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Open Source for Education

Are Any Open Source Products Useful for Teacher Self-Development?

Open Source products are available for lots of "Techie" purposes, but are there any Open Source products available for Teacher Self-Development?

There are a lot of teacher resources for integrating technology using Open Source software, but what about teacher self-development resources that are geared to personal and psychological, intrapersonal and relationship oriented, or just plain skill development? Here are the Google search results for the search term, "teacher self-development open source". Search Google for teacher "self-development" "open Source". The top search results include topics such as Web 2.0, "Video Papers" Open Source Portfolios and mentoring for technology. The most concise description of this externally-directed focus upon technology seems to be "Everyone should have the necessary skills to benefit fully from the Information Society. Therefore capacity building and ICT literacy are essential. ICTs can contribute to achieving universal education worldwide, through delivery of education and training of teachers, and offering improved conditions for lifelong learning, encompassing people that are outside the formal education process, and improving professional skills." Source UNESCO http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15922&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html Of course this should not surprise us. Computer skills (hardware, software and applications) have been the rage over the past decade or more. And in typical education fashion, the pendulum swings toward extremes instead of a realistic, balanced focus. So, how are we to approach the question of Open Source products for teacher self-development? Software Libre: Not Software Gratis In discovering if there are Open Source resources, we have to determine what the term "Open Source" means. Few teachers know what "Open Source" actually means? Open Source software is free to use and keep, but also free to change, recompile, reconfigure, change. Open Source software is also free to sell. But, teachers use the term, "Open Source" to mean free software (as in no cost). Unfortunately, the term "free" is misleading. There are a lot of "free" software products that are not Open Source. Types of free, but not Open Source software include; Freeware - Free to use. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Others are not allowed to sell this software

Banner Ware - Free to use. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Others are not allowed to sell this software, either. Shareware/ Trial Ware - Free to use for a short period of time, usually 30 days or less. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Often teachers can get enough use of Shareware during the trial period to last the entire school year. Others are allowed to sell this software if they are affiliates of the software developer. After the sale of shareware software, the developer pays a commission to the seller. Unfortunately school district IT Departments fear Shareware/ Trial Ware and do not allow it to be installed.

The reason that school district IT Departments eschew Shareware/ Trial Ware is that after 20 or 30 days, the software must be purchased (there is no money) or uninstalled (more work for staff they don't have) Any Shareware / Trial Ware remaining on the district's computers after the trial period could be considered pirated software, and the district automatically becomes liable. Shareware / Trial Ware offers many teacher self-development and self-improvement opportunities, but these programs are not free. Ad Ware - Free to use because the software contains ads. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. The danger associated with Ad Ware is that the software acts as a "Pop Up Magnet"; that bypasses your browser's filter. Also, anti-virus programs and anti-spyware programs may not remove the Ad Ware programs because you gave the Ad Ware developer permission to send you these Pop Up Ads when you installed the software. If you read the fine print on the Ad Ware "Terms of Service" Agreement, you will see that you pay for the privilege of installing the software without cost by allowing these intrusive ads to be sent to your computer. Viral Ware - Free to use because the software is re branded to carry ads. The difference from Ad Ware is that new users can pay a fee and have their ads inserted instead of other people's ads. After the ads are inserted, the software is given away. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way.

Spyware - A large variety of "bad" software that does "nasty" things. This category includes: Software that captures Web user data, software that contains Trojan viruses, worms, key loggers (captures and sends your user names and passwords to the developer), etc. The fact that most teachers do not possess the skills (or the time) to decompile, reverse engineer, repackage, update or re-brand Open Source software may be a clue as to the reason that teachers lump all free to use software under one term. Open Source software is coming to be called, "Libre Ware." This means "free" as in permission to do what every you want with the software (including selling out to a big company for \$1

billion USD as MySQL just did with its sale to Sun Microsystems). Here is a description of the difference; "Software Libre" is a name that some people have started using for 'Free Software' in order to clarify that the 'Free' in 'Free Software' has the meaning of 'Libre' rather than 'Gratis.' 'Open Source' is a relatively new term, denoting a particular organization's effort to market software libre and to define it in a more specific way that is friendlier to the capitalist marketplace. Source: Library Juice http://libr.org/juice/issues/vol5/LJ_5.2.html So, many teachers call all "free to use" software "Open Source" when most of the "free software" is not really Open Source. There are lots of free programs that teachers use every day that are not Open Source, but commercial programs. For example: Adobe's Acrobat Reader, Flash Player and Shockwave Player
Apple's Quicktime Player
Google's Application Suite and Search Engine
Microsoft's Internet Explorer, Media Player and Live Search
Mozilla's Firefox
Real's Real Player

Sun's Java Package and Java Virtual Machine There is another class of Open Source programs that only a few teachers are interested in, server-based programs. Software in this category of programs includes Web Servers, Blogs, Forums, Wikis, and Learning Management Systems. The problem with these Open Source systems being used for self-development is that they take a lot of time to develop, and are more suited for instruction than personal self-improvement. Avoiding the "Straw Man" Fallacy Our exploration of Open Source solutions for teacher self-development should avoid using a "Straw Man" argument. Sidebar A "Straw Man" fallacy is one where a position that is easily criticized (even lambasted) is set up so that it can be torn down. Here is a definition: "A straw man argument is an informal fallacy based on misrepresentation of an opponent's position. To "set up a straw man" or "set up a straw man argument" is to create a position that is easy to refute and attribute that position to the opponent. Often, the straw man is set up to deliberately overstate the opponent's position. A straw man argument can be a successful rhetorical technique (that is, it may succeed in persuading people) but it is in fact a misleading fallacy, because the opponent's actual argument has not been refuted." Source: Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straw_man

The way that this article could pose a "Straw Man" argument is to suggest that Education is about children and relationships, not about computers and technology

Computer programmers and software project volunteers are "techies" who have limited interpersonal skills and minimal success with interpersonal relationships

Computer programmers and software project volunteers wouldn't be working on Open Source projects if they had a "Life," since they wouldn't have the free time to donate to the project

Computer programmers and software project volunteers have limited psychological insight into their own issues. That's the reason that they have withdrawn into their own little, isolated world of computer programming. Of course, though these statements have face validity, i.e., on the surface the statements appear to be "true;" the generalizations are more "urban myth" than reality. These criticisms of Open Source software development are misleading. In reality, programmers and software project volunteers are followers, not leaders, and most of the projects that they work on are copies of commercial software. This is the Open Source "Rule of Copycat Knock off Software". Sidebar The one exception to this "Rule of Copycat Knock off Software" that we are aware of is Compendium. Compendium is Open Source dialog analysis software. Obtain your copy of Compendium here. Most "Copycat Knock off Software" is inferior to the commercial version that it imitates. What can you expect for free? But, is free good enough for teachers? Open Source and Education The whole issue of Open Source for Education centers upon finances and public demand that teachers integrate technology. Unfortunately, school districts have: Failed to fund basic education, let alone technology-driven education

Placed the burden of learning to integrate the technology upon teachers

Moved to force teachers to learn to use the technology without paying teachers to do so, or without providing adequate release time to do so

Limited the size of IT Departments and the technical support staff that is needed to actually use and manage the computer, servers and software that Open Source integration requires. However, these limiting and self-defeating economic forces have no bearing to the real problem, i.e., that school districts failed to discover, test, measure and promote (to the public) a direct rationale for the integration of technology with current academic learning. Sidebar Most of the arguments for integrating technology into instruction refer to job skills once students graduate. And, the few school district Open Source projects that are touted as successful consist of nothing more than high school students using Internet research access and basic word processing software on cheap computers to write reports and term papers. Of course, any teacher that has developed basic desktop productivity software skills can use either Open Source or commercial software to track, manage and maintain his or her personal self-development efforts. But, this is not using Open Source self-development, but Self-Development using Open Source tools. The problem here is that teachers can do the same, with less file compatibility issues by just using the industry leader's Office software. But, there is one Open Source software product that teachers can use for personal self-development that does not have a commercial competitor. How Compendium can be used for Teacher Self-Development? How can Compendium improve teacher self-development? The answer is by having a map of the dialog of key players, sponsors, stake-holders, and being able to sort through the forest of statements to find the crucial needs, fears, motivations, ideals and values of

these groups. But, Compendium[®] can also be used to explore your personal issues in depth if you imagine yourself to be composed of groups and committees. Appreciating that you operate (as a professional and as a person) as though you were many different, (some related, some compartmentalized, some departmentalized selves) leads to self-understanding, greater clarity of focus, and improved internal collaboration among your crucial needs, fears, motivations, ideals and values. Obtain your copy of Compendium here.

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