

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

Quick Tips

C-SPAN Classroom

Election season brings interest in all things political.

But finding (and trusting) unbiased, un-slanted, un-spun reporting from modern mass media outlets? You be the judge. Then, there is C-SPAN Classroom.

C-SPAN Classroom is a public service of the cable industry.

Since Cable Operators are folks that eschew regulation and are wary of politicians who might turn on them, despite the overly generous contributions, these folks business bottom lines can't afford to alienate either political party. This motivates them to provide even and fair news coverage. A Super Primary Source C-SPAN Classroom offers unique, primary source video. (This means "original" sources of information rather than information about primary elections…which they also cover.)

C-SPAN Classroom focuses on free materials for teaching Civics and U.S. Government. These include a focus upon: Principles of Government

The U.S. Constitution

The Legislative, Executive and Judicial Branches

Political Participation C-SPAN Classroom also offers teacher resources that include: Sample Clips

A Newsletter

A Video Search

Grants and Fellowships

A Very "Liberal" (pun intended, C-SPAN Classroom's words - meaning: generous) Copyright Policy C-SPAN Classroom encourages teachers to use C-SPAN resources without cost. The policy allows teachers to make video tape copies without obtaining permission if the use…Is for an educational use

Is not offered for sale or subsequent distribution

C-SPAN is credited as the source of the video These materials can be used by teachers at school and at home…and these copies can be kept for as long as you want.

C-SPAN Classroom also allows saving video taped materials on digital media; i.e., CDs and DVDs, or saving this content using online storage systems such as video servers.

Rules for using C-SPAN Classroom Digital Content

Teachers can use C-SPAN Classroom by: content and teachers can digitize C-SPAN Classroom content for use by: Digitizing the content

Purchasing the content from the C-SPAN Store and using it, sharing it

Downloading the content from the C-SPAN Archives

Keeps backup copies of the content indefinitely

Providing C-SPAN content to students on CDs or DVDs as long as the content is available without cost to all students in the course

Posting C-SPAN-produced content on a non-commercial Website or a school district Intranet site

Using C-SPAN-produced content during professional presentations as long as the fee for delivering these presentation is nominal Uses that Require Licensing (and maybe paying a fee) Teachers that use C-SPAN content for distance learning classes will have to obtain a written license, and might have to pay a licensing fee.

The reason: Many colleges and universities charge for distance learning and dual-credit classes.

Distance learning would be classes that are distributed by: Public broadcasting stations

Local cable or public access

Internet and Network access

Distribution of courses by CDs or DVDs (not just copies of programs that you give to all your students) C-SPAN Classroom "StudentCam" Contest C-SPAN Classroom sponsors a StudentCam Contest each year.

This Year's StudentCam Topic is, "A message to the new President"

Students (alone or in teams of up to three students) develop a presentation to ask the new president, "What is the most urgent issue for the new president to address after taking office, and why?"

Students create a short (5 to 8 minutes) video documentary to explore an issue of national importance. This should be an issue that they believe the new president of the United States must act upon.

Student documentaries need to include more than one viewpoint and must contain C-SPAN program content to qualify for the contest.

The deadline for submitting the documentary is January 20, 2009" (Inauguration Day). Students in grades 6 to 12 are eligible to enter.

Winning students will be interviewed on C-SPAN, and there are \$50,000.00 USD in available prizes. Link to the C-SPAN

StudentCam Press ReleaseC-SPAN PoliticsAlthough the Primary and Full-Fledged Presidential Campaigns seem like they has been a long and acrimonious road, C-SPAN Politics has kept up with the fray and the frayed nerves. Of course, there is still time for one or both of the campaigns to take an even more nasty turn for the worse. If either candidate fails to reign in the zealots that support them, "mud could fly and sleaze could tarnish" both campaigns; even though the principle aspirants have agreed to step above the "ooze and slime" that characterized the last several campaigns.

C-SPAN reports on political ads, debates and campaign "stump stops." And they offer fair coverage, rather than slants and spins that "Dote and Promote" for their owner's (or stockholders' favorite) and "Thump the Chump" for the candidate that their employers disfavor.

C-SPAN Politics also shares Podcasts and historical documentaries of previous political campaigns. These are real, primary sources.

SidebarUnfortunately, many of these resources require RealPlayer to be installed on your computer. Get

RealPlayer HereRed State, Blue State: The Real PatchworkEveryone has seen the ubiquitous

"Red-State-Blue-State" political maps that shrink understanding of the Electoral College to a simplified graphic.

But, voting in states also divides along "urban/ suburban/ rural", ethnic make up, and racial make up.

C-SPAN Politics provides a political map that drills into the "voting-block-tendencies" of areas within states.

States Political Regions Map (not overall, one party takes all summary)

Unfortunately, sifting through primary source material is time consuming and tedious. (Students get lost or distracted when turned loose on sites with tremendous resources, so teachers must sort out appropriate information and provide rubrics, project maps and assignment blueprints to keep students on track.)

The extra work is worth the effort.

Even elementary school teachers can benefit from these resources when they develop presentations that add color and commentary to augment the boring (politically correct, uncontroversial) textbook content. SummaryC-SPAN Classroom, C-SPAN StudentCAM and C-SPAN Politics contain a huge primary source archive. Resources for teaching current events, civics, social studies, government (even history) are available without charge.

Take advantage of these resourceswhen you have the time.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Sunday, August 31, 2008

Quick Tips

Scholastic® Opens a New "Newbie Teacher" Service

Scholastic® launched a new service aimed at capturing new teachers and bringing them into the Scholastic® sphere of influence.

The new Help for New Teachers site is called, "First Class." This marketing strategy makes sense for Scholastic® because up to 50% of new teachers leave the profession within three to five years, so the teacher market is in flux. In addition, "Baby Boom Age" teachers are retiring in increasing numbers.

Unfortunately, the reason for so many new teachers leaving the profession is unrelated to a lack of instructional materials. Teachers have access to a plethora of materials—self-created, in district and from the Internet.

Classroom Toolkit provides enough of these zero-cost resources to help almost any teacher through multiple years.

New Teachers need help in coping with the school systems that employ them since most of these school systems fail to provide the help and support that new teachers need.

Teacher survival and career longevity requires self-support and personal learning skills that are largely unavailable in school districts.

In addition, most of the resources, tips and help available on First Class seems to be geared to elementary school teachers.

Here is a link to Scholastic's new service: [Help for New Teachers: What's on Offer](#)

Scholastic® offers the traditional mix of "resources, tools and tips" with this new service. A newsletter, coupons and special offers, and a new teacher help line are also on tap. Some of what Scholastic® includes with this service includes:

Classroom Planning
Managing your Class

Lesson Planning

Grading and Assessing Student Work
Classroom Organization
Organizing your Classroom

Finding Classroom Resources
Communications and Public Relations
Working with Colleagues

Communicating with Families
Personal Professional Development
Time Management

Teacher Professional Development
Printable Materials
School Days Mini-Book

Autumn Activities

Book Report Alternatives
Jargon-Based Topics
Connect with Kids and Parents of Different Cultures

Bias-Proof your Classroom

How to Choose the Best Multicultural Books

Many Cultures, Many Languages
Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)
Teaching ELL: General Instructional Strategies

Teaching ELL: Speaking Strategies

Success for ESL Students

Reaching Out to Non-English Speaking Parents
Scholastic® requires that teacher register (and provide the name of their school) in order to use many of the free materials on offer. Will this Strategy Work for Scholastic? First Class is not Scholastic's first try at reaching new teachers. However, Scholastic never tried to connect the new teacher market with all of its divisions like they are doing with this marketing effort.

The First Class effort might stand a greater chance of success if the company were a bit less focused on selling books and materials from their product line, and more focused upon what the real factors are that force so many of our new teachers to leave the profession so soon "out of the starting gate."

Although Scholastic® recognizes the "new teacher burnout rate," its solution based upon selling more of its materials is yet to be validated.

However, the site is broad and deep—and worth your time if you choose to visit.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Quick Tips

Safe Instructional Videos: Too much to ask for?

TeacherTube provides student-safe instruction videos. Better yet, most school district content filters recognize TeacherTube as a safe Internet destination.

Access TeacherTube; at TeacherTube; Sidebar For the isolated school district content filter that blocks access to TeacherTube; we describe a way to download videos and save them to a CD or USB drive. Here is what you need …

First download the software that you need to manage this process:

Download the software

Second, download a free FLV Player from Applian

Download the FLV Player, or this Recommended One from CNet.

Note: These FLV Players may install a Toolbar if you just select the defaults. Be sure to uncheck the Install Toolbar options!

Next, run the Xilisoft Download YouTube Video application

Enter the YouTube URL in the Xilisoft application.

Save the output.

Play the video.

In addition, TeacherTube offers a companion product, Teacher Tube Desktop (in the Beta testing phase). This is a social networking tool.

TeacherTube and TeacherTube Desktop provide cost-free access to over 25,000 educational videos. And hundreds more videos are added by teacher members each month (as compared to the thousands that are added to YouTube; each second.

But, TeacherTube videos are child-safe, unlike Google's two, big video-serving behemoths.

Sidebar Here is how innocent searches on YouTube go astray.

A recent search for the term "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" turned up multiple renditions

Besides the obvious interpretations by Madonna, versions by Chinese, French, English, Ukrainian singers were available. Great so far!

Since the goal was to find a variety of accents as a demonstration for a foreign language course, this set of videos provides an outstanding instructional resource

Where the project went haywire was when YouTube began to suggest other videos that might be of interest.

And, instead of maintaining the "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" search term, the YouTube system began supplying searches based on words such as the singer's name.

So, let's say that the French singer's name was Sheila Souffle. The YouTube algorithm, in all its wisdom, serves up a video about a "dish" named Sheila. But, Sheila is not a turkey with dressing, and not someone whose little piggies are in a blanket, or restrained by a wrap of any kind. Sheila is in-the-raw, au natural.

The reason that TeacherTube videos are safe is that real people monitor the content on TeacherTube. Not so on YouTube; where so many videos are submitted that Google would have to employ hundreds of thousands of reviewers to keep up with the pace. If that were to happen, the videos would not remain "free." Strengths of TeacherTube; TeacherTube's content can be used by instructors.

But, if you do the math, you discover that 25,000 videos is a "drop in the bucket" compared to the needs of the curriculum.

However, this is a great start for a company that has only been in business for a bit over a year.

TeacherTube also partners with content-owners such as the American Institute for History Education.

Unfortunately, finding the "right video" is fraught with the same challenge as finding the "right lesson plan" on the Internet. That is: is it quicker and easier to create your own if you have a structured, modular plan.

With videos, you just need the ability to cut, edit and trim videos that you find so that the segments fit your curriculum … also to ensure that unwanted segments never reach your students' eyes and ears.

Of course, video editing is time consuming, tedious, even with superior tools.

So, summer is the time to get a head start on adding video to your instructional repertoire.

The other challenge with creating instructional video is that huge amounts of content are required for a standard (180 student attendance day) school year.

That is the reason that TeacherTube's 25,000 videos seem like an "echo in an empty bucket." TeacherTube also provides a number of "Channels" i.e., curriculum areas.

Visit the TeacherTube Channels here.

But, if a teacher created the thousands of videos that would be required to drive a year-long course, this collection of

intellectual property would be worth a lot (really lot) of money. Even more money, if that collection of intellectual property increased demonstrable, observable student achievement.

Few teachers (and fewer school districts) are willing to share a year's worth of instructional content with the world without financial remuneration.

This leaves teacher scrambling across the Internet to acquire instructional content, and makes TeacherTube; a rapidly rising destination for time and resource-strapped teachers. TeacherTube; DesktopThe TeacherTube;Desktop is an interactive environment. This program works with a suite of applications, including a video server system that can manage a video user community.

This Web 2.0 application allows teachers to add any of the TeacherTube; videos, plus a slew of gadgets (Widgets

And all this requires only the ability to browse the Web, and the ability to upload, copy and paste.

SidebarTeacherTube; Desktop is in Beta test mode, and offering free accounts to the first 1,000 teachers that sign up.

Sign up at Teacher Tube; DesktopHigh-End VideoLike Techsmith;'s offer of a trial of Snagit 9, Xilisoft; offers a trial of its converter software.

Xilisoft; offers an army of specialized converters, but for less than the price of two specialized converters, you can get a multi-function suite of tools.

Here is what the Xilisoft Video Converter Ultimate product can do… Main Functions: Convert between almost all popular video formats, such as MPEG-4, AVI, H.264, DivX, XviD, RM, FLV, SWF, MOV, 3GP, WMV, etc.

Convert between almost all audio formats, such as MP3, AAC, AC3, M4A, WAV, WMA, etc.

Convert video to almost all audio formats, such as MP3, AAC, AC3, M4A, WAV, WMA, etc.

Convert pictures of certain formats to video formats like AVI, RM, FLV, SWF, MOV, 3GP, WMV, WAV

Extract pictures from video files, and outputting them as JPG, PNG, GIF, BMP, SWF, etc.Key Features:Offer powerful video effects editing functions, including crop video size, edit video effects, add and adjust video subtitle, and add video watermark; 2.Clip any video or audio segment to convert, and merge them into one

Allow to convert one source file to several, or merge several source files into one

Can preview and compare source video and video customized

The snapshot provides you with image snapping, and also you can grab picture by setting the duration

Provides rich profiles for you to choose, and enables you to customize and save your profile for future use

Can customize the size of output audio and video file for different devices

Provides batch conversion and multithreading to convert multiple files at the same time

Can run in background for more efficiencyTo download the free trial…Xilisoft; Video Converter Ultimate Free Trial

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Monday, June 30, 2008

Quick Tips

Create a Master To-Do Log/ List System

Whether you use a Planner-Diary (such as a Day Timer[®]), a Personal Digital Assistant (such as a Palm Pilot[®]), or a computer-based system such as Microsoft[®] Outlook[®]; you need a Master To-Do Log/ List System. Why?

The reason that you need a Master To-Do Log/ List System is so that activities and tasks don't fall through the cracks. When you keep track of everything that you must do, you decrease the amount of stress that you experience...especially the kind of stress from being reminded by a supervisor that the three or four hour task that you forgot about is due tomorrow morning, first thing!

The second part of the system is the To-Do List, or, better yet, the "Take Action on Priorities" List. Components of the System The Master To-Do Log/ List System must be flexible, and you need to customize this system to how you work. The crucial strategy is to ensure that: Everything that is important is Listed

Highest Priority Items are "Acted Upon" first

Urgent Items don't take over and keep High Priority Items from happening The Master To-Do Log The first part of the System is a Master To-Do Log. This lists all the tasks that you have to do. You write everything that you have to do on this Log form.

This is the list that almost no one uses. The reason, because it gets filled up with recurring tasks. And for a teacher, the amount of work that is required is overwhelming.

The useful Master To-Do list is kept trim and lean.

What this means is that routines, habits, standard methods, scheduled tasks do not get written on this list.

For example, items that a teacher would not bother writing on this list might be: Taking class attendance and entering attendance data in an attendance or grade book

Making breakfast, getting dressed, combing or brushing your hair, driving to work

Picking up your child from After-School Care

Checking E-mail and Postal Mail

Fixing dinner in the microwave oven, pouring milk on a bowl of cereal

You get the idea

On the other hand, it might be useful to add trivial tasks such as:

Return videos to the library (because the fine is \$2.00 per day, each)

Keeping your medical, dental or psychiatric appointment because there is a charge for missed appointments

Showing up in court to contest that traffic or parking ticket, showing up for jury duty

Purchasing gifts and cards for birthdays and anniversaries of significant others

Etc.

The challenge is to list everything without overdoing the list making. You need to take action on items, rather than spending your time just writing and copying lists.

It might help if you categorize the items on the Master To-Do Log. The To-Do List Maintaining the Master To-Do Log is bearable until the list becomes so long that you begin to feel that you will never catch up.

That is the reason for coding the Log items.

Some systems use an "A-B-C 1-2-3" system. This places tasks in the A1 category (Important), down to the C-3 category (Low Priority, Can Put Off until Later).

For teachers, the problem with this approach is that teachers have little discretion over their time. For example, tasks can be Important or Unimportant, Urgent or Not Urgent.

This leads to a situations where teachers must do Unimportant but Urgent tasks, while putting off Important tasks that are not Urgent. (Absolutely the wrong approach.)

A third system is the "Is it worth it" System. With this system, you just take items from the Master To-Do Log if they answer the question, "Is doing this worth it?" The answer must be, "Yes!" And, not a pint-sized, pipsqueak "yes," but a shout-it-out, "YES!" To-Do List Management The To-Do list is not written the day when you want to accomplish things, it is written the day before...sometimes a few days before.

Write out Action Items. Try to identify 20 take-action tasks per day (or less). Taking action on between 15 and 20 items is about all that you will be able to accomplish.

It's easier to start the school day if you already have a written To-Do List. This allows you to start completing your list when you are fresh and when your mental power of concentration is most focused.

Later in the day, after stress and excitement take their toll, your energy level and your ability to concentrate diminish, and your productivity decreases. Save routine tasks (such as grading homework papers) for this time since you don't need high levels of focus or skill to accomplish such trivial tasks. Sidebar Of course, you should avoid assigning trivial

homework, but grading the homework should be easy on the teacher. And, cross the completed item off the To-Do List. You may enjoy the satisfaction in seeing the large number of tasks that you have completed in a week or two.

And, that satisfaction is one reason that paper lists often leave you with a greater feeling of accomplishment than when you use an electronic task tracking device or program.

Crossing off each action item leaves you feeling like you have accomplished something. What about Left-Over Items? So what happens if I have one, two or more left over action items?

Just put them at the top of the list for the next day.

And, if you like the feeling of accomplishment, you can add these tasks to another page. The flip of the page can give you a sense of accomplishment.

Lesson Plans Inadequate?

Teachers often believe that Lesson Plans are enough to drive efficiency, but the lesson plan is a guide to what students are going to do to learn.

The lesson plan document is your communication with your supervisor, and a legal record of your classroom activities.

What the To-Do Log and the To-Do List do is ensure that you keep all the important To-Do items in plain sight and in reach. Your Beliefs about Time Management Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists have their place in your time management strategy. However, external factors such as these tools can distract from the internal change strategies that can streamline daily planning tasks.

Two factors that impact your efficiency as much (or more) than Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists are: Our Beliefs
Our Intention

Our beliefs either limit or expand our ability to get things done.

And, how we view time has an incredible impact upon how productive we become.

Future Classroom Toolkit articles will explore the impact of belief upon planning and time management.

For now, it is sufficient to explore beliefs that are more useful to have, i.e., beliefs that… Provide flexibility rather than constraints

Expand capacities rather than restrict abilities

Identify opportunities rather than highlight difficulties

Empower our action rather than restrain our behavior

Flex our capabilities rather than handcuff our strengths

Promote our maturity and confidence rather than prop up our child-like dependencies

And, our intentions have a power that brings situations and outcomes to fruition in ways that our plans only hope to achieve.

So, examine your beliefs and your intentions to determine ways to empower your actions.

For example, replace beliefs like…"I have to…" with "I choose to…"

"I wish I could…" with "I intend to…"

"If only…" with "I want to…"

"There is nothing I can do…" with "I can consider these options…"

And consider ideas and belief that you hold, examine ones that fail to achieve what you want, and replace those ideas and beliefs with more functional options.

Easier said than done?

Actually, surprisingly easy if you open your mind as an adult and question the limits and limitations that you learned as a child.

What you have to gain is a brighter, open, freer viewpoint that allows you to manage your Master To-Do and To-Do List with greater flexibility.

And flexibility accomplishes plenty. See for yourself.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 06:00

Saturday, May 31, 2008

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.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Quick Tips

Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences

The year-end drama of conducting Parent-Teacher Conferences heightens about this time of year. This is when campus leaders begin collecting the names of students that you may not promote to the next grade level.

And, all sorts of recriminations, anger, blame-leveling and unpleasantness ensue unless a teacher prepared for this eventuality with the proper groundwork.

If you didn't prepare, and if you insist on "holding back" a student; prepare for stormy seas. You might have to weather anything from a tidal wave, gale-force chop or the "Perfect Storm."

And, even with the full support of every campus administrator, you need to "batten down the hatches" and be prepared to ride out the rough seas.

And while you are tossing and turning in the churn of emotion and hard feelings, "pray" (The supreme Court doesn't have to know what you are up to in the privacy of your own thoughts) that you will do better to prepare (and protect) yourself next year. Sidebar For a short list of tricks and tactics that you can use to make Parent-Teacher Conferences more enjoyable (bearable), visit A to Z Teacher Stuff Teaching Heart Scholastic Parent-Teacher Interviews/Conferences from About.Com There are a lot of resources that can help you, but proactive planning and common sense management are your best bets.

Think: "What can go wrong?" Expect: "Whatever can go wrong probably will." Be Ready: "You can weather the storm if you calk the leaks, close the port holes, and seal the hatches." Otherwise, you are left to flounder "like a cork on the waves." The "Indirect Approaches" The most effective strategy, if you start early enough in the school year, is to keep in constant, positive contact with all student's parents. Then, begin laying the groundwork for retaining the student early on. But, don't make a direct suggestion to the parents because, maybe rightly, the parents will conclude that you have given up on their child, and that the "kid's fate is doomed."

Instead, problem-solve with the parents and invite them "on board" as active partners.

Then, they will see (and experience for themselves) the challenges that their child faces when wading into the dangerous waters of high-stakes testing tide in a grade that the child will be frustrated in.

In a "fairy tale scenario," the parents might enlist your help in getting the school to retain their student. Of course, you labor intently to provide all the extra help that the "not-on-the-high-stakes-pace student" might need.

In the real world, other scenarios play out. For example; The parents refuse to sign the papers for Special Education referral and testing

The parents do not speak English, and you don't speak their language

The parents are in jail, and you can't talk to them

The child is gifted, bored and making trouble

The child misses part of the school year because the family is picking crops in other states

The family does not want any notice or publicity, possibly because they do not have the requisite passports, visas, work permits or other residency documentation

Endless combinations of the above; Indirect Suggestion There are a number of indirect approaches to getting parents to believe that the idea to retain their child came from them. Some of these include: Telling success stories about students who were retained in the past (while maintaining confidentiality, of course)

"Salting" an Internet resources list of links with "pro-retention" sites. Note: Keep this resource list balanced with about 40% of the "experts" favoring the "retention option" while 60% favor other strategies, such as Special Education, one-on-one tutoring, parent training, etc.

Describing the upcoming year of struggle in slightly unfavorable terms while describing the upcoming year as a "retainee" in slightly favorable terms. (Again, keep this subtle. You don't want to be found out, exposed, or retaliated against)

Note: Avoid any mention of sanctions the school will receive if the student is "placed" in the next grade level and flounders on the high-stakes test You can lay the groundwork for the retention decision with planning, communication with parents, and with plenty of effort on behalf of their child.

You work for the welfare of each student; show it.

Parents respond to teachers that demonstrate that the interests of their child predominate in the school's decision-making process.

In the end, you want parents to come aboard as loyal crew members instead of unhappy, disaffected, belligerent passengers that wish to foment a mutiny.

Working to keep parents as your strongest allies ensure smooth sailing in choppy seas. Treat the parents of your students as if they are traveling with "First Class" tickets.

If you are the master teacher that you should be, the parents already know how fortunate their child is to be in your

classroom. This is your "upgrade" to the joys of teaching. Consider yourself fortunate.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Monday, March 31, 2008

Quick Tips

April First Foolhardy? Try NuSpell on your Students

Students have a sense of humor that is commensurate with their age. And, some of your colleagues failed to grow up. So, expect April Fools jokes to be rampant on the "Day that Pranks Begot!" But, there are instructional ways to turn the tables on your rambunctious, "carried away by the mirth of it," students…teach them a lesson that they won't soon forget.

SidebarWouldn't it be "lovely" [sic] if all lessons were ones that our students didn't soon forget. Wishful dreaming?

Your strategy for "hot-seat role reversal" is to deliver a lesson on "NuSpell." Yes, there is such a thing, and the proof is online. Visit the NuSpell Site NuSpell Bingo Game Link to the evolution of the alphabet Poor Little Sick Boy Story Link to the Hogs Time Article And what to do for an encore?

Let students recite the "Dearest Creature of Creation" Poem for special April First Prizes.

Link to the Dearest Creature of Creation Poem…

Be sure to preview and practice reciting this poem yourself. And, look up the pronunciation of the words that you don't know, otherwise the joke will be on you.

One great method for introducing this poem is to offer a "nice prize," say \$5.00 to any student that can recite the poem all the way through without errors. Another strategy is to offer a consolation prize of \$1.00 to the student that gets the farthest through the poem without making a mistake.

And, what great math lessons in: Creating graphs of how far each student gets in the poem, by either words or lines

Sorting lists of the missed words and creating sets of those categories

Creating statistics of performance of teams, i.e., boys vs. girls

groups based upon hair color

student height

Groups based upon affiliation such as, "Jocks, Geeks, Cheerleaders, Teacher's Pets, Eggheads, etc. Just prepare ahead of time, and watch the fun.

Oh! And be sure to wear green to keep from being pinched.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Friday, February 29, 2008

Quick Tips

Teacher Time-Savers

The Classroom Toolkit Website presents a full complement of structured materials that save time and enhance classroom planning. Of course, Classroom Toolkit offers a unique focus, blending project management and automation technology to streamline teacher productivity.

Time savers for Teachers[®]; is another online resource that offers a free eBook with 28 pages of forms that you might find useful.

Download the free eBook at: Time Savers for Teachers[®]; free eBook Free Materials Time savers for Teachers[®]; provides a host of free materials. Of course, these are not as extensive as the collection provides at Classroom Toolkit, but that is because Time Savers for Teachers[®]; sells a lot of teacher materials packages.

Here is a link to the teacher materials packages that you can purchase.

Timesavers for Teachers[®];

But, check Classroom Toolkit before ordering because you may find most of the materials that you need at absolutely no cost.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Thursday, January 31, 2008

Quick Tips

Sleep Deprivation: A Malady for Students and Teachers

Everyone gets tired from work and play. And, falling asleep quickly when retiring for the evening is normal and natural. But, forcing yourself to stay up each night because you can't grade papers until the kids go to bed, and getting up early to get the kids (and maybe your spouse) off to school and work with a good breakfast means "consuming an inordinate amount of wax from both ends of the wick."

Teachers need to take care of themselves, and getting enough sleep is crucial to physical, emotional, and mental health. Remember that the body conducts most of its repair projects during sleep, and that people burn a lot of calories when they sleep. If you are gaining weight without eating more, perhaps a lack of sufficient sleep is the culprit. What is Sleep Deprivation? Sleep deprivation is the chronic lack of sufficient sleep. Chronic means "long term."

Dragging in on the Monday after the Super Bowl because the party goes didn't leave (not everybody is sensitive to the needs of the classroom week) does not constitute sleep deprivation.

But, sleep deprivation is serious.

The list of ailment associated with the malady include: Aching muscles

Blurred vision

Cardiovascular disease

Clinical depression

Colorblindness

Daytime drowsiness and naps

Decreased mental activity and concentration

Depersonalization/de realization

Weakened immune system

Dizziness

Dark circles under the eyes

Fainting

General confusion

Hallucinations (visual and aural)

Hand tremors

Headache

Hernia

Hyperactivity

Hypertension

Impatience

Irritability

Lucid dreaming (once sleep resumes)

Memory lapses or loss

Nausea

Nystagmus (rapid involuntary rhythmic eye movement)

Psychosis

Pallor

Slowed reaction time

Slurred and/or nonsensical speech

Severe yawning

Weight loss (or gain) Source: Wikipedia Sleep Deprivation http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep_deprivation

In addition, sleep deprivation often causes/ creates symptoms similar to 1.)

Attention deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and 2.) Alcoholic Intoxication. Source: Wikipedia Sleep Deprivation http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep_deprivation

A Teacher's Worst Nightmare Some of the symptoms or diseases caused by sleep deprivation seem trivial, others are so serious that student school failure or loss of teacher employment are likely.

But in the range of midrange symptoms (where the student or teacher remains in school, the list of symptoms contains the high-stakes focused teacher's "worst nightmare."

This is because so many of these symptoms overlap, and the sleep-deprived person can experience a smorgasbord of symptoms in some closely related configuration.

This is also because many of the symptoms in this constellation of pain and misery are related to a lack of competent performance on high-stakes test day. In other words, sleep-deprived students struggle to perform well on high-stakes

tests.
What to do if you are Sleep-Deprived
If you suspect that you are sleep-deprived, get help and take care of yourself.
Of course, this is easier said than done because: Sleep-deprived people lose a substantial chunk of their insight and judgment
Habits of less-than healthy living sneak quietly upon us, and we don't notice our slide into inadequate health
Treatment will be easier and less costly if the problem is addressed early. Solutions will be expensive and more resistant to change if allowed to integrate into multiple areas of your life.
What to do to Help Sleep-Deprived Students
Students may occasionally fall asleep in class. Let them sleep if you can.
But pay attention if this happens more than once.
At a second occurrence of a student falling asleep in class, do the following:
Document according to your district's or campus policies
Refer to a school counselor or social worker
Contact the student's parents
Inform your supervisor or principal
This may seem like over reacting, but resolving an issue quickly means resolving the issue with less stress for everyone.
Follow-Up and Follow-Through
Remain alert and focused on the symptoms and effects of sleep deprivation.
Remember that sleep deprivation is a culprit in many illnesses.
Also remember that most causes of sleep deprivation can be treated, and that it costs very little to go to sleep.
Sweet dreams!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Monday, December 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Translation Technology: Ready for Prime Time?

Translation software and online translation services abound. But, are any of them good enough for "prime time;" i.e., good enough for use in your classroom. Of course, if you need to communicate, even a poor translation that gets your point across; or helps you understand what the parents or student is trying to say, is beneficial.

As a "down and dirty, quick fix;" it is hard to fault free translation software and free translation services.

But, what is the catch? Language plus Culture = Communication. The first issue is that "word for word" translations seldom communicate the precise meaning. So, if the communication is super important (maybe even legal) such as Special Education Students' Individual Education Plans, grievance forms, failure notices, anything that can come back to bite you... get a professional person to translate for you.

For other stuff, decide if the trade off of "quick vs. quality translating" is worthwhile. Online Translation Services

Babelfish (at [Altavista](#));

Google; Translator (at [Google](#));

Translate (at [Paralink](#));

Translator (at [WorldLingo](#));

Translator (at [Dictionary.Com](#));

Multiple Translator (at [Omniglot](#));

Of course, if you have time to burn, you can examine each any of the 9.9 million search result links for "online translation" …

Google; Search for "Online Translation" Of course, you get what you pay for, and this stuff is "free."

Also note that if you search using Google; and you find a resource that is written in another language, Google;'s search listing offers to translate the page (or resource) for you. Good luck if you demand accuracy, though. Translation Software Translation Software is not much better than online translation software.

However, there is one exception.

The one program that does a "noble" if less than precise job is the program, SEER;

But, SEER; is different because it requires user input to identify the part of speech and the usage that need to be translated.

But, this requires "human intervention" that takes thought and time." Of course, "thought and time are what you pay a professional translator to do.

And, SEER; is pricey, at about \$300 USD. The product is also available for an annual subscription of about \$100 USD.

And, SEER; recommends that you employ a professional translator, or at least a native speaker of the language that you want to translate to (the target language).

SEER; offers a free download, but you might be better off purchasing the trial CD since the trial CD gives you 70 days of use before it stops translating for you. If you use the trial CD and then purchase the SEER; product, all your translation work will remain available and usable! Link to the SEER; Site

Link to the SEER; Download Page

Link to the SEER; CD Order Page

Remember that Culture is Crucial For Translation

Word analysis (vocabulary) is important, as is grammar, syntax and spelling. But, the culture that the language is embedded in is also important to the translation process.

In addition, native English speakers are generally unaware of just how difficult English is to translate.

While the sentence structure and grammar rules of English are easy, English … Spelling, synonyms, homonyms and exceptions are horrendous

Has more words than other languages, over 900,000

Co opts words from other languages at a frantic pace

Uses slang and idioms (also at a frantic pace) in lieu of structured conventions

Modifies daily with expressions that are gleaned from the broadcast and film media Phrases that didn't exist yesterday can come to prominence in a short time, and be listed in the Oxford Dictionary to the surprise of everybody. Sidebar Link to a description of how words are added to the Oxford Dictionary

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Friday, November 30, 2007

Quick Tips

Speak Up 2007: An Invitation You and your school district (or campus) can participate in this year's Speak Up National Research Project. Project Tomorrow, a leading non-profit group that focuses on science, math and technology K-12 education, facilitates this project.

The Speak Up project collects and releases an annual report that is "unfiltered" and authentic. (Real "Tell it like it is!") Project Tomorrow gathers these gems of experience and jewels of wisdom from K-12 Students

Teachers

Parents

School Administrators, Directors, and Executives

Reach and Focus
Project Tomorrow gathers all data online, and every school district in the United States and Canada are eligible to participate.

The survey focuses on 21st century education and technology issues.

Survey participants come from every state.

The online surveys remains open for your comments until December 15th this year.

Why Participate in Speak Up?

There are several reasons why you should post your comments on the Speak Up 2007 Website. These are:

Speak Up gives you a direct voice in the development of national and state education policies and programs

The national data is shared each year with Congress, the US Department of Education, National Science Foundation and many State Governors.

If you participate in Speak Up, you have free online access to your own quantitative data with national

benchmarks **Participate: Get the Report!** If you participate in the Speak Up Project, you will get the project data in January

2008, in time for making planning, training, budgeting and purchasing decisions. Themes for Speak Up 2007: Big

Ideas The themes for Speak Up 2007 include: Opportunities and impact of technology on learning

Communications, self-expression, and social networking

Global awareness and international collaborations

Science, math, national competitiveness, and workforce development

Schools of the future **Surveys Close: December 15th, 2007** Access to the Speak Up Survey remains open (online 24/7) until December 15th, 2007.

Students, parents, teachers and school leaders can access the survey from any computer that is connected to the Internet.

The survey takes between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Survey items include: multiple choice questions, and 1 (or 2) open ended response questions. The number of questions depends upon what survey you volunteer to take.

Register today! Tools to promote Speak Up The Speak Up website offers tools for making the 2007 Speak Up Survey a success. These tools include a Speak Up How-to Guide for Educators, a Speak Up How-to Guide for Parents, flyers for posting at your school, sample E-mail templates for communicating with other educators and parents, lesson plans, previews of the survey and more.

Visit the Speak Up Website or contact the Speak Up Team at: speakup@tomorrow.org **Summary** Project Tomorrow is a national nonprofit educational organization. Its mission is to promote and support innovative and research-based uses of science, math and technology. Project Tomorrow supports the use of these tools in developing critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity for all K-12 students.

Check them out. **Non-Profit Partners** Here is a list of Non-Profit Sponsors for the Speak Up Program.

This list is included to demonstrate that this is a valuable opportunity for you to get involved, and to motivate you to go to the Speak Up Website and register. **Alliance for Excellent Education**

American Association of School Administrators

American Association of School Librarians

American Electronics Association (AeA)

American Federation of Teachers

American Institutes for Research

Association of Materials Resource Centers

Benton Foundation

Cable in the Classroom

California Charter Schools Association

California League of High Schools

California League of Middle Schools

California Science Center

The Center for Educational Partnerships, UC
The Centers for Quality Teaching and Learning
The Children's Partnership
City of Seattle Department of Information Technology
College Board
Computer Science Teachers Association
Computer Using Educators (CUE)
Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)
Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Educating Future Generations (efg)
Educational Testing Service (ETS)
The Forum for Youth Investment
Future Scientists and Engineers of America
Gaggle
Generation Yes
George Lucas Educational Foundation
Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce
GreatSchools.net
iEARN (International Education and Resource Network)
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
Irvine Public Schools Foundation
Kidz Online
Maine Mathematics and Science (MMSA) Alliance
Massachusetts Building a Presence for Science
McKenzie Group
MassCUE
Math Forum @ Drexel
MOUSE
NASA Office of Education
The National Alliance of State Science and Math Coalitions
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
National Association of College Stores
National Association of Elementary
School Principals (NAESP)
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP, GEAR UP)
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers
of English
National Education Association (NEA)
National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA)
National Middle School Association
National Park Foundation
National Research Center for College & University Admissions
National Rural Education Association (NREA)
National School Boards Association (NSBA)
National Science Digital Library
National Science Resource Center -- Regional LASER Sites
North American Council for Online Learning
One Economy
Orange County Department of Education (CA)
Points of Lights Foundation
Professor Garfield Foundation
Public Education Network
Public Broadcasting Service
San Diego Science Alliance
Science@OC at the California Science Center
Science Buddies

Science Museum of Virginia
Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA)
State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)
TechCorps
TechNet
Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership
Think.com
United States Distance Learning Association
USATODAY Education
US Conference of Mayors
US Department of Education
Youth Science Foundation CanadaImpressed?

Now is the time to exercise your "democratic rights" because, if you work for a bureaucratic school district, your democratic rights are few.

Speak Up anyway! Your students educational future depends upon enough voices being heard.

And, while you are at it. Punch, pound, slap and kick The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and rid our educational landscape of this blight.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Google: A Wealth of Instructional Resources

You use Google to search for Websites, but, Google offers an assortment of other no-cost options. And, as compared to Open Source products, Google's online services are top-notch and top rated.

Here is what you can find on the Google site; Link to the Google Options Page; More Services than you can "Shake a Stick at" Here is a listing of the services that you can get from Google; without charge.

Some cautions are in order for any of these products or services that require installation on the local computer. Your school district's IT Department may frown on any unauthorized installations, and unauthorized users may not have adequate logon accounts with permission to install software.

Even so, Google offers an impressive array of products to choose from.

And, did I mention that every one of these is without cost? Alerts

Get E-mail updates on the topics of your choice Blog Search

Find Blog's on your favorite topics Book Search

Search the full text of books Catalogs

Search and browse mail-order catalogs Checkout

Complete online purchases more quickly and securely Desktop

Search and personalize your computer Directory

Browse the Web by topic Earth

Explore the world from your computer Finance

Business info, news, and interactive charts iGoogle

Add news, games and more to the Google homepage Images

Search for images on the Web. Note: Remember to set preferences for safe images Maps

View maps and directions News

- now with archive search New!

Search thousands of news stories Notebook New!

Clip and collect information as you surf the Web

(Does not work with Windows; Vista)

Note: You may not be able to use this product at school since you have to download and install software. Patent

Search New!

Search the full text of US Patents Product Search

Search for stuff to buy (for your classroom or for yourself). You do have a tiny bit of disposable income, don't you? Scholar

Search scholarly papers Special Searches

Search within specific topics Google; Toolbar

Adds a search box to your browser

Note: The IT Department in your school district may not allow you to download and install the Google; Toolbar on school district computers Video

Search for videos on Google; Video and YouTube;

Web Search

Search over billions of Web pages. This is the Google; Search that you know and love Web Search Features

Find movies, music, stocks, books, and more Custom Search New!

Create a customized search experience for your Website. Note: This service is probably only useful to you if you manage a Website Communicate & Share Blogger

Build a curriculum-based Blog -- fast, easy, and free Calendar

Organize your schedule and share classroom and school events with parents, students, colleagues and friends Docs

Create and share your projects online and access them from anywhere

Groups

Create mailing lists and discussion groups Gmail

Fast, searchable, no-cost E-mail with a great Spam filter

Orkut

Strange name for a service that helps you meet new people and stay in touch with friends Picasa

Find, edit and share your photos SketchUp

Build 3D models quickly and easily. Note: Another product that you have to install on the local computer. The same

school district IT Department cautions apply

Talk

Google's version of Instant Messenger. To communicate with your friends through your computer, they must also have an Google Talk account

Translate

View web pages in other languagesYouTube

Watch, upload and share videos. Note: Your school district's content filter may block the YouTube site because there is so much inappropriate material there. (Let your students continue watching this stuff at home.) Access to videos requires a broadband connection. Pack

A free collection of usable software. Note: Some of the programs listed above in an easy to install package.

Special Note: Installing the Norton AntiVirus service may interfere with the AntiVirus program that your school district employs.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Quick Tips

Word a Day - Word of the Day: Mammoth Opportunity for Learning Almost everybody overestimates and underestimates. For example, most people will over estimate how much work that they can do in a year, and underestimate how much work that they can accomplish in a day or a week.

Odd, yes. And, teachers overestimate how much their students will learn by the "drop-dead high-stakes test date, and underestimate how much time it will take for students to "master" each component test objective. Sidebar Classroom Toolkit focuses upon higher-order thinking and teaching to students strengths. Word of the Day Sites Here are some "Word of the Day" sites … Wordsmith

NY Times Word of the Day

Visual Thesaurus - Sign up for Seven Different Words of the Day E-mail services How does "Word of the Day" Promote Higher-Order Thinking? Answer: "Words of the Day" don't promote anything unless the teacher promotes them by … Working them into the lessons each class period

Remembering what yesterday's word, and the word from the day before were, and working them into today's lesson

Working words from past weeks into lessons and conversation

Adding them to the "Word Wall" if in elementary school

Having students add these words to their journals in middle school What? You think that we are subverting the idea of a word of the day by reinforcing it on a "decaying repetition cycle?" You're right.

And, you suspect that we stray further afield by integrating the word with multiple subjects so that they word develops rich meanings

You're right again. And, we loose our opportunity to increase students' ability to memorize words in isolation by attaching meaning and enhancing the personal involvement that our students have with the word. You got it! Meaning,

Communication, Interaction, Internalization (MCII or MC12 The "Word of the Day" should be a daily reminder that a curriculum driven by high-stakes test objectives lacks usefulness. Rigorous experimental study would determine that such an approach generates standard measurable student outcomes.

Perhaps it is a shame that so many "Newbie" teachers (and veterans that should know better) succumb to the seduction of focusing on practicing test objectives instead of delivering a real curriculum. Daily Word is the Proof that Test Objectives Limit Learning How? Well, listen to the most common complaint about the "Word of the Day." That complaint is … How are students supposed to remember a long string of words when it is time to take the high-stakes test? This is exactly the issue about focusing on a long string of objectives. Objective do not skills make Learning seems to be cognitive, but Master Teachers know that learning is only minimally so.

The benefit of a "Word of the Day" strategy is that you can use the learning, memory, recall, integration, performance, meaning … and every other dimension to test instructional methods. That is if you are paying attention, and recording observations and results. Sidebar This testing is more like sampling than the assessment of the entire class. Classroom Toolkit recommends that this sampling process be ongoing, quick and involve a rotating selection of students.

The most important strategy: You use the observations to change course, i.e., change to instructional methods that are delivering results. For example: "What increase in learning occurs when your students enter the "Word of the Day" into their daily journal? What happens when they write a variety of short devices using the word? What happens when they gossip using the word. Etc. What happens when you work the word (or a concept related to the word) into the Daily Inspiration Message? What the "Word of the Day" strategy can do is enrich and broaden your students' vocabularies. What the "Word of the Day" also can do is enrich and broaden your instructional delivery strategies. The "Word of the Day" is an easy way to introduce students to newer and more complex learning routines. What can we say about "Word of the Day" strategies? They Rock!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 07:00

Friday, August 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Mini-Relaxation Minutes: Restore Concentration and Mental Acuity

Focus and concentration can feel like stress-- whether it is the "good stress" of enjoyable, captivating, discovery-learning; or whether it is the "distress" of authoritarian, who-cares?, "forced to grapple with it" boredom. But, some quick as a blink strategies and techniques can provide needed respite. These tricks don't take 40 winks, but only 60 to 120 seconds.

What we are suggesting are easy to do, high recovery, catnap replacements that energize and revitalize your performance.

Respite Options

Here are some strategies and techniques to try… Sit quietly, close your eyes, lift your gaze slightly. This will stop your thoughts. Hold your eyes in this position for as long as you are able to rest

Take a deep breath, breathe out slowly. Pay attention to your breathing without controlling it. Let your breathing settle into relaxation on its own

Start at your feet and tense, then instantly relax each muscle group up to the top of your head. Feel any body part that captures your attention, then let go. Feel yourself settle into relaxation

Sit quietly, and listen to any subtle sound. Focus your hearing on the sound, then listen to the sound below or around the sound that you hear. Follow the subtle sound to its more subtle source, to a more still and calm level

Make a barely, even audible subvocalized hum, then let this sound trail off into silence. Feel, sense and focus on the properties of silence

Hold a coin, button, thread or other small object between your thumb and one finger. Focus on feeling the indentations, holes, textures of the object. To get really focused, try to feel the texture and grooves of your fingerprints

Sit quietly, then count down from 10 to 1. At the same time, focus your eyes downward in steps, one step down for each number. Hold your focus on the bottom step, until you are ready to resume your normal activity After experiencing these mini-vacations, stand up, stretch, and hold happy, positive thoughts.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Math for Every Subject: Build your Reusable Question, Math Templates, Sentence Stems and Math Prompts

If you teach, you teach math. You teach logic. If you ascribe to the Multiple Intelligences Theory, or know that value of "old school" Learning Styles, you know that number sense and logic are thinking skills that need strengthening.

How many of your colleagues "gripe and complain that students "just don't think." What do you think they mean by that? Are your colleagues referring to a math and logic set of thinking abilities?

And, if you climb the Higher-Order Thinking ladder, analysis, application, synthesis and evaluation are "math-logic-heavy" thinking skills.

Sure, computation has been deprecated on high-stakes achievement tests, but questions related to

Reading Charts and Graphs

Money, Time and Measurement

Number Lines, Coordinates

Estimation

Geometry

Patterns and Sequences

Probability and Statistics

Logic

Sets and Matrices

And, the ubiquitous "word problem"

are hammered home. The Enlightened Response So, what's a stressed, working-fingers-to-the-bone, free-time deficient teacher to do?

Carve out more time to teach math from the obviously wasted time found elsewhere in the school day? Scrape together time from excess downtime minutes?

No. Address math systematically, continually during the entire school day. Every Subject Relates to Math and Logic Every subject relates to Math and Logic, so, work math and logic questions into every lesson.

What could be easier? "No, ignoring math and logic altogether is not an acceptable answer. How to "Pull this Off" Whatever your strategy of building a personal habit of including one (or more) math question in every lesson, the time to start building the habit is before school starts.

Start by building generic, reusable questions, sentence stems, problem templates and math question prompts.

Find ways to place reminders around the room, find ways to have student assistants remind you to ask the "Math Question of the Class Period."

The permutations and combinations for creating questions from the ten areas of math competency with eight types of intelligence is the Cartesian Product, i.e., each item matched with each other item. This gives us 80 possible combinations. If we have 80 possible combinations and seven classes per day, the Cartesian product is 80 times seven or 560 options.

These options are too numerous to list here. Sidebar Note, trick questions are also allowed. For example: How old was President Bush when he fought in Viet Nam as a Swift Boat captain? How many times did President Clinton lie to a Grand Jury before he was impeached? How many times did Vice-President Gore invent the Internet? What is the shortest distance between a lobbyist and the loss of public timberland if money must first pass through a Congress person's bank account? How many strippers can dance on a table at the senator's 90th birthday party? Let us know if you would like to see some of the many generic math and logic examples?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Saturday, June 30, 2007

Quick Tips

Summertime Relaxation: Recharge your Energy (and your Databanks)

Relaxation and Stress-Release Summer is the time to recharge your energy. You can recharge even if you teach summer school, enroll in graduate courses, or work at other full (or part time) jobs to make ends meet. How, can you recharge when you are tired and working?

Answer: Because a change of pace is balancing and stress-releasing.

Answer Number Two: Because you intend to make it so, you plan to make it so, and you do what is in your best interest to ready yourself for the "quick flip in activity levels" that is your mini vacation.

Get some exercise. Have some fun…Take walks, hike, enjoy a picnic

Swim

Try yoga, tai chi,

Play (or make noise on) a music instrument

Go dancing, skating

Play golf (but only if you are not competitive…against yourself or others)(Recharging your Databanks Recharging your databanks means slowing down your thinking so that you are ready to accelerate during the upcoming school year.

Recharging your databanks includes strategies such as…Thinking and incubating ideas, then writing them down as action items or goals

Brainstorming and fantasizing…imagine how exhilarating next year will be when these new ideas are implemented and tested

Putting together research in a structured manner so that it is organized for use during the upcoming school year Build the ideas around themes, novel ways of looking at the world, the ways that students look at the world

Build more project-based learning, more learning centers, more real-world research Strategic planning, putting together a library of generic materials that you can reuse (use ten, twenty, thirty times is the goal)

Think of strategies where learning activities are self-correcting, group-scorable, or where "spot checking" serves just as well as paper grading. This will decrease the time that you waste by grading "mountains of papers with mole hills of

benefits to your students." Sidebar This recommendation to focus on reusable materials is a hallmark of the Classroom Toolkit strategy. Other Tools Here are a few tools that assist in your research…Developing a vision and overview

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Rest. Recharge. Re-energize. Reinvigorate.

"Then, let the games begin."

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Teacher Sharing: Standards are the Key to Efficient Sharing

Standards are the key to efficient and effective teacher sharing. But, we are not talking about anything like the arbitrary, grade level/ scope and sequence, or rubric-based standards (while these are invaluable).

What we are describing is a practical, "technical or project management; kind of meaning for the term, "standards."

What we are suggesting is just obtaining agreement with other teachers, agreement with team teachers; or, taking the easy route and appropriating standards similar to the ones that are promoted on Websites projects such as Classroom Toolkit Formality not Needed for Forms, Templates, Checklists, Frameworks Just one or two teachers agreeing to cooperate by using the same forms, templates and checklists; can create huge paybacks in time saved.

For example, if three teachers work together on the same lessons, individual effort is reduced by two thirds. Four teachers working together decreases the individual workload by three quarters.

And, with high-speed computer networks, teachers can work together from just about anywhere in the world. (How can any teacher justify blazing a fresh trail for every lesson when so many willing partners are available? Why "go it alone?") Leveraging and Streamlining your Workload A standardized system, such as the modular system that Classroom Toolkit recommends, is ideal for building a library of reusable instructional and classroom management components.

These standardized strategies can take the form of

Lesson Plans

Templates

Forms

Checklists (for students and teachers)

Thematic Unit Frameworks

Open-Ended Worksheets

Rubrics, especially self-correcting, group correcting models

Flowcharts and Mind Maps

Visit the Classroom Toolkit Website for samples of structured, modular learning materials.

Classroom Toolkit's materials are available for free use, as long as any subsequent sharing continues to provide the materials without cost. The idea is to wean yourself, and your colleagues, from the bland materials that connect with your district's adopted textbooks, to free yourself from the addiction to blackline master teacher books (purchased at your own expense, using your disposable income), and to extricate yourself from the bumps and grind of the photocopy chorus line as you tread water to keep a one or two day fix of worksheets available on your desk.

Samples of what can be done include:

Daily Oral Language

Daily Oral Math

Daily Oral Vocabulary

Graphic Organizers

Thematic Units

Lesson Plans

Story Starter Framework

Math Word Problem Framework The potential for time saving multiplies as you enlist your colleagues to partner with you. Approach them now. Selling the concept will be easy. Do you know of a colleague who would rather work more just so they can "do it all," all by themselves?

If you do, steer clear of this colleague. You don't need a partner like that.

But, if you find that you have "rugged individualistic tendencies yourself," obtain therapy and overcome this compulsive addiction.

Your students deserve more of your time, and the more that you streamline your job with shared standards, the more time that you will have available to focus upon your students.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Monday, April 30, 2007

Quick Tips

The Most Precious Time of the Year (For Learning)

Now is the most precious time of the year for student learning. The high-stakes test start to fade into the unpleasant fog of distant memory. Lesser teachers gear up for the downhill coast into the oblivion of those pesky test results arriving before school dismisses for the summer.

But, Master Teachers know that every moment spent from now on, now that the stress and obsession with the high-stakes test dissipates. Now that the daily specter of doom and dread fades…students are free to learn. Teachers Know These Students At the start of the school year, teachers experience the joy of discovery as every student is new and fresh.

And, the first six weeks of the school year are invested in review.

Last year's learning settles in quickly, and then every one "hunkers down" for the stormy ride to and through the high-stakes test.

But, after seven months of daily, personal observation; teachers know what makes their students "dance and sing, weave and bob, boil and settle down. Teachers have their fingers on the pulses of their entire class. Brain-Dead, No Pulse? But, children snap back and recover quickly from the stress of the high-stakes test. They never were "brain dead," only bored and repulsed from their joy of learning by a system that seems to rise to the challenge of delaying and incapacitating learning in odious new ways.

So, now teachers can teach, and children are free to learn.

Now, the teacher can express empathy and leave a "lasting impression" upon the humanity and deep spirit of each child.

And, academic achievement is easier at this time of year, too.

The teacher has repeated the prerequisites in so many ways that a solid foundation of basic knowledge paves the path to each element of novel learning. Don't Slack Off! Teachers might slide past the supervising "work police", I mean campus principal; but knowing how precious each learning opportunity is at this time of the year, no teacher could sleep sight and sound after squandering these precious days on "status-quo" learning.

So, redouble your efforts. Focus. Think and visualize greater learning heights, and there will be no limit to the talents, skills and abilities that your students develop.

This is the most precious time of year for learning. Cash in on it. Opulent learning awaits.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Saturday, March 31, 2007

Quick Tips

Before you Insult or Put Down a Student: Count from One to the Value of your Salary

Interacting with students can be exasperating, trying, frustrating…anger generating…as well as rewarding, joyous, fun, exhilarating, happy. But, some students continue to tamper with their teacher's emotional interface, methodically manipulating their teacher's "emotional-equilibrium-thermostat," and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

Perhaps you encounter such a student in your classroom. Perhaps that student "ticked you off" today.

You run a lot of descriptive comments, labels, evaluations of this student through your mind…almost all negative. And, you generally keep these to yourself. When the Temptation Presents Itself But, at those choice moments when the sarcastic, biting, "now's my chance to get back at him" inspirations hit; think twice, think better about what you are about to do, think.

While opportunities to insult, put down, diminish your student in a cute, unique, funny, double-meaning-kind-of-way present themselves. Can you defend your comments to your supervisor when you face a complaint from the student's parents?

While you can have the entire class laughing at the "trouble making, thorn-in-your-paw student;" don't.

Don't do it!

Use a variation on the "count to ten" technique, and count from one to the sum of your salary.

But this could take a lone time (although with the size of your salary, not nearly as long as it should, because your salary should be a much larger number).

Maybe it will even take until tomorrow to count this high, but, don't lose any sleep over the incident. Do the Math The math supporting the "supper-high-count" is a delay tactic that pays off because the math in this situation is "bad."

And, if you can't overcome the "bad numbers," don't "do the deal."

The numbers resulting from sarcasm, put downs and insults to students (even veiled, sneaky ones that you can get-away-with) are like the interest numbers of a "payday loan."

If you can't repay the payday loan on payday, don't do the deal. The interest for a delay will end up costing you… But, quick, glib, negative comments "zinged" at a student will cost you because the cost has a payback plan that is worse than the repayment of a payday loan.

While your six seconds of revenge bring a smile, even a veiled smile, to your lips…The "put down" student will smolder, fume and retaliate…at a later date, in a few minutes, tomorrow, maybe for the rest of the school year Other students may laugh, even applaud (because the trouble maker irritates them, too); but their "guard hairs, hackles, feelers" will be sensitized; and they will (at an unconscious level) be alert and ever vigilant for when you might turn on them

No matter how you try to pay off the "usury-style interest" charged by this insult-based incident; no amount of kindness, rapport, good words, will cancel the "charge against your reputation" that the moment of spite generated.

School-Based Urban Legend The "Don't Smile Until XMAS" myth does not apply in this case.

You're not a "burned out, disgruntled, control-jockey" just drawing a (meager) paycheck.

This "'Don't Smile Until XMAS Urban Legend" never worked, never had any place in education, never rose to the level of "professional" behavior.

You are a highly-trained, focused, dedicated professional.

You hold yourself to high standards. In this case to a standard as high as the physicians' "First, Do no harm."

In this case, counting from one to the value of your paycheck offers a double payoff. The strategy of waiting before firing off a negative comment does no harm to your student, and does no harm to your reputation and does no harm to the rapport that you have developed with your students. Avoiding a double negative (the irksome student and a retaliatory teacher response) creates a positive, and you maintain a positive reputation with your students.

More importantly, as you express yourself in a professional manner, you get to think (and feel) good about yourself.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Friday, March 30, 2007

Quick Tips

Summertime Relaxation: Recharge your Energy (and your Databanks)

Relaxation and Stress-Release Summer is the time to recharge your energy. You can recharge even if you teach summer school, enroll in graduate courses, or work at other full (or part time) jobs to make ends meet. How, can you recharge when you are tired and working?

Answer: Because a change of pace is balancing and stress-releasing.

Answer Number Two: Because you intend to make it so, you plan to make it so, and you do what is in your best interest to ready yourself for the "quick flip in activity levels" that is your mini vacation.

Get some exercise. Have some fun…

Take walks, hike, enjoy a picnic

Swim

Try yoga, tai chi,

Play (or make noise on) a music instrument

Go dancing, skating

Play golf (but only if you are not competitive…against yourself or others) (Recharging your Databanks Recharging your databanks means slowing down your thinking so that you are ready to accelerate during the upcoming school year.

Recharging your databanks includes strategies such as…Thinking and incubating ideas, then writing them down as action items or goals

Brainstorming and fantasizing…imagine how exhilarating next year will be when these new ideas are implemented and tested

Putting together research in a structured manner so that it is organized for use during the upcoming school year Build the ideas around themes, novel ways of looking at the world, the ways that students look at the world

Build more project-based learning, more learning centers, more real-world research Strategic planning, putting together a library of generic materials that you can reuse (use ten, twenty, thirty times is the goal)

Think of strategies where learning activities are self-correcting, group-scorable, or where "spot checking" serves just as well as paper grading. This will decrease the time that you waste by grading "mountains of papers with mole hills of benefits to your students."

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Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Quick Tips

Teacher Stamps and Designs

Teachers need hands-on materials that are affordable.

And, teachers and school extra curricular clubs and organizations need fund raising ideas that pull profits.

Here is a source for many of these needs. [Link to the Teacher Stamp Company \(TSC\) site](#) What's On Offer? TSC Design carries affordable art and crafts materials such as stencils, papers, kid safe inks, glitter and

But, even if you don't want to buy arts and crafts materials from TSC Design, check out their Website for how-to craft-project and fundraiser ideas. [Low Prices - High Demand](#) How can we tell that this stuff is good?

Answer: TSC Designs has an exhibitor's booth at the Texas Computer Education Association Convention in Austin, Texas each year.

And, the TSC Booth is always "swamped" with teachers.

Why?

There is a high demand for low priced materials, especially from teachers who have to pay for classroom materials out of their own "affluence-challenged" pockets. Check out the Website [TSC Designs](#) offers a dated, but effective Website.

The site design is clean and the site is simple to use.

Unfortunately, the site does not offer an automated (virtual) shopping cart, and you have to order the "old fashioned way."

The TSC also accepts school purchase orders, but because of the "archaic" school district purchasing laws in Texas, we can guess that the company does very little school district business (at least in Texas).

Most of the sales will be direct to teachers, clubs and school organizations who are not subject to the silly and stifling rules that Texas school districts are "heir to." [Why Fundraising?](#) Low cost raw materials can be turned into objects of perceived high value with the materials that TSC sells.

Any holiday, any occasion where you can take a nickel's worth of materials and sell the resulting craft for \$0.25, \$0.50 or \$1.00 is a money maker as long as each item doesn't take too long to create.

Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Sweetheart's Day any excuse really, where students can create an affordable, attractive message for a special someone.

The cards and designs are money makers. And, these are money makers that provide real value because Commercial cards are over priced and too expensive for children

Hand-made, attractive art delivers sentiment and the receiver's smile perks up, while stylized commercial art delivers a "Ho Hum!" and a half-hearted, "I-know-I-have-to-smile" grin

Children can create something pretty [Sidebar](#) Three dimensional objects capture attention. And, embossing is a technique for adding depth to a flat piece of paper.

For example, a child would have to paint a picture in the style and technique of a Rembrandt, da Vinci, or Monet before parents give it a fleeting glance as they tack the gift to the refrigerator with magnets. But, parents display three-dimensional "pieces of love" in a place of honor, and they exhibit three-dimensional work to any relative or neighbor who comes within their grasp.

So, check out the [TSC Design Website](#), and see if any of these low cost supplies can pay for themselves in your classroom or on your campus.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

Quick Tips

PocketMod: The Ultimate Organizer for Your Students (and Maybe Yourself)

In the land of high tech, high-dollar planning, it is amazing when a simple, useable, solution pops on the scene. And **PocketMod** is a solution that is so simple that it is elegant.

Forget (no pun intended) paying "big bucks" for a heavy, battery-sapping, wallet-draining, Personal Data Assistant (PDA). **PocketMod** is free and light weight. In fact, it weighs only as much as a piece of paper.

How do I know without weighing it, because **PocketMod** is a piece of paper! How it Works **PocketMod** is software that you can download for your PC or Apple. **PocketMod** runs on Adobe Flash, so the **Flash** Player must be installed on your computer.

If you don't have the **Flash** Player installed, here is a link to download the **Flash** player

You can also create **PocketMod** organizers online.

PocketMod allows you to customize the many different kinds of organizer pages on eight panels of a single-sided page of paper.

Then, you send the paper to a printer.

You can customize these notes any way you wish, even add them to your wallet-based PDA later.

The **PocketMod** prints folding guides for each panel, and once you see the trick, you will be amazed at someone's ingenuity for devising such a clever product. Where to get **PocketMod**; **PocketMod** can be downloaded without cost from the **PocketMod** site

Link to the folding instructions

Instructional Uses

Once you see what you can do with **PocketMod**; you will be able to devise all sorts of classroom and curriculum uses.

A few that come to mind include: A useful Art Class Activity

Student Weekly Organizers

Organizer Designing Contests

Manipulative Study Guides

3D-Flash Cards

Mini-StoryBoards for Learning Centers

Pocket Games for Reward or Fund Raisers

The possibilities just keep presenting themselves Download **PocketMod**; and devise lots of uses for yourself.

But don't pitch your electronic or leather PDA just yet.

One flaw with this version of the software is that you can't save your custom sheets, and you have to create a fresh design each time you use the software.

But, this software is bound to be a hit with your students.

Introduce them to the program as soon as you can.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Sunday, December 31, 2006

Quick Tips

Self-Talk: Don't Loose an Unfair Argument with Yourself

Self-talk can be a positive affirmation, encouragement, even self-correction in response to mistakes. All these functions of self-talk result in positive benefits for yourself. However, self-talk can also be "self-defeating." Here are two kinds of self-talk errors: Expectation Convolutions

Muddled or Magical Thinking When you engage yourself in conversation (or debate) and sink into these self-talk errors, you always loose. Expectation Convolutions These are "on the face, friendly and helpful" but at the heart "cruel and devious" friends.

These communication patterns pretend to assist with kindness, but in the end, kick us where we hurt most.

Here are some examples of detrimental self-talk patterns: I should, I should have…

What if

If only I had…

I have to…

I can't…, I can't because…

It's too hard, It's too hard to…

Yes, but Substitute these self-talk errors with the following: I can

I will

I'll discover

I'll learn

I'll master Muddled or Magical Thinking Examples of muddles or magical thinking (unrealistic, less than useful) Mind

Reading -- Thinking that you know what others are thinking

Tunnel Vision -- Focusing so narrowly on one thing that reality seems to compress, excluding other (often conflicting) information

Black and White Thinking -- Situations that are important are seldom that simple

Name Calling, Labeling -- Naming something provides a false sense of mastery and false sense of knowing. Worse, when we label people (especially students) with negative words, we loose our ability to server them or to negotiate with them

Self-Put-Downs -- False humility serves no one

Whining, Complaining -- Act, do something about the situation, but quit griping Positive, Friendly, Helpful Self-Talk You deserve the kindest, gentlest, most supportive self-talk that you can devise for yourself.

One rule might be to talk to yourself only as if you were a student, and a principal or superintendent was observing your class… and you wanted to impress them with your "student-centered" attitude.

Improving your self-talk in the area of being nice to yourself is relatively easy once you decide that you are worth the effort of taking care of yourself. "Back to Reality" Thinking Clear thinking, e.g., replacing muddled or magical thinking with reality-based thoughts is more arduous a task than just being nice to yourself. How do you Loose a Debate with Yourself? The loss of a self-talk debate is not the "winning side -loosing side" of the ideas that you present. Rather it is the loss you suffer if you treat yourself badly, or the loss you suffer if you react to people or situation is ways that are less than useful (or even self-defeating) because your thinking is wrong.

Arguments with yourself are unfair if you fail to respect and value yourself.

Arguments (with yourself) that place unrealistic or unreasonable demands upon yourself result in a loss of self-esteem.

Arguments with yourself that drift into muddled or magical thought become mired by the less than optimum solutions that you develop. How can the solution be clean if the thoughts behind the decision are clouded and obscured? In this case, you may choose the right course (choice, option) but for erroneous reasons.

But, even in choosing the right option for the wrong reason, you loose; because you didn't learn from the opportunity.

Remember that the self that you talk to with your self-talk is every bit as deserving of your love, caring and respect as each of the students that you are privileged to serve. Treat yourself nicely with kind words.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Thursday, November 30, 2006

Quick Tips

Gesture-Based Listening: Reality of Mixed Metaphor?

Active listening proponents usually focus upon asking open-ended questions that demonstrate to the speaker that we are seeing their point of view and comprehending what they are saying. But, what about using gestures to indicate that you are following along with the speaker's message? Wouldn't physical movements serve as effective cues that we are listening, at least to the 75% or so of tactile, kinesthetic, proprioceptive (hands-on) learners that comprise our population?

But, for most teachers, gestures are only adjuncts of unconscious communication. Strategic Gesturing Unfortunately, our gesturing habits and skills are perfected in the area of insults, putdown and angry outbursts.

Making all our teaching and communicating habits conscious, then choosing the best tactics from our "bag of tricks" seems to be our most effective personal communication improvement strategy.

On one extreme are those few people that make so many unsynchronized gestures that the visual overload causes the a communicator to "tune out the sight of them" & physical movement that seems like "shouting." So, as a listener, your listening gestures cannot "shout down" or "drown out" the speaker that you wish to reassure. Subtle Gestures Speak Louder than Shouting A slight movement of a hand or finger, marking time to the points that the speaker presents is an effective place to begin. (Note: practioners of Neuro Linguistic Programming [NLP] call this practice, "pacing.")

Of course, to perform this technique effectively, you really have to be actively listening & listening for understanding. You would only aggravate the speaker if your timed pacing rhythms were "slightly off," and the speaker would not know the reason that they were becoming irritated and angry at you. An angry speaker (and speakers who are experiencing stress) will revert to a less-skilled communication strategy without knowing what is happening, and without knowing why this is happening.

So, be kind. Pay attention to the speaker, and let your gestures communicate your interest. Some Gesturing Tips Here are some additional tips on using gestures for listening & Notice how the speaker uses gestures, and use similar, but more subtle gestures in return

Lean forward to show interest

Raise your eyebrows to show surprise

Stand (or sit) in a manner that is similar to the speaker's manner Practice extending the range of your own gestures, i.e., making your gestures more flamboyant and more sedate and controlled. This will extend your capacity to communicate your ability to show that you are actively listening. In Sync Laughing when other are sad, joking when others are mad, and making "flip comments" when others are serious describe communications barriers that make the perplexing process of understanding another person more challenging.

So, use gestures for listening in an appropriate manner.

But, use gestures with thought, kindness and consideration.

And consider the almost-synonym for the word, i.e., "jester."

Botch the "listening gesture process" and the speaker will categorize you (your intelligence and your behavior) as a "jester," a jester that is failing to court their positive impression of you. (Note: Bad pun intended.)

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Tuesday, October 31, 2006

Quick Tips

Mnemonics: A Lost Art in Classroom Presentations

All teachers know about mnemonics (even if they have to refer to a dictionary to spell the word correctly). But, how many teachers use a mnemonic-based strategy during each classroom presentation to help students remember information. A "Bad Rap" for Memorizing But, memorizing has taken an undeserved broadside hit, aimed at "senseless, mindless, mind-dulling drill".

But, is learning a memorizing skill such as the how-to of using mnemonic devices useless?

Not when students could focus for 30 seconds and remember assignments, assignment due dates, lists for oral presentations, formulas, steps in the scientific method and other key bits of information.

The Basis of Mnemonics

There are three components of mnemonics: Attention

Imagery

Organization

Association is the basic skills for using mnemonic device for learning. And, association is the basic skill for collecting and chunking information. Association, at least creating associations that other people haven't made the connection with, is one component of creativity.

So, how many ways can you use mnemonics in your classroom. Answer: Well just about as many creative ways that you can devise to make your classroom presentations more riveting, exciting, memorable, creative, attention-grabbing. What will you Come up with Next? Keeping your students guessing is a great device for keeping your students paying attention.

Novel, unique, imaginative items are remembered. Remember the teacher who emerged from the rest room with toilet paper streaming from the collar of her blouse? Well, everybody else remembers, too. Vividly. An incident such as this demonstrates "one trial learning," and it was effective. But, made up images like this, when attached to important facts create "instant impact" learning.

If our minds have this ability, why do we push the less than effective, "repeat the words over and over to yourself" method of memorizing? Sweep the Mental Cobwebs Besides exaggerated, contorted, memorable images; a mnemonic device requires mental organization.

Take a simple mnemonic list builder. Images are associated with numbers, like, for example...

#1 - Pencil

#2 - Duck

#3 - Split-Bent Bagel

#4 - Upside Down Chair

#5 - Coat Hook

#6 - Golf Club

#7 - Big Nose

#8 - Ice Skater's Figure Eight

#9 - Ram's Horn

Notice that the key words have a similar shape to the number. (The first association.)

Now put the mnemonic device into practice. For example:

Let's remember the names of the Five Great Lakes.

Remember "H-O-M-E-S" Our homes are on the five Great Lakes. H - Huron

O - Ontario

M - Michigan

E - Erie

S - Superior

But, what about the names themselves? #1: Huron - Imagine a huge, stork-like bird with a bill shaped like a pencil, poking a equally large fish

#2: Imagine a duck eating a tire made of Cheerios (On-tire-E-O)

#3: Michigan - The number 3 looks like the letter "M" when turned one way, and the Letter "E" when turned another way.

These are the initials for the great sports star (quarterback, pitcher, hurdle jumper, ping pong player and Sumo wrestler -Mich Egan.

#4: Erie - It is a dark and stormy night, and the girls have climbed on a chair in fear of the erie sounds that screech and moan from the spirits of shipwrecks on the lake

#5: Superior - The "Hook-Shaped Letter S" is huge and big enough to lift a smart-mouthed, Superman (who thinks that he is superior to everyone else) up by the seat of the pants You get the idea...

Interesting images, students paying attention, a rational structure to prompt the recall.

A couple of minutes of "change-of-pace fun" to brighten up an otherwise humdrum, lackluster school day. (Just kidding!)

But the greatest benefit: You don't have to spend much time planning these. And, even better, involve students in creating the images and associations.

What about a Mnemonics Department in your classroom, or what about "hiring" a Mnemonics student helper, with higher rank and importance than the line monitor or door and lights off monitor?

How about a Mnemonics Club for any of you lucky enough to teach in a neighborhood school?

Your opportunities to use this easy to implement mental device are far greater than the simple components of the technique.

Use the technique today, tomorrow at the latest. Keep using it. Measure improvements in learning and measure improvements in your students' attitudes.

OK. Do you remember what you are going to do?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Saturday, September 30, 2006

Quick Tips

Prepared for the Weekend?

Monday morning needs to find teachers vitalized, refreshed, energized, vibrant, dynamic and recharged as they return to school. Teachers need to face the workweek with high-intensity happy smiles...made possible because the weekend was delightful, stress-free, and devoid of school-task drudgery.

Your task, Mission Possible, if you choose to accept it, is to replace patterns of weekend stress with relaxation and enjoyment. Changes Needed?

Figure out a way to move, schedule, and contain all classroom-related labors to the weekdays...place that "overweight workload" on a diet.

If you were told that you would be fired unless you found a way to do all your work during the "work week", you would find a way.

So, now is the time to develop strategies for placing school work "off limits" for the weekend. Your eventual goal is to develop habits and procedures that allow you to leaving all school work at school where it belongs. Timely Tips

Here are some tips to get you started in converting you weekend into the relaxing resource that it was designed for...

Visit a museum, cultural center, or the tourist attractions that everybody but the locals frequent

Go outside to a park. Picnic next to a pond, lake or stream

Do something nice for yourself, get a haircut, buy some new clothes

Take a "spur of the moment", "get up and go" trip

Sleep late, if you can. If not, get up at your accustomed time, breakfast, then take a nap (See Footnote below)

Give yourself an "Exempt from Homework" certificates, and cash them in

Note: Do Not log in and check your district's E-mail Productivity Paradox

The "Math" doesn't add up, but the stress does.

You can complete more work in five days than you can in seven.

But, as you string together week after week of seven-day work Marathons, you become WEAK. Other Suggestions

On Sunday, get your clothes ready for the work week. Shine your shoes

Minimize weekend planning and make choices spontaneously

Exercise, take a walk

Keep televised sports watching under control. Set a reasonable time limit

Avoid binge drinking and late-night partying

Keep your use of caffeine and nicotine under control

You will find that you have more energy at the end of the workweek if you start fresh and refreshed on Monday. Enjoy your weekend.

Footnote:

Some people find that they experience a headache and feel groggy if they sleep late on weekends. If this is you, you can easily circumvent the headaches by getting up at your habitual time. You should be ready for a nap in about 90 to 120 minutes. Give in to the urge, and indulge yourself in some quality sleep. Pleasant dreams...

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Thursday, August 31, 2006

Quick Tips

Develop or Upgrade your Classroom Library

Make a classroom library a focal point in your classroom, and partition the area in some way from the rest of the room. The space should be large enough to accommodate five or six students in a comfortable manner. How do you make the space comfortable? Carpets Beanbag Furniture Soft Chairs Pillows You also need shelves and an organizational system. There is no "best way" to organize the library, but you (or preferably the student librarian) need/s to be able to put books back in their place each time.

You also need to be able to display books in two ways.

With the spines facing outward (like regular book shelves for most of the books) With the cover visible (especially covers with exciting art work)

Other display tricks are: Staggered displays Hang small books from clothes pins from lines stretched between two points, or from lines dropped from the ceiling Modular storage such as crates, cubes, etc.

Decorations can include: Posters Student art (particularly theme and book related art) Puppets and stuffed animals (for younger students) Your library needs about five to eight books per student. This translates to 160 books for a class of 20 students.

When constrained by the volume of your teacher's pay, it can take several years to build a classroom library, But, you do not need to purchase all these books at retail prices. Sources for classroom library books include: Flea Markets Garage/ Lawn/ Yard Sales Bound classroom anthologies Gifts Scrounged books from teachers who are leaving eBay Lots (Note: purchasing individual books on eBay(TM) is inexpensive, but shipping costs increase the final price) Purchased from any district classroom budget allotment (if these still exist for your district) District grants Donations from churches and civic groups Purchase of books from your local library (Public libraries often sell donated and pulled-from-circulation books at affordable prices)

But, there should be fun, exciting, stimulating books in your classroom library; not just non-fiction titles. And, make sure that the books span a range of reading levels, i.e., some books (Baby Bear Books) will be easier to read, some books (Papa and Mama Bear Books) will be a challenge for your students to read, and most books (Teacher Bear Books) will be just about right.

Books do not need to be the only materials that are available in your classroom library. Tapes, CDs and DVDs may also be available, particularly if you have the equipment for playback of these items.

Rules for the use of the classroom library need to be similar to that of a campus or public library, i.e., quiet and relaxed enjoyment in a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere. You will also have to set rules about taking books home, or allowing students to store a book at their desk for a few days. Very few students will steal a book, but some students will misplace (and forget about) a book. Decide how much loss you are comfortable with, but expect that your losses will be small.

Even young children can figure out that if all the books were to disappear from the classroom library, then the teacher will find something less delightful for them to participate in. It is to everyone's benefit to keep this happy space clean, neat and well furnished

Yes, a classroom library gobbles up a substantial amount of classroom real estate, but, dedicating space for a classroom library is worth the investment.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Monday, July 31, 2006

Quick Tips

Summer Spruce-up: Scour, Scrub, Sift-through and "Sanitize" your Stuff

Summer time is prep time for the upcoming school year.

Wouldn't it be great if you faced the year unafraid?

Well, you might not fear your mess, but, clutter drains your energy.

And, clutter builds stress. Especially when you are looking for something that is very important. The "TASK CAN" is the Trash Can

The trash can is one of your greatest allies in your campaign to snuff-out clutter.

Actually, you may need large trash bags, or, even the super-sized, puncture-proof Lawn and Leaf bags.

But, why does clutter and mess create stress?

And, doesn't this stress only affect "Neat Freaks?"

Too bad...but, the answer is, "No." Clutter affects everyone, and you work with more energy when your working area is clean.

Do as I say, Not as I do

How many teachers ask students to keep a clean desk, and nurture a trash heap of their own?

If this describes you, it is time to shape up and "fly light."

You need a System

If you are going to move, you throw out lots of stuff, and you hold a garage/ yard sale. There is no sense moving the junk, then throwing it out when you arrive at your new home. (At least in theory we say that we believe this.)

Start early, start now; so you have time to sort.

Here is the strategy that you need...

Throw out everything, even stuff that you are 80% sure that you might need. Hint: you never will use it, anyway

Set up a filing/ storage system. You never will have enough room, so throw out some other stuff for good measure

Spend a little time each day keeping this system going

Ruthless and Systematic "Junk-Toss"

Thinking..."I might need this someday, I better keep it." is self-deception.

The correct question is: "Can I name the specific situation where I will need this?" If not, toss it.

Still holding on to it? Ask: "What is the worst thing that could happen if I didn't have this?" If "worse" isn't so bad, toss it.

Filing/ Storage System Woes

Some studies show that we never look at 80% of the things that we file. For some of us, the number approaches 99.99% if we have such a disorganized system that we can't find what we are looking for.

The corollary to this situation is, trying to sort the same item, repeatedly.

Rule: if you handle the item a second time, and can't figure out where it belongs, toss it.

Spend Time Planning your Storage Strategy

The time that you spend in thinking through your storage strategy will pay off for you throughout the school year. Put some thought into just how and where you will store files, materials and supplies.

Be especially deliberate about what you will take home, and what you will leave at school.

Probably everyone has been guilty of carting home stuff that "we are going to work on," only to cart it back to school the next day, untouched.

OK. Once or twice is forgivable, but every day?

Keeping Track

You need to develop a planning strategy that you can track and follow through with.

Paper-based, computer-based, personal digital assistant-based (even cell phone-based) planners all can work for you, or not, depending on your preference, your up front planning, and your follow through.

For a reference to teacher planning, refer to our eZine.

Classroom Planning and Project Management

The amount of planning that you need to be doing now is..."a lot".

Pretend that you are going to present an all day workshop to your colleagues, or even to the superintendent, about how to plan for the year.

Develop the graphic organizers, mind maps, planning charts, even the PowerPoint(TM) presentations.

Make sure that you cover all the bases. You don't want unplanned for surprises just as you are implementing your strategy.

Your Creative Intelligences

The planning thought process will look, feel or sound differently to each person, depending upon their preferred mode of thinking.

Some people will talk themselves through each section of their plan (Verbal/ Auditory).

Some people will picture each frame of the plan (Visual/ Spatial).

Some people will check off each priority and create checklists of milestones (Logical/ Mathematical).

Some people will step through each step in a "subliminal physical way" (Physical/ Tactile/ Kinesthetic)

Some people will get together with a group and develop joint plans (Interpersonal)

A few people will hum, choreograph, meditate on or commune with nature concerning their plans; but not many teachers rely solely on these approaches because these kinds of plans are difficult to turn in each week.

The Substitute Folder

Put together a substitute folder, even before meeting your students.

And, while you are at it, put together at least one week's worth of "fallback lessons and generic instructional materials for yourself, too.

Business people call a time-oriented set of folders, usually one for each month and one for each day a "Tickler File". I suppose that the items in the file are supposed to tickle your memory (if you remember to refer to them).

Future Resolve

Resolve to prevent clutter from ever reaching this level of height and weight again.

A tiny bit of daily diligence goes a long way in taming your trash.

But, don't get so carried away that you feel guilty every time you pass a trash basket and fail to contribute. There is no red-suited bell ringer standing next to it. Just contribute to the trash can as generously and as often as you can, and you will rest easier at night.

Guaranteed!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Friday, June 30, 2006

Quick Tips

A Positive Mental Attitude during Job Interviews

Summer is the time when many teachers who don't have jobs (and some who do) interview for new positions. The job interview is a time that many unemployed (and under employed) teachers find stressful.

Here are some suggestions: **The Job Market**

Inspection of the current teacher hiring environment indicates that this a "buyer's market."

Since you are the "seller," this means that you have a lot of competitors (i.e., other great teachers) who are interviewing for the same position that you are applying for. And, if you are lucky, you will receive, maybe, one job offer.

Of course, you can't be sure which interview will net the job offer, so you have to gear up to put on your best show at every interview.

"Psyching" Yourself Up for the Interview

The first one or two interviews are not difficult. You feel relaxed and excited. You smile, and the warmth of your charm seems magnetic.

But, after you don't get either job, or the next, or the next...your attitude begins to tatter.

This is when you begin "psyching" yourself up for the next opportunity.

Although everyone is different, there are some general rules for remaining upbeat. Here are a few:

Network and Expand your Contact Base

Donate your services, join civic groups, give of your time and energy. You never know when a contact notices your dedication, skills, your rapport with children; then refers and recommends you for a job

Accept that you are learning with each interview

Rejection only means that you are one position closer to the one that is for you. The key is to keep getting rejected until the right offer comes along

Prepare better

Study the district that you are applying for, do more homework, check the district's Web site, check lots of individual campus Websites in the district.

Get friends to coach you and ask the tough questions

Role play difficult interview situations, particularly the ones that you didn't do well with the last time around

Prepare for the trial (I mean interview) by committee

These committee members are only gatekeepers, and you can't be all things to all people (please them all/ be liked by them all). In most cases, it is still the campus principal that has the final say. That is the person you have to win over, but not by pandering.

Control your stress

Learn to relax (a skill that you should teach your students once you land the job)

Reward yourself

Find ways to provide tender loving care to yourself. You deserve all the pampering that you will accept, so accept some

Use mental rehearsal to perfect your external and internal practice

Top athletes use this skill to mentally go over every aspect of their game. You should do the same with both the interview situation, and with mental rehearsal for your future job. Rehearsing your future job skills will enable you to speak confidently when you answer questions about your teaching during the interview.

Use creative imagery to test your decision by following a future imagined job offer

All jobs are not created equal. Some are right for you, and others are not. By putting the job situation in "fast forward" in your mind and checking how the job is going, you can find out how your unconscious mind interprets the prospective job opportunity, and whether the long-term outcome will be positive

Remember that things change

The principal that hires you could be promoted, or replaced in a year, or has already been replaced. (Be prepared to relocate at the end of every year for your first three years.) Resubmit applications to campuses where you interviewed last year. You never know until you try

Take the First (Or any) Job that is Offered?

This is your call. But, if you are a brand new, fledgling, newbie teacher with no experience, go for it...unless your intuition, dreams and "gut feeling" scream, "NO!"

Spending a year or two gathering experience is super important. In fact, plan on it taking at least three years before you really hone your instructional and management skills to the level where you can back up every confident interview statement with specific examples of your successes.

Anyone who believes that four years of college taught them a "whole lot" about teaching graduated from the "College of Fine Deception."

Don't Give Up

And, just because no job offers develop early in the summer, keep the faith.

Many changes; i.e., teachers (who were coming back to a campus) move, or their spouse is relocated, a better job offer came through and a position opens up, a teacher has second thoughts and decides to enter another field, etc.) and teachers are hired, even after school starts.

If you can afford it, consider working as a substitute teacher.

Find out, from the Department of Human Resources or Personnel Office of districts that you prefer to work for. what happens if you decide to work for a year in a private or charter school. Some districts will hold this experience against you. Other districts will not credit the time that you work in a private or charter school toward your yearly step pay increase. Rightly or wrongly, many school district hiring agents assume that because private and charter schools pay much less than public schools, that less effective teachers land there as a "perch (cage) of last resort."

Prepare for Deployment

And, use the time that you are waiting for your job opening to build an instructional and management bag of tricks. (This is a great idea if you become a substitute teacher, too.

Unless you are a Math, Science or Special Education teacher (all in high demand); you may not know exactly what grade level or subject you will offered a teaching job for.

So, focus on Multi-age, and content integration strategies such as you find at the Classroom Toolkit Web site.

Build a library of reusable modules and enough generic materials to keep you in business for at least two weeks for whatever classroom you are assigned to.

A multi-age/ grade level thematic unit, graphic organizers, daily oral language, daily oral math, daily oral vocabulary...are mainstays. Items such as journal pages, open-ended question lists, a generic student project framework...you get the idea.

Preparing for anything means that you are ready for anything, and your confidence will communicate during your interview.

A New School Reality

The days of joining a close-knit campus family have dwindled. The school climate is test-score-sour, and your first teaching experience may leave a bad taste in your mouth. If you are not prepared for the stress and confusion that results from pushing students down a path that is not good for them, The "warm-fuzzy-feelings" that made teaching so rewarding in days of yore, can be elusive if you get caught up in the "testing frenzy."

Triple-edged Sword of Opportunity

With the instability caused by principals (and districts) heavy-handed methods for "weeding out" low performing teachers (as measured by test scores), there are more job openings than would normally be available.

However, this mismanagement drives many qualified and competent teachers into the labor market, looking for a new position. These effective and experienced teachers are collateral casualties and "testing-craze fallout," and these experienced teachers become your competitors.

Unfortunately, campuses with "fearing-for-their-own-job" principals are the job sites that are least likely to understand that supporting a "master-teacher-in-the-making" will take at least three years, and are the sites where unrealistic expectations of "test-success-now" create inordinate stress for faculty members.

It will be a risky gamble, and it will be a "trial-of-your-patience" tenure at one of these test-stressed campuses; but somebody has to do it. If you have the stamina (and need the job badly enough) it could be you who rises to the challenge. Thriving in an adverse situation is a job skill that will serve you well during your teaching career.

Remember: Things change. This includes the ideal environments (for both campuses and districts) that are " run into the ground" by new administration or management.

Good luck with your interview. And keep the faith. After all is said and done; the challenges are worth meeting and mastering, because your students are worth every bit of the effort you dedicate to their learning.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

Sunday, April 30, 2006

Quick Tips

Teacher Wide and SchoolWide

Teacher Wide.Com

TeacherWide is a sales site for books for elementary students, to grade 6. The design of the site makes it easy to find books of various categories: Activity and Coloring Books

Author Collections

Award Winners

Bargain Bundles

Bonus Points Rewards

Books Grades 2-3

Books Grades 4-5

Books Grades 6-8

Books Grades K-1

Books Made Into Movies

Books W/Cassette

Classroom Supplies

Clearance

Concepts

Fairy Tales And Folk Tales

Fantasy and Adventure

Favorite Characters

High Interest Low Readability

Holiday Books

Learning To Read

Leveled Books

Mathematics And Counting

Memoir and Personal Narrative

Multicultural

Mystery/Horror

Nonfiction

Poetry

Read-Alouds

RIF Books

Science

Series Books

Social Studies

Spanish Books

Sports Books

Student-Run Bookstore Specials

Summer Reading

Teaching Resources

Toys and Puzzles

Writing Workshop The clearance items listed many books for less than \$1, and many others for less than \$2.

The parent site, SchoolWide, offers theme-based books for older students.

Teacher Wide.Com

One particular service that may be of interest to elementary schools is the Student Run Bookstore program.

Open a Bookstore

With this program, schools can order up to \$375 worth of books, and set up a student run bookstore. The books will be shipped with "net 30", which means that your school does not have to put up the money ahead of time. You have 30 days to pay for the books.

Lots of books are available for this bookstore at \$1.29.

This seems like a useful program. Perhaps a PTA/ PTO could be convinced to sponsor a program like this for your school.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00