

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Teacher Survival Strategies

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Are you Automating Everything you Can?

Do you know any teacher that was hired to do less this school year than last school year? Do you know any school where there is a directive for teachers to slow down, back off the stress level, and only do what is reasonable? Is there a school district anywhere that recommends that teachers pace themselves, avoid stress and mental-physical-emotional strain, and do only what they are paid to do...within normal working hours?

Since work requirements are at less than sane, and since the needs of your students are open-ended and seem to be on a trajectory that approaches "bottomless" (and we are not talking about a lack of underwear), you have several choices:

Plan better, more strategically, modularize instruction

Prioritize, do the most important, highest-payoff tasks first

Delegate -- Let students take up slack for you

Drop essential, but low-priority tasks

Automate all levels of tasks, from the important to the urgent

The tasks that you can automate include: Materials Creation

Lesson Planning

Research

Grading and Grade Calculation

Progress Tracking: Yours and Your Students'

Parent Communication

Centers and Center Development

Software and Account Management

The tasks that you cannot automate include: Teaching: Your interaction with students cannot be replaced

Supervising Student Progress

Analysis of Individual Learning Styles of Each Student

Communicating One-to-One with Students

Counseling, Consulting with Students, Parents and Colleagues

Communicating your Personal Caring and Commitment

Creativity, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making There will never be an automated replacement for teachers.

"Covering material" does not constitute teaching or learning.

Teachers apply themselves in a personal and professional relationship with their students. Students are "clients" in the sense of being in our care. As such, our decisions must be based upon their needs.

Teaching requires modeling of the qualities that we would have students adopt. And, teaching requires the development of habits: abilities, attitudes, knowledge and skills that become so practiced and proficient that they seem like automatic responses.

But, this is not automation in the sense that we are using it here, as a time saver. What you are doing by automation is freeing up time and energy so that you can apply and develop personal skills that make you a "genius-level" teacher.

Too Busy "Teaching to the Test" to Automate?

You say that you are too busy "teaching to the test" and scrambling for materials to automate anything.

If you are stressed for time, you are not automating enough.

The effort may require self-discipline at first, but the payback will be additional time for the future. In a way, all of Classroom Toolkit is focused upon automation. The process that we share is one of modularizing instructional materials so that teachers can mix and match materials to instructional goals. Automation Goals (and payoffs) for automation include: Developing and Automating Presentations

This is done with templates and fill-in-the-blank data merges. Increase Efficiency

Automation increases efficiency with instructional planning, and instructional delivery with such tools as E-mail, Web form submission, surveys, parent communication, data integration, and classroom management. The use of automation makes tasks that would otherwise have been performed manually more efficient and time-effective. Streamline

Processes

Automation streamlines processes, especially if you bend the process to conform to the technical requirements of the automation software. For example, what if filling out a the campus form for each student is automated. Create your own form that looks close enough to the original, then automate the fill-in. This can save you hours. And, share the form with

your colleagues. You can save them hours of work, too. Increase Cycle Time/ Reduce Time on Task
Automation speeds up the time that you can develop assignments and projects by increasing your efficiency. By automating everything you can, you communicate with parents and supervisors, develop materials and lesson plans, calculate grades, submit reports…tasks that you have to repeat can be automated. Tracking and Documenting
Developing a "step-by-step re-use process" instead of a "one off, one-time-use" treadmill creates time out of "thin air."
Targeting Behavior and Learning
Collecting data and reporting progress can be automated. This is done by creating check-off forms using a database management system (database). Most teachers have one of these in the Office Productivity application that is part of their professional office suite software
Unfortunately, the learning curve for mastering a database management system is steep, and most teachers never develop the powerful uses that this software affords
Creating Learning Profiles
Sorting and grouping students into fluid and dynamic project and task groups
Measuring Results
Unless you can measure what you do, you cannot control what you do. Without measurement; situations, serendipity, fate, crisis and accident are in control. With measurement, you take control.
Getting Back more Time than you Put in
Automation is like a magic box. You put in a little time, and you get back a lot more time.
Automation Tools
Tools that you can use to automate instructional planning, management and delivery include:
A professional Office Productivity Package with merge features (for document files, spreadsheet files and database files). This is your automation workhorse
For example, Microsoft® Office Professional
Text research storage with one-button capture
For example, InfoSelect®;
Full page storage for online research
For example, Surf later®; Vocabulary Mapping
For, example, Visual Thesaurus®;
Data Analysis and Display Program
Inspiredata®;
Mind Mapping Software
For example, Mind Manager®;, Mind Genius®; Education or Inspiration®;
Screen Capture
For example, Snagit®;, or Instant Screen Shot
Screen Video Capture
For example, Camtasia Studio®; A Phrase Expansion Tool
For example, Paramind®; Remember: Academic versions of this software can be purchased for a fraction of the list price or street price.
Another trick is to purchase an older version on eBay®, then upgrade. This usually results in a huge cost savings.
Online Tools
Online tools that can streamline and automate your work include: Blogs, E-mail, Online Toolkits and Learning Management Systems
Blogs
Blogger
Classroom 2.0
Teacher Lingo
Word Press
E-mail Systems
AOL Mail
Gmail
Windows® Live Hot Mail
Yahoo Mail
Online Toolkits
For example Google®; Tools and Google®; Pack
Learning Management Systems
For example, Moodle!

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