

Thursday, November 30, 2006

## **Open Source for Education**

Project Gutenberg and eReader; Free Electronic Books

Project Gutenberg and eReader; are not exactly Open Source, but both offer access to free eBooks.

"Content is King" on the Internet, but content for teachers is often expensive...often obscenely so. Not only that, but content takes time to create&hellip;time that teachers don't savor in abundance.

But while Project Gutenberg and eReader; offer a source of free content, other strategies are needed to make use of these resources.

See Classroom Toolkit's Instructional Management recommendations for a modular strategy using reusable teaching materials. See this newsletter concerning the download of our ISO disks.

Of course, there are other "catches"&hellip;Sending students to read raw text files (such as Project Gutenberg) can create frustration

Copying and converting raw text files requires edit and format time

One student could tie up the only classroom computer for a long time reading long text passages

Students don't have the attention span (or frustration tolerance) to listen to long passages of computer-generated voices that read the content (Hint: Probably you can't stand this kind of information input, either.)

Reading-straight-text assignments product less than stellar results, except for the most motivated and over-achieving students

What to Do?  
One solution is to convert straight text to an eBook-readable format.

There are several ways to perform this magic...Load the text file into a word processing program, then save as a Web page

Drawback: The created Web pages are filled with junk code

Drawback: Formatting is necessary (and time consuming)

Convert the file to PDF format

Drawback: Line breaks and other formatting errors can creep in to the saved PDF file

Benefit: Anyone can read the PDF file with any Web browser

Convert the file to the eReader; format

Drawback: Formatting is necessary

Benefit: The file can be read on lots of portable devices..

Note: Perhaps instead of banning cell phones, schools could require that the cell phone be able to read eBooks.

Have your district purchase a site license for a 250 or 500-title collection of preformatted eBooks.

Drawback: The cost is either \$1,000 or \$1,500 USD.

Benefit: The text is formatted and readable on all kinds of devices

Benefit: For \$3.00 or \$4.00 USD each title, every student, parent and teacher in the district can have access to 250 to 500 eBooks.

Benefit: The software for reading these eBooks is free (at least the "free version" is free)eReader; SoftwareThe eReader; software comes in a "Free" and a "Pro" version. The "Pro" version of the software costs \$10 USD. The "Free" version functions as the "Pro" version for ten days, then some features of the "Pro" version become inactive. That is, after ten days, the "Pro" version degrades to the "Free" version.

Another catch, if you want to format eBooks yourself, the software that creates these eBooks costs \$30 USD. The biggest catch: formatting takes valuable time.

There is also a demo version of the eReader; eBook creating software, but, unfortunately, you cannot just create lots of documents during the trial period. Well, you can create as many documents as you wish, but you will wish that you hadn't because each page will have a "Made with Demo Version" in huge letters.

So, why bother with this software?Available PlatformsThe eReader; software is available (for free) for the...Palm OS

Pocket PC

Windows Mobile Smartphone

Sembian

Windows Desktop

Macintosh Desktop

The idea is for this software is to make text (such as entire books) available for mobile devices.

For example, I read the free book, Tarzan of the Apes by Edgar Rice Burroughs on my Palm Pilot; T3. Now I am testing The Swiss Family Robinson...also free.eReader; eBooks for SaleThe collection of eBooks for sale ranges from free to the full price if you were to purchase the physical book in a bookstore. But, if you own a potable device that

can run the eReader software, you could "learn on the go."

For school districts with a strategy of providing students with a Portable Digital Assistant (PDA), eReader sells the collections of 250 eBooks for \$995 USD or 50 eBooks for \$1,495. These titles are loaded on the district's server, and downloaded to the PDA device for reading and study.

Of course, the logistics of, say 1,000 students in a high school, each downloading daily assignments would need to be streamlined. (And some high schools have three or four times as many students.)

From the eReader Website...&The Education Classics Collection, a comprehensive collection of 500 titles that includes "The Red Badge of Courage," by Stephen Crane, "Little Women," by Louisa May Alcott, "Night and Day," by Virginia Woolf, the works of William Shakespeare, and other books commonly found on middle and high school reading lists.

This collection provides schools with a cost-effective way to easily distribute eBooks to students. The eBooks cannot be lost, stolen, or damaged, and the license entitles the school to internally distribute as many copies of the eBooks as it wants, as many times as it wants."Project GutenbergMany titles that are in the public domain are available from Project Guterberg. In fact, Project Gutenberg now has over 17,000 electronic books in its library.Timesavers, Or Not?There are some ways to format plain text documents that don't devour a teacher's every waking minute...Arrange for students to format text during learning center and writing conference activities

Use global formatting for the entire text, then apply styles to titles, subheadings and bullets

Project sections of the text using an LDC projector, and apply formating in real time during a whole class (or small group) discussion about the meaning of the text and how formating can communicate that meaning

Find parent volunteers or retired teachers who will do the formating for you

Work out a set of "macro" commands that will automate the

Test one of the many text conversion utility programs (free or Shareware). Note: Search many sites for these. Link to one valuable resource for finding these conversion utilities...

With imagination, help or automation, providing learning experiences using free, public domain text provides benefits for teachers and payoffs for students.

And, if you format one of the Project Gutenberg or other text using the eReader software, please post the text on the Internet so that other teachers can use it.

We will be glad to post these files if you cannot find another sponsor.

Send a description of what you would like to share to...[joseph@classroomtoolkit.net](mailto:joseph@classroomtoolkit.net)

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