

Friday, June 30, 2006

News Nuggets

Commercialization of Lesson Planning

Have you thought that your lessons were good enough that other teachers would pay for them?

Maybe you are right. But, don't expect to make enough to quit teaching and retire on this income stream by tomorrow.

A new site...A new Possibility?

The Associated Press just reported a business idea for a site that allows teachers to post their lessons for cash.

Associated Press Article

"The site, TeachersPayTeachers.com, aims to be an eBay for educators. For a \$29.95 yearly fee, sellers can post their work and set their prices. Buyers rate the products."

Associated Press Article

The site's developer, a former teacher, cashed in his retirement and maxed out his credit cards to launch the site.

"He keeps 15 percent of every sale, but he knows the only way he will really make money is by getting "teacher-authors" to pay the membership fee."

Associated Press Article

Being a Teacher of the Year Helps

Ten percent of the 80 teachers that had signed up for the service were teachers of the year. They were given a complimentary membership.

Maybe the materials will be worth membership fee. But, as the Associated Press article points out, there are a lot of free lessons on the Internet.

Even Classroom Toolkit offers free materials. [Link to the Classroom Toolkit site](#)

Want to Sell your Materials? Go for it!

It is probably difficult to convince other teachers to buy your lesson plans and materials when so many are available for free.

But, if you have a lot of materials, this might be a spare cash vehicle for you.

There are some cautions. For example:

If your materials were created while you were at work, the copyright might be owned by your employer

If you and some teacher friends jointly created the materials, you might need a legal contract or a formal partnership arrangement

If your materials contain any resources that were "borrowed" from textbooks, the textbook (or other) publishers might not like to find out that you were selling some of their intellectual property

Explore Your Options

There are other options that you can explore. For example:

You can sell your materials in electronic (or other form) on eBay, where the cost for conducting an auction is about 25 cents. [Link to eBay#8482;](#)

You can collect your materials and sell them to a commercial publisher such as Teacher Created Materials. Here is link to their contact page: [Link to the Teacher Created Materials site](#)

You can hire an agent and sell your materials to a big-name publisher (You're on your own here.)

You can publish your materials with an online "Quick Print" publisher such as LULU. [Link to the free, Quick Print site, LULU.com](#)

You can share your materials

The Rest of the Story

The scramble for high-grade materials and the quest for high test scores can distract teachers from the fact that the most important asset for students is their teacher.

Often, in their push to hype and highlight their materials, marketers downplay the importance of the teacher in the classroom.

A real person that children like, real interaction that engages children, and the interpersonal dynamics of a sharing and caring teacher outdistance materials and plan books on the classroom productivity scale.

Our classrooms need student and teacher empowerment, not more powerful materials.

A materials-driven classroom strategy does not help teachers on a long-term basis.

As our friends in Great Britain would say, much of the stuff that teachers buy is "One Off." That is, one use and you're done. The "activity-driven" model of lesson planning is inefficient and it dissipates classroom focus.

What is more efficient is the modular lesson design that Classroom Toolkit advocates.

But, knowing what to do with all those world-class materials is also part of the story.

The time and cost benefits develop when you train your students in how to think, work together, solve problems and contribute to the learning in the classroom.

The Classroom Toolkit Business Model

Developing the Classroom Toolkit Web site did not take cashing in a retirement or maxing out credit cards.

The basic cost of hosting the site is \$300 US per year.

And, the ads at the bottom left of the page just about cover that cost. I'm sure that the ads would cover the cost of the site if I moved them near the top of the page (so more folks would click on them), but that would spoil the look of the page.

The Classroom Toolkit site is a proof of concept project for a larger project, something like the goals of TeachersPayTeachers.com, except that participation and materials would be completely free to teachers, worldwide; and there would not be a cost, ever.

In support of this New Nugget topic, I have posted a number of electronic books/ courses, so that teachers can learn what it takes to develop these business strategies.

Hint: this is a lot of work, and you won't get rich quickly. The rule is "Buyer Beware" for any information that promises immediate riches if you buy today.

Here are the links to Second Income/ Alternate Business courses that teachers may find helpful:

How to start and run an Affiliate Business

Affiliate Business Course

How to develop an Automated Product Delivery strategy

Automated Product Delivery eBook

How to develop a long-term Internet Auction business course

Net Auction Course

How to write for the Internet Course

Net Writing Course

How to price your products for the most profit

Pricing Products

How to sell your services and increase your business using the Internet

Service Sellers Course

What you need to do to set up a Webmaster Business

Webmaster Business Course

Resources for setting up a at home business

Work at Home Course

Also, be sure to check the Top Tips section of this newsletter for a low/ minimal cost strategy that teachers can use to share materials within your district.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Short Article

Sharing Can be Electronic, Too

Have you ever wanted to create an online course.

I mean a real course. Real Teacher/ Learner Resources

What if you were able to use these resources for your course?

Text Pages

Simple pages written using plain text

You could apply a number of built-in formatting types to turn your plain text into nice-looking Web pages

HTML Pages

Easy to develop Web pages

Each page would be stored in the database, not as a file, so you wouldn't have to keep track of them

Files and Web Pages

You could add live links to active Internet Web pages

You could also upload files and make these files available to participants who are studying your course

These files could include MP3 files (sound recordings), movies, and Flash animations
Your content could be displayed in windows, pop up windows, or frames

Directory

You could display a whole directory (and its subdirectories) of course files. Students could browse and view all those files

Labels

You could create Labels and embed text and images among the other links on the course page

Real Tools (All Built In)

Would your online course make use of these tools if they were built in to the course software?

Built in tools (all structured as re-usable modules) include:

Assignments

You can list learning assignments and learning activities

Chat

Course participants can communicate with each other

Glossary

You can build a running record of specific technical terms and tailor-make the selection of these terms to your course

Forums

Course participants can interact with the course presenter and other participants

Journal

Participants can make use of online journals to keep a learning log or running record of their explorations into your course content

Lessons

You can structure your presentation

Quizzes

Quizzes can be a learning and memory aide, rather than a grade-extracting tool

Surveys

You can set up online questionnaires for participants

Wikis

You can set up a presenter or participant interactive dictionary/ encyclopedia. This is interactive because one or more people can edit or add to the text of the definitions and explanations

Workshops

These are hands-on/ learning lab assignments

All this built-in capacity is available with the Open Source product, Moodle

What does All this Learning Power Cost?

Surprise, you can have all this power at your fingertips for free, or almost/ nearly free.

If you have an old computer that you can use, the cost is free.

If you want to place your course on a course exchange, the cost is free

Here is one Moodle Exchange

Strategic Open Source of Texas Moodle Exchange

If you want to place your course on a dedicated Moodle site, the cost is \$4.95 per month

SiteGround.com Moodle hosting site

Classroom Toolkit is building a tutorial site with a hosting plan that costs \$3.95 per month.

Note: The GoDadd.com hosting does not support Moodle, however PHP and MySQL are supported, so the installation of Moodle is not that difficult.

Classroom Toolkit Tutorial Site

What Classroom Toolkit Tutorials will do is illustrate the concepts, methods and skills required for teachers to create, edit and adapt our unique materials.

Automated Management

Building online courses is time consuming...labor intensive. Fortunately, Moodle(TM) handles (almost hides) the behind-the-scenes technology/ processes, allowing instructors to focus on course content.

Another advantage to the Moodle software learning and course management system is the entire Web is a learning playground for course participants.

You can pick and choose activities and materials and include these in your course as links. In this way, you support copyright and intellectual property rights of learning resource creators, while augmenting your course with the best that the Web World has to offer.

A Flexible Course Development Process

You can install the Moodle Course Management System on a server, on an old computer, or even on your desktop (or laptop) computer.

Then, you have a "build-as-you-go" course management system

You can develop and post online in a "build as you go" process (such as the Classroom Toolkit Tutorial project, or you can develop the entire course on your desktop computer and export the entire course in one operation.

Courses that are built on one computer can be copied to/ exported to an other computer that runs the Moodle Course Management System.

True computer platform (Windows; Macintosh; or Linux;) independence!

Completely Portable Learning

The Moodle software system contains a "pack and go" capacity.

This means that you can export your entire course, and copy/ send the course to any other Moodle system.

This is how a Moodle Exchange operates.

This is also how school districts can build an in-house collection of courses, because, once the course is imported, it can be customized, added-to or re-designed

An entire course can be used as a template for a more advanced course...or a template for another course.

Online Tutorials and Examples

Online tutorials are available for learning how to install and configure the Moodle Course Management System.

Examples include:

Lots of How-to install and configure Moodle information

Strategic Open Source of Texas Moodle;

More how to configure a Moodle server

Texas Computer Educator's Association (TCEA)

Free Open Source Software Site that focuses upon Moodle;

K12 Open Source - Free Open Source Software Moodle;

Online tutorials also show you how to build and manage the courses themselves.

Examples of these include:

The official Moodle site that shows what a teacher can do with the software

The Moodle Demonstration Site

Extensive instructions on how to build Moodle courses

Melbourne University Moodle How-to

A how-to guide for developing and managing a Moodle course

Earlham College Moodle How-To Guide

Tutorials on how to implement the Classroom Toolkit strategy

Classroom Toolkit Tutorials

A Special Note

Search the Internet for "Moodle How-to" and "Moodle courses". When you find course information that looks useful, login as "guest." Many Moodle courses are available for audit, and any guest can look them over without charge.

You will be amazed at what you can learn.

A Super-Special Offer

Ken Task, a retired Texas educator, has a special offer for any school district that wants to take him up on it.

Ken will travel to your school district and configure a Moodle server and teach your district's IT staff as he goes along.

The only cost: Ken's travel expenses.

You can contact Ken at:

Mail: Ken Task at K12 Open Source - Free Open Source Software

Mail: Ken Task at Strategic Open Source of Texas

Mail: Ken Task at Educational Service Center, Region 3, Texas

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Short Article at 10:00

Feature Article

Incentive Pay Proposal in Texas

The Dallas Morning News ran an online story on June 12, 2006 that should chill the optimism of any Texas educator. <http://tinyurl.com/ecp4z>

The headlines were, "Incentive Pay Enters Classroom."

Holly K. Hacker and Terrence Stutz of The Dallas Morning News report that the State of Texas plans to spend one quarter billion dollars on incentive pay for teachers. This incentive pay will be tied (surprise!) to increases in student test scores.

This is another expedition "deep into the heart of mistakes," but the kind of mistake that we expect when folks who don't know anything about education (legislators/ politicians) meddle therein.

Here is our translation for comments that were included in the article:

"Despite criticism that such plans are largely unproven"

[Translation: Everyone knows that this won't work]

"Over vigorous objections from teacher groups"

[Translation: No need to pay attention to those slackers]

"...the program will push Texas to the forefront of educational excellence."

[Translation: We (lawmakers/ politicians) don't know what to do, so let's throw some money at it and pretend that we did something of value]

"Talented teachers will be more inclined to stay in the profession..."

[Translation: We (lawmakers/ politicians) can't tell the difference between a talented teacher and an armadillo, but we hope that this testing stuff gives us a clue]

"Texas is going to take the national lead in rewarding educational excellence and attracting top-performing teachers to struggling campuses," predicted Mr. Perry [Texas Governor], a longtime advocate of merit pay for teachers who initiated a pilot program for 100 campuses this year.

That \$10 million pilot will be expanded tenfold in the coming school year, with more than a thousand schools – educating mostly lower-income students – expected to join. Bonuses will range from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per teacher. In the 2007-08 school year, a second program, emphasizing improved test scores, will be offered to all school districts. Bonus amounts have not been set."

<http://tinyurl.com/ecp4z>

[Translation: The Texas Governor doesn't have a clue, either. However, he knows that attracting and keeping great teachers is a serious problem.]

Here are some statistics from the article:

Texas has 300,000 teachers

Average teacher salary is under \$42K

A \$10 K bonus could increase some teachers' pay by almost 25%

Nearly half the nation's governors talked about incentive plans in 2005

Merit pay schemes for teachers have been around for 200 years, in this and other countries

"Ms. Shapiro said test scores have to be a big part of the incentive pay plan because there are few objective ways to measure the effectiveness of teachers. She noted that the program also considers other factors, such as teacher evaluations.

We want to see a new philosophy in our schools, one that says you reward your best employees. Those are the teachers who go above and beyond, who make a difference in the lives of children."

Source: Senator Florence Shapiro, R. Plano, the Bill's Author

We would add that there are lots of objective ways to measure teacher performance, but all of these require long-term planning, training, teacher release time, hiring of observers, and a lot more money than one quarter billion dollars. If these politicians knew what they were doing, and wanted to do the job of measuring 300,000 teacher's performance in a fair and supportive manner, one quarter billion dollars would look like "Chump Change."

Here are the main interpretations of the lawmakers/ politicians beliefs:

Most of the state's 300,000 teachers are less than talented

Most of the state's 300,000 teachers are less than dedicated

Teacher performance is somehow, magically, connected to test scores

A new philosophy can overcome issues such as under funding, bureaucratic chain of command, micro managing, and district governance that handcuff teacher empowerment

Teacher arguments against this bill are just as bogus.

"I'm very bothered about the whole premise of paying out money based on performance," said David McClure, a sixth-grader teacher at Davis Intermediate School in Wylie. "If you thought there was cheating now, you wait until money's thrown in the mix."

[Translation: Some teachers don't know how to teach children from lower socioeconomic homes, any more than the lawmakers/ politicians do]

Here are the main opposing points of teachers:

Teachers with seniority will migrate to schools where students are from middle class homes
Only the newest teachers will take jobs in schools for poor students
Money that is intended for instructional materials will be diverted to this program, forcing teachers to spend their bonus money on out-of-pocket purchases of materials for their classrooms
There is no fair way to tag test scores to teaching quality

Teachers of upper and middle class students could do little or nothing and see high test scores
Teachers of lower-socioeconomic students can work brilliantly, effectively and round-the-clock and still see lower test scores than "lazy" teachers for upper class and middle class
Teacher friends of the campus principal can have their class rosters hand-picked, so that their test scores will be higher

Teachers will campaign to get students placed in Special Education classes earlier in the year to protect their incentive pay stipends
Adversarial relationships could develop among teachers, depending upon who gets extra money, and how much "that other lazy slug of a teacher" gets
Different incentive schemes have been tried in Colorado, Florida, Minnesota and Texas, with mixed results
This bill would let each district work out the details differently. This could effect a migration of teachers to neighboring districts that developed a more lucrative and generous (it wouldn't have to be much better) incentive structure
In a state like Texas where First, Second and Twelfth Grade students don't take the high-stakes test, would these teachers be locked out of the incentive pay scheme?
Likewise would Art, Music, PE, Health teachers, Special Education and any secondary subject content teacher who taught a class that was not tested be locked out?
Etc., etc.

Cheating!

The subject of cheating is important. What I am writing next is true, but I am not at liberty to reveal sources (an education specialist in a Texas state senator's office)...

- 1.) This pilot program has been put on hold.
Reason: Many of the schools that were to be participating in the pilot program were identified for "Testing Irregularities" on the previous state-sponsored high-stakes test
- 2.) The Texas Education Agency was not going to do anything to investigate these irregularities
Reason Given: There was no money involved in the irregularities at that time
With this bill, money is now involved...
- 3.) With between \$2,000 and \$10,000 at stake, theft by test fraud would qualify as a State Jail felony
This theft by test fraud would be prosecuted by the White Collar unit of the District Attorney's Office; a unit that many jurisdictions might have to increase in size if this bill were to be implemented and enforcement were to be strict.
- 4.) If students participate in the test cheating, does that make them accessories to felony theft?
Other information in the article:

609 schools were identified as having testing irregularities during the 2005-06 testing year
In 2003, five percent of elementary schools in Chicago were found cheating, with only incentives, not additional pay at stake
Evidence of cheating was found for Dallas, Houston and a now defunct, Wilmer-Hutchins, and school district during 2004
California tried an incentive program, and there were allegations of cheating. The California program ended because the state ran out of money

Of course, these were only the most egregious cases.
The article states that the "public demands higher achievement from students and schools."
The problem is that these high-stakes tests contain only face validity for what traditional (factory-model classrooms) do, but the tests have no face or content validity for what students need to know or be able to do when they graduate and compete in the work force. The article notes that the No Child Left Behind law also is complicit in the testing debate.
Our Competing Plan!

Our plan calls for a simple solution. Overtime pay for teachers.

If teachers are working above and beyond their regular working hours, then, all they should have to do is turn in a record of the extra hours that they worked, and their stipend would be added to their next paycheck.

Here is the math...

Let's see. 1/4 billion dollars, divided by 300,000 teachers.

Each teacher would get about \$833.

If teachers earned \$20 per hour, they would exceed their quota for extra pay in just less than 42 hours.

If teachers earned \$6.15 per hour, they would work 135 hours before using up their entitlement.

Over a 36 week school year, all a teacher would have to work extra (at \$6.15 per hour) for only 3.7 extra hours a week. At \$20 per hour, the teacher would only have to work a few minutes over an hour a week extra.

What seems like a lot of money to the state doesn't mean much to teachers, since most teachers work well over this amount of time for no additional compensation.

It would be nice if the extra work was recognized and appreciated.

Instead, some folks would like to make teachers "more accountable" to the tests.

But, this is Texas. And, your state has more good sense than to damage our children's future by handcuffing teachers to these tests, doesn't it?

Texas is the place where a local school board would rather fire a teacher for allowing her partner to post topless art pictures on the Flickr(TM) site, but where the state education agency decides not to investigate 609 schools for testing irregularities.

{Note: Texas is a great state, lots of wonderful, big-hearted, warm-hearted, generous, caring people live here. I have lived in Texas for 25 years, and speak from experience.

However, this does not mean that Texas politicians and school districts know what they are doing when it comes to supporting education. In fact, the school finance issue in Texas has been appalling for all of those 25 years.)

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Featured Article at 09:00

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

Top Tips

Ready for Real Sharing among Teachers in your District?

Our Top Tip is a site that we suggest that you refer to your school district's IT Department. Maybe you will find this new site useful if it attracts lots of active teachers.

But, in the meantime, this site can serve as a model for what your school district's IT Department could do for your district's teachers, without spending a lot of money...maybe without spending any money.

The site that I am referring you to is...

TeacherResourceExchange.org

What is so special about this site?

This site is an online forum that focuses upon teacher sharing.

The site is easy for your IT Staff to set up and run on an older computer, with software that is completely free.

Imagine that teachers in your district are sharing materials through a system like this, visualize this as already happening, already effective, already making a difference for your students.

Teacher sharing of hard goods and physical materials is less than ideal because someone has to pay for shipping. (Generally the receiving party.)

But, most school districts, and even some regional cooperatives, have an internal mail system that teachers do not have to pay to use.

What is this Magic Software?

The software that runs the TeacherResourceExchange.org site is called PHPBB.

You or your school district's IT Department can download this software at:

[The PHPBB Open Source Project](#)

There are some tricks that have to be done with another Open Source product, a free database management system, [MySQL](#);

You (or your district's IT Staff member) can download the [MySQL](#) software at:

[The MySQL Open Source Project](#)

You can start by explaining that for very little work, and probably no money, your district's IT staff can become a "Big Hit" with your district's teachers.

Once the IT folks see what you want to do, and how easy implementing this project will be; they will be glad to help out.

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

Teacher Resources

Want to Build a Unit on Protecting the Environment?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers a site dedicated to teaching about protecting the environment.

Who is this Site for?

This site is educators who wish to teach about the environment.

What does the site offer?

This site offers background information, lesson plans, and activities. There is also information about workshops, conferences, grants, awards and a other topics.

The information can be used by teachers in traditional classrooms, in an outdoor settings, in community centers or in the home.

What specific resources does this site offer?

The EPA Teaching Site offers

Information you can use when you teach

Teaching resources - Lesson plans and activities from the EPA - Grouped by topic

EPA publications - Free materials for teachers and students

EPA Quick Guide - Overview of how the EPA works

Help and Recognition

Awards - Programs for teachers and students

Grants - Links to connect good ideas with the financial resources

Workshops & Conferences - Training opportunities in many local areas

Students Involvement Projects

Community Service Projects - Students apply what they learn in the classroom to real life

Student Jobs and Scholarships - Research environmental careers, internships and jobs

Specific Environmental Areas for Teaching

The EPA site focuses upon these specific environmental areas:

Air

Conservation

Ecosystems

Health

In Your Neighborhood

Waste

Water

Other Resources

Environmental Kids Club - A site for elementary age students

Environmental Kids Club

Student Center - A site for middle school age students

Student Center

High School Environmental Center - Age appropriate site for high school students

High School Environmental Center

Environmental Education Center - An source of adult-oriented environmental information

Environmental Education Center

Environmental issues connect with so many content areas; e.g., health, PE, mathematics, science (biology, chemistry, geology, physics) and social studies (geography, history, sociology, psychology) that just about every teacher can make creative use of the resources on this EPA Teaching Center educational site.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Resources at 06:00

Book Review

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The Simplicity Survival Handbook: 32 Ways to Do Less and Accomplish More

Author: Jensen, Bill

ISBN: 0-7382-0912-0

Format: Softcover

Pub. Date: 2003

Publisher: NY: Basic Books

Pages: 311

Cost: \$17.95 (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$11.67 (new) - \$3.99 at eBay(TM)

Subtitle:

Do less...of the corporate silliness. Ignore more of the noise and senseless stuff that comes your way.

You deserve better. You deserve to spend your time and talent on what truly matters.

The Books' Topics:

Stop the senseless stuff that comes your way each day

You don't have to remain a victim of the system nonsense, and you don't have to perpetuate that silliness either

You have more control over your workload than you believe

You can do something about "the system" without losing your job

The central themes of this book are:

Protect yourself, save time and see the humor in the stupidity that you experience at work

Change the conversation about leadership, communication, productivity workflow, efficiency and other system-twisted "motivators"

Keywords:

System Silliness

Supposed-to Stupidness

Corporate Claptrap

The Productivity of Doing Less

Main Idea:

Doing less is smart, productive and professional.

Vegetating in the minefield of and mindless tasks and "black hole" politics of the system is less fulfilling and leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

Navigating through this morass can be fun if you know what to expect, and if you learn the Simplicity Survival Judo that uses the clumsy inertia of the bureaucracy to trip your bosses and coworkers under their own weight.

Quotes:

"Ask "Why?" three to five times before agreeing to do stuff." (p. - 87)

"Three ways to deal with bosses who don't get it

Smile and Nod

Go Around or Above

Let Your Departure Do the Talking" (p. - 94)

"One of the primary drivers in day-to-day activities is to keep things moving forward. Most of us avoid anything that smacks of moving backwards -- like stopping to reflect on, and question, any work that has already been set in motion.

That doesn't make us bad people. Or bad managers or bad teammates. Just crazed and overloaded." (p. - 148)

"The idea is pretty simple: give people all the information they need so they can manage themselves, and make decisions that ought to be part of their job. But leveraging transparency in ways that leaders can trust all this new openness and self-management-- well, yeah, that can get a little complicated." (p. - 240)

Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the issues that develop from any bureaucracy or chain-of-command hierarchy. However, Mr. Jensen has figured out that the power of these organizations needs to reside at the worker (or teacher) level if they are to survive and thrive in the Information Age.

The Book's Shortcomings:

This book didn't have any shortcomings. It is the first book that we have reviewed to receive a perfect score.

However, many teachers may not have the options of getting up and leaving when confronted with an archaic and backwards work environment.

For many teachers, the local school district where they work is the only game in town (or in many towns around). For these teachers, some procedures that are less assertive than "voting with their feet" may be most appropriate.

Comments:

Some of the strategies and solutions to real-world issues presented by corporate knowledge workers may not apply to teachers.

And, the grass may not be greener in the next school district, either.

Finding a vibrant work environment where creativity, productivity, and worker empowerment is the rule is almost "ruled out."

Summary:An original and creative work that is worth exploring and worth applying, especially for anyone that works for a large, bureaucratic organization.

Rating (Four Point Scale):

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4
Innovative - 4
Original - 4
Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 4.0

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Site Strategy

Classroom Toolkit Site Strategy

Our site's strategy is to provide a time-saving plan and a management framework for teachers. This benefits our site's visitors with a value beyond just searching the Internet for an endless supply of unconnected, free materials.

Finding just the "right" materials for a specific lesson takes more time than it saves.

It saves more time to create your own materials, if you have a strategy for reusable templates and generic components.

We offer our materials freely to show teachers how this strategy for saving time actually works.

In addition, our site demonstrates a practical method for integrating technology into instruction. This is a stated goal of almost all school districts and the federal government. However, it is easier to say that the integration of technology is a priority than it is to provide adequate funding for equipment, materials and professional development. We show teachers how to integrate technology without adding another hour or two to their workday. In fact, we show teachers how to save time. Here is the progress that our site recorded for June...

Our site had 1,623 visitors for the month of June
Over 5, 296 pages were visited
Page rank for the major search engines were:

Google™: 16 pages in the top 30 search results slots with 5 pages receiving a #1 ranking
Yahoo™: 15 pages in the top 30 search results slots with 5 pages receiving a #1 ranking
MSN™: 16 pages in the top 30 search results slots with 6 pages receiving a #1 ranking

We submitted four proposals to the Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA) concerning the Open Source movement. These coincide with our site and eZine strategy. Here were the topics:

Online Course Publishing with Free Software: How to Manage Moodle(TM) Modules
Teaching to the (Homemade) Test: Creative Strategies for Test Coaching that Motivate and Teach
Templates, Tricks and Technology-Based Time Savers: A Reproducible Instructional Modules How-To

Research and Document Development Strategies: Authorship Cycle Tools and Tricks to use when Simple Word Processing Isn't Enough

We have built the framework for a Moodle(TM) tutorial service
We have redesigned the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter

We received feedback from a trusted friend that our newsletter was too long.
After some experimenting, we have converted a Blog into a newsletter format.
Please feel free to let us know if this new system appeals to you.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Site Progress at 04:00

Open Source for Education

Open Source in Education: Open Source Teacher Materials

Classroom Toolkit is in the vanguard of Open Source Materials for teachers.

Other sites offer free materials, but few, if any offer world-class, new, creative materials for teachers.

Many sites want to charge for the individual materials, or charge a subscription fee to access the materials collection.

Some free sites are the posting of class projects: either public school, undergraduate, or graduate class projects. These sites offer great materials, but usually the offerings are discrete lessons or units.

The Classroom Toolkit Goal

Classroom Toolkit is different. We provide...

A how-to for a unified, connected, total classroom planning and classroom management system.

A focus upon teacher and student empowerment in a "Let's increase accountability as we take away resources and funding" world

World-class, original materials that model efficient and effective instructional strategies

A Newsletter and Blog that "Tell it like it is" about the challenges that teachers face

News and commentary that reveal the truths and insights that teachers would speak for themselves if they weren't in danger of losing their jobs if they did speak out

Creative Partners Needed

Classroom Toolkit is looking for teachers who want to share the materials that they create.

Please volunteer if you want to develop Open Source content for other teachers.

What is Open Source Content

Classroom Toolkit originated the Reciprocal Public Materials License concept.

Classroom Toolkit Reciprocal Public Materials License

This license is similar to how Open Source Software is licensed.

The rules for this license are quite simple:

Anyone may use the materials with out charge, as long as they do not charge their students for the materials

Anyone may add to and revise the materials

Any additions, changes, revisions of the materials may be distributed with the original materials, but both components must be distributed without cost

The copyright remains with the original author

Anyone that creates additions, changes or revisions only holds the copyright for the portion that they create

How does this Benefit You?

Teachers everywhere get to use quality Classroom Toolkit materials without cost

Teachers save time in several ways: Classroom Toolkit materials are...

...modular and reusable

...adaptable to many kinds of lessons

...built on learner-centered, empowering principles

...built with a knowledge of how multisensory processing and a stress-free learning environment increases thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and learner self-concept

...puts "teaching to the test" in its place of ignominious distinction

What Happens if I Volunteer

Unlike other Web sites, we insist that authors retain the copyright to their materials.

Of course, you have to give us written permission to publish your materials on our site. This permission covers only placing those materials on our site, and no other rights

You receive complete credit for the materials that you author.

By posting your materials, other teachers will use your materials. So why would you want to share your materials and still retain a copyright?

Here are some reasons:

You can do your part in stemming the tide against over priced corporate content

You can gain exposure for your ideas and skills if you are (or wish to become) a consultant

You can list the materials you share as publications on your resume

You can test whether other teachers like your materials, and if they do, collect your materials into a book or an eBook

You can test whether there is enough interest in your materials for you to start a Web site of your own, or, to develop your own online business

Volunteering in the Classroom Toolkit Open Source Teacher Materials Project will not make you rich. But, you will become important to a lot of teachers and students.

And, if you do not want to publish your materials with Classroom Toolkit, but want to pursue your own Website and your own marketing, we will help you.

To volunteer, or to provide suggestions of any kind, please contact us at:

Mail: Joseph Chmielewski M.S., L.P.C. at Classroom Toolkit

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 03:00