachers

Leadership and Continuous Improvement

Technical Support Of course, in this fantasy, everyone would amass such a high level of technical expertise that training and professional development will cease to be a necessary part of the Technology Plan. Sidebar These fantasy excursions into possibility thinking are not new. Apple™ proposed such ideals a score of years ago with the Apple™ Classrooms of Tomorrow (ACOT) program.

And this was when computers used floppy disks and when the most powerful Apple™ computer was the Apple™ Laser Printer. Today's technology is "light-years" ahead of the primitive equipment of yore, but still not easy enough to use. If Technology is the Focus, are People Important? As amazing as it sounds, Techie's implicit trust in technology leaves people defined in limited and traditional roles. These roles include: Teacher

Student

Parent

Community Member

Administrator

Policy Maker

Technologist So, what is missing from this list? Thinkers

Artists

Planners

Caretakers

Healers and Therapists

Entertainers

Farmers

Mechanics

Factory and Production Workers

Service Sector Workers
Financial Professionals
Law Enforcement
Military
Engineers
Technicians
Skilled Artisans

Entrepreneurs…the roles and ideals that teachers see as a desirable future for their students.

Learning consists of more than attitudes, knowledge and skills. Performance and execution are important learning components.

But, equally important are problem-solving, decision-making, cooperation, collaboration, creativity and communication. So are kindness, love, poetry, the appreciation of peace and beauty, patriotism, and a belief in democracy.

Technology is an important "half-truth" that must support education as an invisible (transparent) tool; but by itself, technology offers little more to education than a skillet offers to the meal. Maybe the skillet makes preparing the meat easier than poking the meat with a stick and holding it over a fire, but neither the skillet or the stick constitute the meal. Why Technology Folks can't Talk to Teachers
Techie folks face a handicap when they pitch technology solutions to teachers.

That handicap is that the Techies talk "Techie Talk."

But teachers have little or no interest in "technology for the sake of technology." And, "Techie talk" seems like foreign sounding, suspicion-provoking, confidence-shattering noise to teachers.

Techie folks are so enthralled by the specifications and features of the latest "breakthrough" devices, upgraded software, or "socialized" Web service that they fail to notice that these "specifics" leave teachers cold.

There are several models that we can apply to analyze this communications collapse, i.e., the Techie folks might just as well be "talking to the walls." The Neuro Linguistic Programming Rapport Model
One model that stretches our understanding of the non-functional communication dynamics between Techies and teachers is the Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) concept of rapport.

In the NLP Model, "Rapport" means more than just getting along. Rather, it means something like, "being on the same wavelength."

On the level of interest, teachers are focused on instructional management, classroom planning, measurable learning outcomes...and performing well enough to keep their jobs.

But Techie folks drone on about all the neat and nifty tricks that hoop-jumping software and paper-tiger-taming Online services can perform. Great! Except, what teacher cares?

Besides, teachers are sophisticated enough in the use of technology to know that this "three-ring" hot-shot stuff always takes more time than it saves; and that "doing it the old, tried and true, no frills, just-get-the-job-done" methods require no new technology, and no new learning curve. The "Person Like Me" Model
The other model that explains the "dynamic discontent" between Techies and teachers is the "Person Like Me" Marketing Model.

With this model, marketers explain that relationship, trust and influence are produced when people come to believe, "This is a person like me" (and all that such a belief might mean to a specific person), "and if they say that the product is great, I believe them."

However, when Techies speak "Techie talk" to teachers, the unconscious, visceral (even below conscious awareness) belief that bubbles up is, "This person isn't hearing a word that I am saying, this person isn't describing anything that is important to me, I don't understand anything that this person is saying; so why should I trust anything that they are saying?" ("The Techie is not like me! Everything that they say is suspect.")

"Besides, even if this technology stuff were to save time for me over the long run, in the short term, it will take more time than I have right now."

"And, I don't know if what the Techie says is true, anyway. And even if it proves to be true, the Techie wouldn't know because nothing that I hear from him has the least bit to do with instruction." Summary
Techies cannot effect change in education because they do not talk "teacher talk," i.e., instructional language. And, Techies fail to be sound believable to teachers because they eschew instructional jargon in favor of speaking technical lingo.

And while technical lingo is fine as a shorthand way for Techies to communicate to each other; "Techie talk" leaves teachers feeling uneasy, suspicious and resistant to the Technology Advocate's ideas...no matter how useful or potentially relevant.

The solution for this dichotomy is for the Techie to learn to talk "teacher talk" and for Techies to listen to teachers as though teachers have something important to say.

If the Techie would bother to listen, then learn, then speak teacher jargon; teacher's would begin to trust Techie communication.

But, if Techies listened and developed relevant solutions for teachers, they wouldn't be pushing technology. They would be improving instruction.

"Improving instruction by ignoring technology and focusing on student achievement," now that is an idea that teachers can "sink their gnashing teeth into."

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

Perfecting Personal Talents

Personal Goals and Professional Skills

If teaching was a science, then meticulous practice could be driven by observable, measurable skill-set checklists. This might be similar to the pre-flight, in-flight and landing routine checks that professional pilots tick off as each step is encountered.

But, such an approach fails if an artist is painting a portrait or a landscape, or if a musician is composing.

An artist's sketchbook contains ideas, experiments, what-ifs, compositions, composites, trial designs, juxtapositions, perspectives.

What is important is the freedom to express, the freedom to experience and the freedom to make errors…flexibility, choice…options.

Musicians play, create snippets, test melodies, compare harmonies, balance chords…play (as in the sense of enjoyment of activities as a child enjoys).

A by-the-numbers painting or a by-a-formula song lacks texture, layers, depth, intricacy.

And, the emotions of human experience are absent, too.

Human Experience means Mistakes

So, does a teacher perfect teaching skills by allow the imperfection that is associated with experimentation, experience, exploration?

The answer: Personal Goals and Professional Skills are developed in a manner similar to sailing a boat. When sailing a boat, winds gust and change direction, currents push one way or the other, waves drive (or push back), and weights shift. In addition, navigation sometimes uses the sun and a compass, sometimes stars and maps.

But even when the port is in sight, the course heading requires constant adjustment.

But the goal (the port) is kept in sight as adjustments to the heading are made. This is the model of improvement talents and skills…by focusing upon a goal or destination, keeping your bearings pointed toward that goal, and gathering course-correcting feedback along the way.

Feedback is the self-correction mechanism that we use to reach our goals.

But, focusing on getting everything "right and perfect" the first time does not speed us toward our goals. Rather, waiting to get everything perfect, or over correcting before we start, retards our progress and stagnates our performance improvement.

Visualization and Rehearsal

Fortunately, the learning capacity of the human system is more efficient than a sailboat. For one thing, each return to port requires a trip away from port. This is time consuming. Second, conditions are always different. The tides and currents differ each day by 50 minutes, and the wind and weather change in abrupt disdain.

But, the human mind and emotions can practice success with imagery and mental rehearsal. And, as the mental practice progresses, the speed of the practice can accelerate.

This means that learning time (the dreaded learning curve) can be shortened. And this also means that more complex, intricate and valuable skills can be developed.

Even better, mental rehearsal responds to the specific details of your individual learning style. This means that you are the world's greatest expert about how you learn.

Besides that, the learning that you can acquire, the skills and abilities that you can perfect, are limited only by the models that you can install within your mental system; and by the patterns that you can practice.

Since models and mental practice are unrestrained by "shouldn't do, can't do, must not do" boundaries; your ability to learn is "limitless." Restraints of Conscience There are restraints to the "shouldn't do, can't do, must not do" boundaries; but these have to do with "ethical, moral, legal and professional" constraints.

For example, classroom behavior management is a learnable skills. But, coercion, domination, brainwashing and subversion fail to meet the test of professional behavior. And these tactics may cross ethical or moral lines, or fail to meet legal standards. Sidebar The subject of Mental Rehearsal deserves an article of its own,. Expect a major article in an upcoming issue of Classroom Toolkit. The mental rehearsal process relies upon vivid and meticulous attention to details, just like actual, practical applications do. But, practice speeds can accelerate and multiple practice sessions can occur in a compressed timeframe. Creative Imagination Creative Imagination is the mental rehearsal process that is carried out to its most useful conclusion.

Creative Imagination builds an experience from outcomes "as though those outcomes have already happened."

This is a process of carrying mental rehearsal to its "illogical conclusion." There is nothing connected to magical outcomes of intense imagery with real-world occurrences, yet strong intentions paired with multi-sensory imagination for the "event as already happened" precipitates amazing stories and successes. Sidebar Creative Imagination deserves a feature article of its own, and will be the subject of an upcoming Classroom Toolkit article, too.

Note: Classroom Toolkit explored the limitation of cognitive-academic learning (and the unlimited potential of the human psyche) in a previous newsletter article, Unlearn what you Learned in College: A Quick Way to Improve Teaching Effectiveness Summary Whatever the personal or professional skill that you aspire to, the most intricate skill sets can be

expanded, developed and improved by visualizing, mental rehearsal and Creative Imagination.
Amaze yourself by practicing this most important skill of personal improvement.

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