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Quick Tips

Want to Upgrade your Technology Teaching Skills?: Don't Try this Summer Conference Trip

If after bludgeoning gasoline prices, you have any disposable income, you might try out-of-town travel to educational summer conferences. Most trips to educational conferences should provide some measure of tax-deduction relief, but check with competent tax professionals, and don't claim that you learned your "creative tax deduction strategies" here. The theme of the conferences that we suggest that you NOT attend is the O'Reilly Open Source Convention (OSCON). Sidebar

Note: This is not an advisory against the OSCON program. This an outstanding program that offers marvelous learning opportunities, but few benefits of value for classroom teachers.

It may seem strange to offer a "don't go" recommendation for a teacher "Quick Tip" article. But, this is a companion article to our review of Moodle! in this Classroom Toolkit issue. Sidebar "Moodle! Why this Open Source, Course Management System "Can't / Won't / Will Never" Catch On in K-12 Education" Actually, this Quick Tips article is a companion to the Moodle! article, because this article show exactly why Open Source (on its current track, like Technology Integration in general) is doomed to lurk on the outskirts of education. The problem, Open Source in its current incarnations doesn't offer much for education except "free and cheap" solutions. And the corollary: "Free and Cheap" solutions mean…More "Brute Force" Work by Teachers to make anything valuable happen from that "Free and Cheap" stuff

More Teacher Time Spent on the "Free and Cheap" stuff, and less time on productive instructional tasks
More Guilt by Teachers that they are not "Integrating the Technology" the way that they are supposed to
Lots of Manual Steps in interconnecting the "Free and Cheap" pieces of the Open Source stuff that don't work together
No Direct or Observable Link between the "Free and Cheap" stuff and Measurable Student Instructional Outcomes
A trip to OSCON in Portland, Oregon, July 21 - 25, 2008 will prove these points. identify in this article is "Technology Integration" in your classroom. Technology Integration: Not a Teacher Priority
Technology Integration does not make the top of ordinary teachers' "To Do Lists." Not even close! Though a minority of teachers express a real, heart-felt interest in Technology Integration, almost every teacher is forced to "Talk the Talk, " even if they "Walk the other way." Most teachers have yet to see a viable implementation of Technology that delivers sustained, measurable, reliable, replicable student content-area learning improvement. This is the key to the Technology Integration problem. An OSCON will unlock nothing this summer. Here are the particulars of the conference…

"Now celebrating its tenth year, OSCON is a vibrant meeting ground for the open source community to inspire, debate, make deals, motivate, and connect face to face. OSCON 2008 will feature the key players and issues influencing open source today, and explore the greatest potential for open source tomorrow. Source: O'Reilly OSCON Note: Education and Learning are absent from the list of benefits." OSCON 2008 is happening July 21-25 in Portland, Oregon. Join over 2,500 open source developers, hackers, experts, IT managers, and users at OSCON 2008. This year's convention will include 40 tutorials that go deep into open source technology and over 400 sessions focusing on Administration, Business, Databases, Emerging Topics, Java, Linux, Mobile, People, Perl, PHP, Programming, Python, Ruby, Security, Web Applications, and much more." Source: O'Reilly OSCON

Note: Teachers are not listed as "Key Player" and, unless the teacher is a teacher of computer programming, these topics are foreign and useless." OSCON is the crossroads of all things open source, bringing together the best, brightest, and most interesting people to explore what's new, and to champion the cause of open principles and open source adoption across the computing industry." Source: O'Reilly OSCON Note: The agenda that these folks push is to get you and your school districts to adopt Open Source software. No mention of learning or instructional outcomes. Then, look at the list of sponsoring vendors: Atlassian™

EnterpriseDB™

Etelos™

Google™

IBM™

Ingres™

Intel™

Jasper Soft™

LinAgora Group™

Microsoft™

Mindtouch™

Mozilla™

Novell™

OpSource™

Silicon Mechanics
Sun Microsystems
White Oak Technologies
Yahoo
Zimbra
ZDNet

These are solid, technology companies. However, except for Disney, Google, Microsoft and (maybe) Novel; teachers have no contact with these companies. And, Disney seems to have little in common with "Free" because Disney products are not "free to schools." Learning Tracks Here are the learning track for the presentations; Administration (Network Administration, not School District Administration)

Business
Databases
Desktop Applications
Emerging Topics
Fundamentals
Java
Linux
People
Perl
PHP
Programming
Python
Ruby
Security
Web Applications

Great topics for computer programmers and Senior IT folks, limited interest to teachers. Speakers We are not going to belabor the point by listing the speakers and their affiliations. Non are from school districts, none are speaking about education topics. See for yourself; Link to the OSCON Speaker Schedule

But check out this teenage speaker, and the description of his topic;

"Samuel Baldwin (Teen on Linux) Teenbuntu: Reaching Out to Teens Samuel 'Shardz' Baldwin is a 15 year old gnu/linux/bsd geek living in Massachusetts. He's been running various linux distros since he was 12 years old, and programming since 10. His interested in hacking started when he saw 'something new' (red hat [sic]) on his grandfathers other computer. Immediately he took up an interest in unix and hasn't stopped learning since. He programs in C/C++, Perl, and dabbles in Haskell from time to time. He triple boots with Arch GNU/Linux, Gentoo GNU/Linux, and Kubuntu GNU/Linux. He also runs an OpenBSD server, and has a strong interest in Plan 9 From Bell Labs." Source: OSCON Program Summary While there are a lot of conferences, organized so that teachers can travel to visit family and friends in various parts of the country, and still get a 20% tax break on travel expenses; the OSCON conference probably won't even pay off for teachers if they have family members living in Portland. The reason: Attending OSCON is not "Free or Cheap." The full conference plus two tutorial days cost is \$1,740 (early) and \$2,090 (walk-in). Session attendance costs \$1,145 (early) and \$1,445 (walk-in). Two days of tutorials cost \$945 (early) and \$1,245 (walk-in). However, if you want to visit the Expo Hall and talk to the technology vendors, the cost is "Free." To register if you wish to register for OSCON, follow this link: Link to register for OSCON;

But, if you want to improve your teaching skills, look elsewhere. Classroom Toolkit is a great place to begin your search.

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