

Monday, March 31, 2008

Open Source for Education

Kidspiration: The "Why" of Educational Technology that Open Source Forgot

Inspiration; Software released Version 3 of Kidspiration;. This software is the preeminent "concept mapping, mind mapping" resource for young students - Grades K-3. (Actually, there is no other software program that does the job of instruction young children as well as Kidspiration;.)

Concept maps and mind maps are visual tools for structuring thought. Colorful diagrams and images show relationships in concrete and understandable ways that prove to be effective teaching tools.

So, what could Open Source folks learn from the release of Kidspiration; 3.0? (Flip Answer: The same thing that they should have learned with the release of Kidspiration' 1.0, or 2.0. the same thing that they should have learned from examining Inspiration;"s flagship product, Inspiration;, or Inspiration; Software's Inspiredata;.

Here are the basics: Software must be multi-platform (Windows; and Mac; at a minimum)

Software must run on a school district or campus network, as well as on individual computers

File Format Compatibility for file sharing, and access to created data and images must be usable (preferable interchangeable) with other programs…especially Microsoft; Office (The Word Processing and Presentation Programs in particular)

Software development must continue so that newer versions are compatible with the latest releases of computer operating systems, i.e., Windows; and Mac;

Output from the software must be compatible with methods for demonstrating pre-post learning progress, such as use within students' online portfolios

The technology must be transparent so that the attention of students and teachers remains focused upon instructional content (The technology must not be so difficult that it calls attention to itself.)

Software releases must be announced well in advance to allow school district administrators to budget for the software

Software must be released by the Spring of the year to allow school district IT Departments to test the software and roll out the updated software during the Summer

Software must function correctly with a network install, i.e., only requiring one server-based installation (as compared to installing the software on each desktop and laptop computer). But, the software must also be available on laptops that students and teachers use at home Take-home licenses for the software should be available so that students and teachers can use the software at home. Of course, this is the argument for selecting Open Source software in the first place. But, if the software does not meet the instructional needs of students, there is no justification for wasting students' and teachers' time (or network storage space) by installing it.

Sidebar Kidspiration; is available from many dealers and resellers. But, don't buy the software yourself since school districts receive huge discounts on site licenses. Site licenses allow campuses to install the software on as many computers as they wish. But, don't install the software on every computer, either. What you should do is install the software one time on your campus server; then, create a link to the program from your campus or district Intranet page. This solution eliminates plenty of hassles, and allows students to access the program from any computer that is connected to the campus network.

blockquote>The Curriculum Connection

Kidspiration; can be used by young children. But, so what?

The question is, "What do young children learn from software that is engaging (and so easy that it doesn't draw attention to itself) that children learn crucial concepts?"

Look at some of the items that Kidspiration; 3.0 includes:

Symbol Collection - over 3,000 symbols related to concepts that are taught in Grades K-5

Support for Multiple Subjects - It's not just for Math anymore

Views include - Picture, Math and Writing Views

Math Functions include: Color Tile Manipulation

Pattern Block Manipulation

Base-Ten Block Manipulation

Fraction Tiles

Fraction Boxes Symbol - Keyword Search

Support for Audio Input - Teachers can record instructions

Support for ELL and ESL students

Included Dictionary and Thesaurus -- over 13,000 words

Included Sight Vocabulary - Dolch and Frye's Word Lists

Over 150 cross-curricular teaching templates - with Standards-Aligned Lesson Plans In addition, Inspiration;

released a companion teacher resource book, *Kidspiration*; in the Classroom: Reading Essentials.

If you think that *Inspiration* Software understands the learning process for young children, and understands the needs of teachers in this high-stakes test-crazy world of education, you are right.

If you notice that *Kidspiration* integrates visual, auditory and hands-on learning across multiple curricular content area subjects while decreasing students' attention to the technology, you perceive the correct model for "Technology Integration." That is, the technology takes a backseat to learning, the technology delivers learning experiences and positive learning outcomes by disappearing from view. Transparent technology is integrated technology. Link to 50 uses of *Inspiration*; and *Kidspiration*;

Link to Graphic Organizers on Classroom Toolkit Exercises with *Kidspiration*;

Graphic Organizers in the Classroom on *Educscapes*;

Graphic Organizers at *Graphhic.Org*

Conducting Google search for Curricular uses of *Kidspiration* produces over 14,000 resources. A Google search for Curricular uses for Open Source produces 540,000 entries. But, the *Kidspiration* resources are focused upon instruction, more targeted and more useful. The "Open Source" entries are focused upon the technology. > On the face of it, "Open Source" would seem to win as a resource for teachers. In practice, *Inspiration* software "out classes" difficult-to-use Open Source software that is geared toward "Techie" adults, software that draws attention to itself." (No pun intended.) Multiple searches with variations of search terms containing the words "Open Source software" produce plenty of results, but fail to focus upon direct instruction in a usable way.

Sidebar

If any Classroom Toolkit reader finds a suitable search phrase that produces links to resources that teachers can actually use (besides Classroom Toolkit, of course) please comment to this article entry.

Note: The Classroom Toolkit strategy is to provide Open Source instructional materials, not software development.

These materials are developed in a modular format to save time for teachers. Once teachers salvage some personal time; instead of being trapped in the personal drudgery of daily lesson planning, teachers can devote more energy and focus upon improving personal teaching skills. The Professional Development "Snowball" The other area that *Kidspiration* beats Open Source solutions is in the area of professional development.

Kidspiration focuses upon creative and innovation ideas for moving the curriculum towards higher-order learning skills. The Open Source "Techie strategy" focuses upon saving money with software that can be "tinkered with." … that is, software that allows programmers to rewrite its "source code." Teachers to Open Source Developers: "Who cares if we can rewrite software source code? We don't have the time or know-how to do that, and we don't want to learn. We love children, and we want our time to be spent communicating with children, and teaching them. We don't want to spend our time interacting with a computer screen. Just make the software do what students and teachers need, don't show off your technical prowess. We don't care about 'technology for technology's sake,' and never will." Sidebar This "stilted" focus upon "free and cheap" leads to the "biggest sin" of the Open Source for Education Movement; i.e., forgetting to spend about one-third of the project budget upon instructional-focused (not-software-focused) professional development. See the Classroom Toolkit articles …

Teachers to IT Departments: You have Professional Development Homework Lack of Educational Intelligence: The Major Problem with Open Source Software

Teachers to Open Source Advocates: "You have Homework!"

But, *Inspiration* Software has a full range of professional development options that focus upon instructional outcomes. Sidebar *Kidspiration* professional development sources include:

The *Inspiration* Software Professional Development resources Teacher Created Projects from the University of Wisconsin

Using *Kidspiration*; in the Classroom

Kidspiration; Make and Take *Kidspiration*; Free Trial

But, don't take our word for it. Download a free trial of *Kidspiration*; now! Download a free trial of

Kidspiration; now …

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 01:00