

Sunday, August 31, 2008

Short Article

Advocacy: Why Advocated Change Never Happens

Evolution and disintegration, growth and decay, building and demolishing…these are the natural order of the Universe. There is a natural conservation of mass and energy, matter changes form, and energy dances from one state to another.

Some folks might argue that since nothing remains constant, change is "inevitable."

But, although changes occur, these changes are active processes.

Where advocates for "real change" go awry is by focusing upon "change" as though change were a noun (a thing), or as a "state of events" in the real world. Sidebar The "mantra" for "change" is apt to reach a fevered pitch this political circus season.

But, this article avoids focusing upon rhetoric that is calculated to resonate with a perceived level of economic discord and social suffering.

Instead, this article focuses upon an "impossible idea"…that advocates can convince people to "change (as the Advocate defines) for the better." Advocates' Checklist for Change Change Advocates, including the folks that want to "make our schools better," have a playbook that was acquired though the school of hard (really punishing, below-the-belt punches) knocks.

Here are the "prize-winning" strategies: Pick the Right Fight - Don't play when you can't possibly win

Time your Tactics - Make the clock your friend, not your enemy

Expect "Push Back" and Resistance - The status quo defense will redouble their efforts to resist

Expect that Change will Take Time - Be patient, the typical education innovation cycle is 20 years

Remain Optimistic - But be realistic. Evaluate milestones and setbacks for what they are, signposts…not summary judgments

Focus upon Selective Change - Think strategy, tactics and advantage. Avoid forced submission and domination

Trust Innovators, and give them Both Responsibility and Authority - Find action-takers, calculated risk-takers and put them in charge. Let them experiment and experience failure. Allow them to make mistakes

Be prepared for the Long Haul - Plan to stick with the change process for a long time So, although innovation and change are really (think disguised) rants against teachers; and cunning campaigns to force teachers to do more uncompensated work, schools are really complex cultures with stakeholders that are aligned to divergent wants, needs, motivations and self-interests.

Change advocates often view their job as a sales pitch, i.e., they must sell buyers (teachers) on the benefits of working harder, smarter and differently to "accommodate the change."

Of course, this is a "hard sell," (no pun intended), and few teachers are tricked into buying (in) by this strategy. Sidebar If the benefits of the proposed change were so rewarding, the "changes" ought to speak for themselves, and no sales pitch would be required.

For example, attaching a worm or minnow to a fish hook exchanges the "unappetizing morsel" for a pan-sized fish.

And people are motivated to perform this kind of exchange, day in, day out because the process is inherently rewarding.

Exchanging something you can't (or won't eat), the worm or minnow for a fish is a high payoff activity. Another example:

If people were able to step up to a counter and exchange a \$10 bill for a \$20 bill; they would stand in line, wait their turn, make the exchange, then return to the end of the line for another round.

Many people would repeat this process, day and night, until exhausted.

Sure, you have to overcome skepticism because people would hesitate, wondering, "What's the catch?" But, the

promise of an exchange similar to this is what fuels gambling enterprises. What's in it for Me? Change advocates fail to realize that almost all of the "educational change equation" calculates out to the following benefits for the changer…

More Work Required

More Effort Required

Decreased Free Time

Additional Costs

Previous Efforts and Investments become Denigrated and Devalued

Supplies, Inventories and Resources for the old way are No Longer Needed

New Supplies, Inventories and Resources have to be Acquired

Old Habits that must be Extinguished and Unlearned

New Habits that must be Developed, Learned and Perfected

Old Skills that will Dissipate with Disuse

New Skills that must be Won with Stress and Effort

Self-Confidence that will Erode, replaced by a Temporary (we hope) Lack of Confidence because New Procedures are

Stressful Convoluted Advocacy So, how do change advocates pitch an inherently undesirable product?

Answer: Rhetoric, psychological tricks, mind control and emotional appeals. These boil down to variations on two themes:

Do the extra work that the change demands, feel the pain. Do it for the benefit of your students

Do the extra work, feel the pain. Do it so that you can keep your job

Of course, neither of these "benefits" creates the intrinsic motivation inherent in activities such as fishing or gambling.

And the lack of real benefits may be partially responsible for so many new teachers leaving the profession within three to five years. Reason: "Forced Change" delivers too few benefits and too much stress.

Don't Fight the Culture Change

Advocates are reformers who want everything to go their "ideal" way. Of course, most other folks fail to identify the same outcomes that the Change Advocate identifies as ideal.

But, there are sets of beliefs, behaviors, standards and methods of operation that everyone is comfortable with. These complex "sets of influences" can be considered to be the organization's "culture."

Change Advocates complain that the culture is difficult to change, and that fighting against the culture almost always results in a "loss." The Change Advocate's advice: "Don't go up against the culture."

Of course, this is a wrong-headed, self-centric view when it comes to changing teachers.

Changing teachers is easy. All the Change Advocate has to do is make the life of the teacher easier and more productive, provide less work, higher pay and more help.

And that is where the "culture wars" argument falls apart.

What Change Advocates see as a "resistant culture," the folks involved see as an inferior solution to a problem that they don't recognize; a solution that makes more problems than it solves.

Message to school or teacher Change Agents: "Figure out real solutions that provide real benefits to teachers, and they will come begging for your solution."

Anything less, expect resistance. Summary Change Advocates fail to realize that change is process, not a thing.

Secondly, these Change Advocates fail to focus upon real benefits that appeal to the self-interests of the folks who own the habits, behavior, routines and systems that the Change Advocates wish to "adjust."

Change Advocates focus upon one stakeholder group, generally the lowest rung on the "Chain of Command" ladder; and use blame, guilt and rhetoric as the tools of their persuasion arsenal.

The Change Advocates seldom think of lucrative additional pay, additional help, increased benefits and various other compensations that could motivate the change that they advocate.

So, advocated change cannot, doesn't, seldom ever happens because 1.) the Change Advocates either have not done their homework; or, 2.) the solution that they propose is more tears, toil and trouble than the payoffs that ensue.

Since advocated change won't happen, let the teacher "blame game" continue.

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

Feature Article

Total Physical Response - Story: Integrating Storytelling into Instruction

The Total Physical Response - Story (TPR-S) strategy provides teachers with extraordinary tools for integrating storytelling into all aspects of instruction. The TPR-S strategy provides a framework for taking instruction to the proverbial "next level."

TPR-S tools give teachers potent and powerful methods for: Increasing students' memory of concepts by overcoming the tendency to remember only the first, last and different in a lecture

Building natural mnemonic devices for teachers' lectures

Engaging students' imagination and creativity for even the most boring topics (the standards-based curriculum that you are ordered to teach.)

Involving students in their own learning

Easy integration with the Mutual Storytelling Technique for promoting mature student mental health and emotional wellness

Added opportunities to map other content-area concepts (especially math and health) into any lesson

Added opportunities to provide positive, indirect suggestion for a positive student mind set TPR-S is an instructional strategy that is so natural that we wonder why we never thought of it

Besides these benefits, TPR-S requires only the props and learning materials that are on hand, meaning that implementing TPR-S strategies requires minimal "out-of-personal-pocket" expense.

There are some downsides to implementing this strategy, even if the TPR-S strategy sounds like a teacher's "dream come true answer and antidote" to many of the issues plaguing modern instruction. Sidebar (Teaching to the test being only one of those distractions.) A Strategy that Time Forgot Actually, it is only modern education that has forgotten about the TPR-S strategy.

In eras past, before print (books) and electronic memory systems (computers, Internet); the most common instructional practice was to both narrate and act out communication; signal, punctuate, pantomime; with gestures, facial

expressions and body movements.

And as teachers digressed (they didn't have rigid schedules and a timeline for coaching students for the high-stakes test), stories of past experiences, related to the item of study, naturally

Olden-times-teachers (or tutors) prided themselves in their personal wisdom, and prided themselves in their ability to communicate that wisdom with stories.

What modern, output-focused factory educators consider to be "time-wasters, tangents, bird-walks" can serve academic goals once a teacher understands the power of TPR-S and employs the strategies in a focused method.

And, storytelling is seated deep in humanity's collective consciousness, probably predating words and the development of a spoken language. This means that stories seep into the unconscious regions of the human mind and affect learning in multiple ways.

Far-Reaching Benefits Although TPR-S can be used to enhance the memory and experience of literature, and to activate active learning before a story (or novel) is read; TPR-S is usable for every subject. For example: Convert the steps of a complex math operation into a story, connect the vocabulary with specific physical actions (TPR) … or better yet, allow students to devise and share their own stories related to this operation

Map out the names, features and functions of multiple areas of the brain, create characters and a fantasy-type story of magic and intrigue with the action associated with countries, towns or villages with the names of these areas of the brain
Change the components of a complex economics formula to characters with traits that represent the relationships of the formula

Learn the actions, sounds, vocabulary and rules of a foreign language by extending basic TPR with story lines and natural interaction

TPR, TPR-S, and the Mutual Storytelling Technique represent a full-bodied, comprehensive approach to accelerate learning.

These approaches build high-level, stress-free, creative capacities in our students. And, these methods decrease the amount of work, effort and stress that teachers experience in delivering instruction.

Fables, Fairy Tales. Tall Tales and Folk Tales for a Modern Generation Fables are stories about animals that teach moral lessons.

But, stories can be about anything and teach lessons.

For example, the "Ant and the Grasshopper" fable could be about the "Hard Drive" and the "CPU." The "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" could be about safe files on the hard drive and about Trojans (similar to computer viruses).

Fairy Tales contain some bit of magic and some bit of reality. Fairy tales can be worked into all manner of topics, especially ones that relate to human behavior … history, government, economics, business and politics.

For example, a political campaign exemplifies most (or all) of the characteristics of a fairy tale.

Sidebar We'll skip the obvious relationship to the "Tall Tale" and Myth because the satire is too easy, uncreative and obvious. For example: The Story of the "Three Pigs" could refer to 1.) weak, 2.) better and 3.) solid methods taught in an economics class that describe how businesses insure themselves against loss.

Tall Tales are stories where the main character or hero obsesses uncommonly beneficial traits. Paul Bunyan is a huge lumberjack with a colossal blue ox, Pecos Bill ropes a tornado with a giant rattlesnake turned lariat, John Henry pounds a hammer on a steel drill pin faster than a machine.

An Example of a teaching tall tale might be a scientist that can invents plenty of marvelous, labor-saving devices including the light bulb and the phonograph. Point out that the scientist tried 20,000 experiments before creating a light bulb that functioned. **Sidebar** To discover that Thomas Edison was not the inventor of the light bulb, and that he even lost a patent infringement lawsuit in Great Britain concerning the light bulb examine a real-world timeline.

Non-Tall Tale Light Bulb Invention Timeline What Edison developed was a complete, affordable and practical lighting system. **Folk Tales** are extracts from the culture of primitive (and not so non-modern) peoples. A story that is a fairy tale for one group may transform into a folk tale when exported to another group.

An example of a folk tale adapted to a teachable moment might be the story of the Dutch Traders purchasing the Island of Manhattan for \$24 worth of beads. In fact, some scholars believe that a "sale" never occurred because what the indigenous tribes were trading away was the right to use the island, their vocabulary had no meaning for the concept of selling land because all lands belong to the Great Spirit. This might be a case of renters overpowering the landlord and stealing the land.

A saga or Odyssey are arduous exploits or journeys that require perseverance before a goal is achieved.

The saga of a political or a human rights campaign, with setbacks, treachery, lies and promises, elation and let down fits this story model.

Nursery Rhymes are ditties that children learn. For example: "Three Blind Mice."

Three Blind Mice can become Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin … and Hitler can become the farmer's wife in a TPR-S teachable moment. And such a moment, Hitler in old-fashioned peasant farmer's wife attire chasing a cigar-smoking, bald mouse, a wheel-chair mouse doing "wheelies" as he escapes, and a mouse with a red star on his oversized military hat makes the issue memorable. And, this could all be happening underneath the table as the real characters dine on English fish and chips, Russian Caviar, American hamburgers with German sauerkraut. You get the idea **Sidebar** If you catch the concept of mental pictures associated with a storyline as driving attention, memory and retrieval of information, you understand one of the keys to Master Teacher performance. **Summary** Total Physical Response - Story (TPR-S) forms the backbone of effective teaching, whether the strategies are intuitive or learned.

TPR-S weaves its way into so many other "theoretical approaches" that the rock-solid underpinnings of TPR-S can be

lost in the buzz, flash, and hand-waving by the proponents of each "fad-de-jour" "new-innovative-magic-bullet-obsolete-all-others" re-packaged teaching strategy.

But, understanding the simplicity and power of TPRS-S brings Master Teachers to masterful communication and effective instruction.

But, don't keep this learning method a "secret." At least share the power of the strategy and the ease of the process with your students.

Your students will appreciate how this one idea streamlines their study…while strengthening their memory and recall.

Perhaps the decreased stress and increased positive student outcomes that result from implementing TPR-S will make each workday seem like a "too good to be true" Fairy Tale to you.

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

Quick Tips

Scholastic™ Opens a New "Newbie Teacher" Service

Scholastic™ launched a new service aimed at capturing new teachers and bringing them into the Scholastic™ sphere of influence.

The new Help for New Teachers site is called, "First Class." This marketing strategy makes sense for Scholastic™ because up to 50% of new teachers leave the profession within three to five years, so the teacher market is in flux.

In addition, "Baby Boom Age" teachers are retiring in increasing numbers.

SidebarUnfortunately, the reason for so many new teachers leaving the profession is unrelated to a lack of instructional materials. Teachers have access to a plethora of materials…self-created, in district and from the Internet.

Classroom Toolkit provides enough of these zero-cost resources to help almost any teacher through multiple years.

New Teachers need help in coping with the school systems that employ them since most of these school systems fail to provide the help and support that new teachers need.

Teacher survival and career longevity requires self-support and personal learning skills that are largely unavailable in school districts.

In addition, most of the resources, tips and help available on First Class seems to be geared to elementary school teachers.

Here is a link to Scholastic's new service…Help for New Teachers:What's on Offer

Scholastic" offers the traditional mix of "resources, tools and tips" with this new service. A newsletter, coupons and special offers, and a new teacher help line are also on tap. Menu Style HelpSome of what Scholastic™ includes with this service includes:

Classroom PlanningManaging your Class

Lesson Planning

Grading and Assessing Student WorkClassroom OrganizationOrganizing your Classroom

Finding Classroom ResourcesCommunications and Public RelationsWorking with Colleagues

Communicating with FamiliesPersonal Professional Development Time Management

Teacher Professional DevelopmentPrintable MaterialsSchool Days Mini-Book

Autumn Activities

Book Report AlternativesJargon-Based TopicsConnect with Kids and Parents of Different Cultures

Bias-Proof your Classroom

How to Choose the Best Multicultural Books

Many Cultures, Many LanguagesTeaching English Language Learners (ELLs)Teaching ELL: General Instructional Strategies

Teaching ELL: Speaking Strategies

Success for ESL Students

Reaching Out to Non-English Speaking ParentsScholastic™ requires that teacher register (and provide the name of their school) in order to use many of the free materials on offer. Link to register for the First Class service…Will this Strategy Work for Scholastic?

First Class is not Scholastic's first try at reaching new teachers. However, Scholastic never tried to connect the new teacher market with all of its divisions like they are doing with this marketing effort.

The First Class effort might stand a greater chance of success if the company were a bit less focused on selling books and materials from their product line, and more focused upon what the real factors are that force so many of our new teachers to leave the profession so soon "out of the starting gate."

Although Scholastic™ recognizes the "new teacher burnout rate," its solution based upon selling more of its materials is yet to be validated.

However, the site is broad and deep…and worth your time if you choose to visit.

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

Top Tips

The Iron Triangle: Geometry that Foils Budget-Cutting Propaganda

One of the most egregious school district (bureaucratic) fallacies is that teachers "Can do more with less." But even the newest, "tin horn" teacher knows that this is sheer "hogwash."

But how do teachers counteract such stupidity when it comes disguised as "prudent, cost-conscious due diligence?" Teacher want budget sanity but have a difficult time speaking out when "stupid-intendents" and campus "unprincipleds" are the sources promulgating these false notions of fiscal conservation. The savvy teacher's response to these falsely-spun ideas requires a measured and professional strategy. Otherwise, teachers will be expected to spend more of their own time working on less-than-useful projects, with no compensation. Sidebar When expanded to its actual meaning, "Doing more with less" means: "Teachers will do more under pressure and criticism, with less per-hour return, less free time, and less chance of being recognized for the sacrifices that their families will have to make to do more uncompensated work at home. The answer to how to respond to the badgering of "Do more with less" lies (no pun intended) in adopting lessons that were learned from Project Managers.

Teachers can reply in a professional way that describes the project management concept of the "Iron Triangle." This concept rejects and debunks the "Do more with less" idea; an idea that is more likely to rear its ugly head during these times of budget distress.

The basic strategy is to focus communication upon what Project Managers call the "Triple Constraint." The Triple Constraint is a way to communicate 1.) simple principles when relating 2.) complex issues to bureaucrats and supervisors.

The idea is to communicate how tradeoffs between a project's quality, speed, resource use affect a project's final cost. Iron Triangle to the Rescue Project Managers, like teachers, communicate complex ideas in simple terms so that even the most attention-challenged school district decision-makers comprehend. The model that Project Managers use for rejecting the "Do more for less myth" is called the "Iron Triangle." This model gets its name because "bureaucrats and hype-spinners, and others with budget-warped minds" can not bend, twist or distort reality with their twisted, poor, wishful or "Pollyanna" thinking.

Here is a definition of the Iron Triangle:

The "Iron Triangle" is a Project Management principle that states that the three main constraints on any project are 1.) time, 2.) resources and 3.) project quality. What this means is that a change in one constraint requires a change in the other two constraints.

Translation: There are always tradeoffs.

For example, if time is the most important factor; then either the quality of the project must diminish, or the cost must be increased to account for the extra resources that must be applied to the project to conclude it more quickly.

Or, if resources (people, materials and supplies) are fixed and cannot be increased (because of a stagnant budget); and quality must be maintained; then the project will take a longer time to complete.

What schools face is a unique situation (mostly due to bureaucratic management). With our schools, time and costs are fixed; i.e., during the school year the budget is static.

What this means is that the quality of educational outcomes must suffer. Or, teachers must stretch the time constraint by either staying at school longer or taking work home, probably both. Sidebar Unfortunately, staying at work for zero compensation, and taking work home for zero additional compensation leads to the opinion that teachers are an unlimited source of budget-fixing.

When budgets squeal because they are squeezed so tightly; "Teachers can always be counted on to take up the slack, i.e., by doing more for their students."

If the State or Federal Governments add another un-funded mandate to a school district's workload, teachers can perform the extra work without impacting the budget because that extra work will be "free." (Or, at least the extra work will not show up on the school district's budget.)

Other Unique School District Constraints First, no bureaucrat or politician will admit to policies or decisions that decrease the quality of education, even though "holding quality instruction at bay" is exactly what their jobs are about.

School district decision-makers know that increasing the quality of education during a fixed schedule (the school year) requires more resources. These resources include: A few more teachers

An army of tutors

Lots of technology (equipment, infrastructure, back-end programming, and technical support)

Lots of paid professional development

Lots of release time for teacher training

Lots and lots of; In addition, school districts differ from other projects (for example a bridge construction project) in that "people make the difference."

It is not possible to bring in a Newbie teachers and produce the same outcomes that a Master Teacher can produce.

Therefore, the ramp up to building and effective and efficient teacher takes three to five years. Unfortunately, this is about the time frame when about half of new teachers leave the profession.

Likewise, training an army of qualified tutors would take many years, and, turnover would be higher than the job-change rate for teachers.

So, the bureaucratic panacea of the one-year budget proves inadequate for producing long-term instructional gains that require multiple school years.

The cost of resources (people) and the cost of infrastructure (equipment, software, networks and the technical people to install, manage and maintain them) is complex.

The skills that these resource people need cannot be acquired instantly.

In addition, people with these skills often not immediately available. And the complex infrastructure and facilities to house them cannot be built with little notice.

Realistic, long-term planning based upon paying everyone what they are worth for all the work that they perform is essential. Negotiating Tradeoffs When the next administrator proposes that teachers "Do more with less," the first teacher response should be, "Which of the current priorities and initiatives that we are currently doing after hours at school and at home (without pay) should we eliminate?"

Then, a short explanation of the "Iron Triangle" showing how time and costs are fixed by school year calendars and budget…emphasizing how teacher time is already over scheduled by mandates and initiatives.

The goal is not to belittle or put down administrators, but to win concessions for eliminating unnecessary and unneeded work that is currently mandated.

Further explanation can go into the difficulty of striking a balance between increasing productivity, using scarce resources, and additional costs over the point where productivity cannot be stretched without more devoting more funds to a project.

The key to finding and maintaining such a balance is better long-term planning.

Setting real priorities and sticking with them also helps.

Coming to an agreement on what priorities are important, and having the leadership and courage to "Just say no" to impossible amounts of extra work for teachers are crucial.

Coming to an agreement is necessary when making tradeoffs for what work will be accomplished. Who is in the Driver's Seat? Superintendents and campus administrators often seem to be in the "Driver's Seat" when it comes to assigning more, uncompensated work to teachers. But, with the diplomatic use of the Iron Triangle model can ease the pain of further assignments by explaining how some work must be abandoned if additional work is to be delegated.

Teachers need to affirm their right to live a life apart from their work, and teachers need to obtain recognition, credit, and compensation for their work.

Communicating the principles of the "Iron Triangle" can work for teachers, if done in with statesmanship and professionalism.

Using the "Iron Triangle Model" to show the past administrative directives and initiatives is contraindicated.

Keep your anger and frustration under control when you discuss this issue with administrators, and you just might get your message heard.

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

Teacher Resources

Write Reflections™: Do you Want your Students to Learn to Write for a Change?

Why do students experience the slightest bit of difficulty when they write? Students talk, communicate, even send "text" messages to one another. Students like to interact and associate. (In fact, many of the classroom management techniques favored by control-minded teachers seek to quell this natural urge.) Sidebar For example: Turn a district's worth of Fourth Grade students loose with E-mail accounts, and they will create so many messages that they "lock up" the mail server. But, let teachers get involved in the writing process, and student excitement, creativity and self-expression grinds to a sluggish halt.

This sorry situation seems to be the "fault" of writing instruction, and this

"hard reality" seem to result from ineffective teaching strategies. These ineffective strategies stem from an "I teach writing like I learned to write" approach…; rather than an incapacity or lack of writing skills of our students.

But, is this "writing disconnect" the result of a lack of capacity of our teachers? Sidebar Of course, blaming teachers is the natural inclination of the "test our students with high-stakes writing tests every four years to see if our teachers are performing (and earning their pay)" crowd.

Of course, the "test-em experts" fail to notice that limited, or no funding is allocated for writing instruction, and that teachers' school day schedules are littered with non-essential activities (such as coaching students for the high-stakes test) that diminish the time that students have available for learning to write. Teach Reading First: Teach Writing only if we are Lucky to have a Class of Good Readers Do teachers enroll in many "writing how-to" classes in college?

Answer: The typical teacher enrolls in about as many writing classes as the typical physician takes in nutrition and exercise. (Just as a physician's course load focuses on medication and surgery, teachers' coursework focuses upon reading and math.)

Writing is relegated to one "leg" of a Language Arts "stool"…; "a three-legged stool with five legs"…; grammar, punctuation, spelling, reading and writing.

And, it is precisely because of the focus upon grammar, punctuation and spelling that our students learn (come to

believe) that they "cannot write." It's a Good Thing that Schools Don't Teach Children to Talk If schools began early enough in the lives of our students, and if teachers used the grammar, punctuation and spelling - "catch and correct every error" approach to "teach" students to speak; we would be a nation of stutterers, and sigh-language communicators.

The problem, also noticed in foreign language instruction, is the focus upon finding and eradicating errors. There is parsimony, a tactical elegance, to attacking errors. Errors, since fewer in number than accurate and competent responses; are easier and less work to track.

Finding errors (managing exceptions, eliminating defects, building a uniform product) also fits nicely into our Nineteenth Century Factory Model of education, i.e., quality control, reject defective products, model.

However, a focus upon errors, especially when errors are punished and deprecated; limits learning.

The issue is that "would-be writing teachers" confuse two distinct types of learning: 1.) memory and recall and 2.) performance and skill learning.

This means that unconscious processes associated with the integration of learning modalities and other processes associated with habit development must be integrated before writing performance can be perfected.

And performance is perfected through practice, relaxed attention, and fun. There is also a role for mental rehearsal in skill development.

Punishment and criticism compromise learning and represent the exact opposite from what accelerates practice (and transforms performance) into academic knowledge, trustworthy habits and outcome-based skill sets.

It is the punishment and criticism that is found by sniffing out errors and by "driving a stake through the heart of repetition and practice" that sabotages learning. And, it is persistent punishment and callous criticism that would prevent many children from learning to talk if school were their sole source for learning this skill.

Fortunately, children learn to talk before they reach school age. Unfortunately, once children arrive at school, many teachers focus inordinate effort and attention upon getting them to "stop talking" and "be quiet!"

See: Application and Performance: The "Flip Side" of Planning

Why Write Reflections? Write Reflections; is a success-based curriculum for teaching writing skills, i.e., writing habits and writing performance.

Write Reflections; is Application and Performance (AnP) based learning that is... Systematic Sequential

Standards-Based

Success-Based The main features of Write Reflections; include: Reasonable target performance standards for students' writing practice

Realistic improvement goals based upon mastery of prerequisite writing skills

Real-world timeframes set to developmental capacities and prior skill learning This means that the teachers who use the Write Reflections; program show students exactly what to do, guide students to doable writing success, and appreciate the writing outcomes that students produce.

In short, writing becomes fun and enjoyable for both students and teachers, and

writing success prompts (no pun intended) further creative successes. Components of the Write Reflections; Curriculum

The Write Reflections; Curriculum contains... Comprehensive lesson plans

Web and Mind Map Organizers

Editing Sheets

Samples for Each Grade Level

Step-by-Step Instructions

Assessments

Grading Rubrics

Prompts The Write Reflections; program also includes instructions on how content-area teachers can use 15 different writing genres for instruction. These include: Autobiography

Biography

Cause and Effect

Compare/ Contrast

Descriptive Writing

Essay Writing

How-To

Information Writing Summary

Letters

Narrative

Oral Presentation

Persuasive Writing

Problem-Solving

Response to Literature Sidebar The Write Reflections; model of focusing upon writing in all content-area subjects parallels Classroom Toolkit's philosophy of writing instruction.

It is every teacher's job to teach writing, in the same way that it is every teacher's job to teach related math. Writing and math should be part of every lesson, both writing and math examples and explorations should be relevant and fun. Summary Write Reflections is a writing curriculum that works. Classroom Toolkit ordinarily avoids recommending products that are this expensive because we focus upon free and inexpensive resources for teachers.

However, it took Melinda Micallec, the developer of this program, seven years to build this curriculum. (And saving a teacher seven years of development and a testing effort should be worth a lot to teachers who can afford the up front cost.) But, though prices are steep for individual teachers, costs are competitive and reasonable (in fact probably under priced) for a campus site licenses.

So, convince colleagues, chairpersons and school district purchasers to license this product. Expenditures for a Write Reflections site license can pay dividends in increased student writing scores, and a pilot program on your campus will probably result in other campuses within the school district adopting the program once the improvement in student writing test scores becomes apparent. Sidebar Although high-stakes test scores are essentially irrelevant for real learning, citing test score improvement is often the (cynical) way to obtain funding for crucial products. Schools waste much more money on useless initiatives and worthless "grabbing at straws magic solutions." So, a wise investment in the Write Reflections product should be an easy sell.

Or, convince the local Parent-Teachers Association/Organization (PTA/PTO) to assume the cost of this curriculum. Parents want their children to write well. The task of convincing parents to support an effective program such as Write Reflections should be an easy one.

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

Teacher Survival Strategies

Build an Invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit

Teachers encounter stressful situations, often minute-by-minute. Sometimes this is the result of student activity, sometimes the byproduct of colleague interaction, sometimes the stress is set off by parents' protests, sometimes a response to a principal's foibles or pathology. But, teachers need to remain calm, composed and in control. These stresses are inevitable. Friction generates from so many teachers and students brushing closely; rubbing fur the wrong way, stroking feathers, scraping scales, scratching slime, pricking on another person's quills.

So many peculiarities, so many wants, so many unmet needs. Wishes and intentions come into play to create an environment ripe with conflict, stress and tension.

Every school day does not need to lead to an "emotional meltdown." Each day can be exhilarating, joyful and fun. The key: The invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day suit that repels stresses and disintegrates tension. Think: Water bouncing off a duck's back; in the water, but never getting wet. There Keys to a Well-Fitting Invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit

The three keys to safe and secure external reaction to the daily stresses of teaching include: Making a stress-controlled day a personal choice

Distancing yourself from the fray by dissociating any personal involvement, i.e., don't take it personally

Making a game of it. Make the day fun. So, building an invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day suit is part choice and part taking responsibility. But, avoid overdoing this dynamic. The old saw, often attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt (no pun intended) of, "No one can upset you unless you first give them permission," overstates the roles and importance of cognition and choice.

But, why permit the abundant hassle and challenges of a normal workday to steer your mood towards a downhill direction? Even more, why allow upset to stalk you into the next day, or the next week?

The challenge is to get off the "One-Way-Street" of passive, "It's happening to me and I have to control it," and on to the "I take greater charge of my attitudes and control my emotions each day; sometimes, less so; but the trend is for more control and more enjoyment."

Self-Talk - Nails, Spikes or Daggers: Avoid Puncturing Holes in your Invisible Teflon®, Flack-Jacket, Stormy-Day Suit

In fact, it is possible to dance sweetly through an incident, then "pound and pepper" yourself with negative self-talk once you "figure out the meaning" of what happened. What occurs in this "post-incident assault" on your sanity, peace of mind, and happiness is an incursion into "self-inflicted" scrapnel wounds.

So, why face the original "incident" unscathed, only to scratch, stab and wound yourself afterwards using negative self-talk?

Why allow your self-talk to churn, flood and surge on the inside when you are protected from the outside? Summary Peace of mind, calm, enjoyment, happiness and fun can be part of your workday; if you work at it. Building a invisible Teflon®, flack-Jacket, stormy-day suit means protecting yourself by emotional distancing.

And your follow-up task is to manage and control your self-talk to avoid shredding the self-protection that you enjoy. The benefit of such an approach to self-protection is less stress, greater enjoyment and a more professional demeanor.

Build in all the self-protection that you need, and enjoy the added confidence that you experience when you face workday situations with your invisible Teflon®, flack-jacket, stormy-day suit.

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

Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills

Steps to Controlling your Thoughts, Self-Talk and Emotions

Teachers should be able to say what they think, feel and believe; and in a world of real academic freedom, this would be true. But, teachers need to be sensitive to how their gripes, rants and offhand comments affect their students.

Self-censorship, in the service of professionalism, is ethical and the right thing to do.

More importantly, self-control to maximize positive thoughts and minimize negative thoughts, provides positive payoffs. In addition, emotional and behavioral control provides a positive model for students who understand that, "Do what I say, not as I do," is the trademark of a useless teacher. Control of your own thoughts, your self-talk and your emotions helps you follow your own recommendations and earns you the right to bestow platitudes and give advice to your students. Who Does Stress Harm? The biggest motivation for reigning in negative thoughts, negative self-talk negative emotions is the detrimental short-term and long-term effects that these stresses place upon our lives.

So, even if a teacher's outward appearance seems poised and controlled; if the internal landscape and environment is churned and "whipped up," health and vitality deteriorate.

The litany of diseases and maladies related to stress seems like a catalog of about every known disease. The list of diseases caused or exacerbated by stress is substantial and terrifying.

But, even more important are the effects that a tight lid on stress and frustration (in the professional arena) have upon personal and family relationships.

The key is to eliminate, counteract, prevent the accumulation of stress; but keeping a "tight lid" on stress (the opposite of relaxation and release) precipitates more harm than benefit.

Connections between Thoughts, Self-Talk and Emotions

Thoughts, self-talk and emotions are connected. These are maintained with rapid-fire interchange and tie in to our learned (Multiple Intelligences, Learning Styles) modalities of information processing.

This means that some complex of memories, images, beliefs and cognition interplay upon our feelings, sensations and reactions. This also means that we can control, alter and adjust this process if we choose to do so. (And if we develop the habits required to be successful with this control.

Strategies for Controlling Thoughts, Self-Talk and Emotions

Self-awareness, self-examination and self-discovery are the first steps in developing your self-control systems. But the intent of self-awareness, self-examination and self-discovery is the uncovering of talents, skills and abilities. This is a personal-resources-focused personal tools quest.

Dredging up negative experiences, opening wounds, testing the tenderness of scars, reliving past trauma; all of these unpleasant enterprises are off limits, counterproductive and contraindicated

Our self-awareness, self-examination and self-discovery will assist in inventorying the personal assets that we can use. Personal Control Panel and Pattern Inventory The next steps is to pay attention to what you do, and to pay attention to what sets you off in doing it.

The task here is to develop a non-evaluative, matter of fact list. "This is what happens" is the extent of this list. "When such a situation occurs, I ____."

Avoid positive and negative evaluations, and interpretations. Sidebar Avoiding evaluations and avoiding judgment is a self-control skill that is excruciatingly difficult for teachers.

Everything about what teachers do seems geared to this highest of the Higher-Order skills.

Yet, sitting in judgment of our "selves" sabotages our self-control in insidious ways; and we can't see how this happens because we are too enmeshed in our own evaluation. For example: "I do a great job keeping my cool when ..."

"I did a lousy job responding to ..."; "Both statements in this set are less than useful.

Change both to ...; "This and this happened ..."; "And listen closely to any self-talk. Just record what you are saying without categorizing, or judging, evaluating what those statements mean. (In the final analysis, the judging that you conduct through your self-talk creates more stress than the original event.) Next Step: Tinker with your Senses This is the indirect approach to controlling your thoughts, self-talk and emotions.

You just "monkey around" with your sensory processing. In particular, fiddle around with visual imagery, but manipulating your experience of sensations, sounds, smells and tastes can work to your advantage.

For example, change ...; Size

Shape

Size

Nearness or Distance

Perspective Point

Color

Temperature

Pressure

Clearness or Blur

Constant, Erratic or Intermittent

Stable, Rocking, Fluctuating
Get silly, be mischievous, express comic rebellion, stonewall, silently insult

Examples:

That new male teacher keeps insisting that you go on a date with him. Rather than feeling upset, languishing under a self-talk diatribe discomfort at a situation you can't control; just picture this insulting colleague as a fat, pink pig. Visualize his mouth and nose as a snout. Hear him grunt. Recognize that you are not the "sow" that he would like you to be.

Laugh at the caricature.

Another example:

A colleague continues to complain about the principal and school district, her salary, her students, just about everything.

The antidote: Just picture this colleague as a "toilet mouth, with the nastiest stuff overflowing from her mouth. This image alone should be enough to keep you away from her…far away. The Power of Simplicity
Elaborate procedures are unnecessary and unduly cumbersome if a simple procedure gets the job done.

Quick and inelegant, just good enough; these are often the most elegant solutions to problems.

People disbelieve the power of tinkering with mental imagery until they experience the rapid and immediate changes for the better that these techniques achieve.

And, it is these simple experiments in personal mental imagery that build a control panel for managing your thoughts, self-talk and emotions.

Feel free to experiment and find your own personal style.

And, if you fail a time or two before succeeding, who cares? Besides, since the mental imagery skills are internal, only you know.

Put some personal controls in place and you will increase the flexibility that you have in dealing with your students.

And, though your students will be grateful, you will be the person that most benefits.

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

Professional Self-Development

Digital Portfolios: Will these Tools Ever Work?

Digital portfolios are a great idea. Feature sets are increasing in reliability, scalability and relevance. Digital portfolios help teachers make important instructional decisions, and serve as outstanding reporting tools. Digital portfolios are fantastic motivational and guidance tools for students.

Students, parents, teachers and administrators can show progress and make informed decisions about instructional options and performance targets.

In addition, portfolios provide an antidote for the mindless compulsion that our national learning community places on "one-slice-of-time," high-stakes test scores. Sidebar
Vermont was an early adopter of ordinary, run-of-the-mill "hard copy" student portfolios. Rhode Island has come to the forefront in the Digital Portfolios arena…focusing upon

proficiencies other than tests. More than half of the state's 39 school districts have implemented definite portfolio requirements. With these limited successes, what are the prospects for widespread use of portfolios across our country?

Digital Portfolio Success Depends on your Goals
The strength of digital portfolios is also their weakness. For a digital portfolio program to be successful, everybody in a school district has to use the program. This means everybody… every teacher, every student.

And what does everybody mean? Each and every teacher

Every student

Every administrator who keeps track of students' and teachers' progress

Parents
The "every teacher" is the "catch." "Every teacher" represents the sticky point, the hang-up for an entire digital portfolio scheme, i.e., plan.

The reason is that patchwork implementations; i.e. some teachers using portfolios this year, some student with portfolios from last year, some students with portfolios from two years ago; but not last year…you get the idea.

Unless portfolios are used year to year, by every teacher, the effectiveness of this tool diminishes. How to Ensure Portfolio Use
Someone with authority and determination to see a digital portfolios project through to success must insist that every teacher starts and maintains a portfolio record for every student.

And, that person must check to ensure that these portfolios are started, must check to ensure that every portfolio is maintained, and must determine that the quality of each digital portfolio represents each student's finest accomplishments.

Without this "directed compliance," some (a few) teachers will "backslide" and abandon the portfolio juggernaut in midstream. Other teachers (quite a few), if given a choice, will decline to participate, still other teachers (almost every

teacher) will set sail, then "abandon ship" when they see all the extra work that the portfolios require. The extra work will seem like too much to bother with, since little observable evidence will demonstrate that the extra work is worth the effort. Balance the Extra Work Everyone, especially teachers and students, will have surplus (extra) work to do once a digital portfolio project is implemented.

And, there will be few observable, measurable payoffs for a long period of time.

So, the success of a digital portfolio system depends upon…Compensating teachers for the extra time that they must invest

Decreasing other job requirements so that teachers work load is held constant (preferably decreases)

Implementing the "back-end programming and processing" system so that as much of the digital portfolio system is as automated as possible

Commitment to adequate technical support and Service Level Agreements (SLA's) because system requirements become "mission critical" and need to be "highly available" This means increasing servers, network infrastructure, database administrators, network administrators, technicians and help desk support staff…even if the digital portfolio system is hosted outside the school district (as a Web service). Summary Digital portfolios offer a valuable learning resource for students, a valuable communication resource for teachers, and a public relations resource for the school district.

But, all of these benefits are lost if implementation is spotty, haphazard, and erratic.

Digital portfolios are worth the extra time and effort, but only if there is a commitment to fully fund the digital portfolio project. There must also be an equal commitment to 1.) increase compensation to teachers for the extra work, or 2.)

better still, to eliminate useless and time-draining, non-productive tasks from the teaching day.

Unless top-level leadership is strong, committed and eternally vigilant, digital portfolio systems will fall short of their potential. And, school districts that embark on a system that lacks adequate funding and leadership will suffer political and community relations damage.

The old adage: "Look before you leap" applies to the grand design and wishful thinking that goes into prescribing a digital portfolio system. With planning, funding and commitment a digital portfolio system can become the backbone of a marvelous learning resource for students.

Without these basic requirements, the potential benefits garnered from digital portfolios turn into "egg on the face, let's find some teachers to blame" fiascos.

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

Perfecting Personal Talents

Teacher Creativity and Idea Incubation

Creative people may be quick of wit and nimble of tongue; but, creative

people are patient people. The reason that patience pays off for creative folks much better than the dimmer sparkle of their less novel family, friend and colleagues is that creative folks have mastered the art and science of idea incubation. And the incubation process seems deceptively simple. After an intense, sometimes long-duration focus upon problem-solving; idea-creation-pondering, contemplating, grappling…the onslaught toward a solution is stopped, abandoned, shelved, put on hold.

Then, after a while, the image of the solution just "pops" into consciousness, the "aha-moment" strikes. This happens when rational defenses are preoccupied…when idle thoughts or mindless routines place the executive brain in "neutral." Like Spinning Straw into Gold…as we Sleep Creative people almost feel guilty that the ideas, solutions, innovations, inventions (that their inner-mind devises) didn't come from themselves…guilty that they didn't take part in the …work… of developing the creative expression that just revealed itself.

The often full-blown answer appears to just "pop in" to this universe from another dimension…from the unseen to the seen.

Of course, the work had been completed hours, days, weeks earlier. And the cause and effect connection between the solution and the earlier priming of the creative process is invisible and may never be discovered. Transformation, but not Magic Even the elves need straw before they can work their gold-generating magic. And, the inner mind, the incognito dynamo that powers the creative process, also needs raw materials.

Fortunately, those raw materials are the "stuff" that learning is made of; and, the more "idea raw materials," the better.

The reason that "smarter" people seem to be more creative is that smarter people have more "idea-fuel" and "idea-fodder" to work with. No Monopoly on Learning Channels and Multiple Intelligences Creative thought and creative expression might seem to give an edge o the channels that construct knowledge, but creative ideas are as likely to cross learning modalities as they are to remain in the person's most-favored mode of thought.

This means that multi-sensory, Multiple Intelligences-type examinations of thought and ides should foster creative output. But, the process is less than predictable, and more dynamic.

Therefore, the best strategy for setting up, launching, then harvesting creative output is the "intent" to accomplish this "miracle thought processing" on a deadline, or to meet time requirements. Voyage Destinations: Taking Creative Thought where No One has Gone Before Some folks believe that creativity involves the evolution of ideas, or that creativity

encompasses combinations of concepts that no-one has ever thought before. But empirical evidence suggests that truly new ideas seem to burst fourth around the globe at about the same time.

Amazing! Without collaboration! And each innovator believes that they were the first; believes that the others, thieves, stole their "original" idea.

Of course, this is narrow (anti-creative) thinking. Creativity is much like what happens when the Spring season awakens dormant blossoms. No blossom claims that they are the first to emerge from their seed-buds. Countless flowers bubble up, in the same way that heat on the bottom of a cooking pot brings fourth effervescent action. Neither blossoms nor bubbles stake their claim to being first, and self-aware creative people know that ideas just come to them like fleeting waves on a sandy beach. Sidebar But ideas cannot be owned by anyone. And, that is the reason that ideas are ineligible for copyright protection. But, the form that the ideas are expressed in are eligible for copyright.

The exact rendering of ideas in identical forms is unlikely. The reason: There are too many permutations and combinations of intelligences at play when the ideas are filtered into form and action.

So, rather than believing that you are in sole possession of a unique idea, beating everyone else to the finish line; just set the idea into form, knowing that, out of 100 others who "receive" the same ides, 97 or 98 will do nothing with it. You may not be able to claim "first-thought" for an idea, but you can certainly be the first to "take action."

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