

Thursday, November 30, 2006

News Nuggets

"Out of Sight, Out of Mind" and NCLB
Subtitle: "How soon we forget"
The election is three weeks in the past and we have moved a sufficient cognitive distance away from caring. This enables us to forget about the election returns and move on to issues that are more important. No, this is not a satire piece about the election. How could it be when Give our Kids Good Schools reports that only 14 states had items affecting schools on their ballots. Sidebar
The results of these ballot measures were mixed, but the long-term outlook is for teachers to enter the holiday season with less than rosy and bright confidence that education will become a priority in our country.

Here is a summary of what happened:
Pro Funding Measures for Schools 6 ballot measures favored funding
8 ballot measures rejected additional funding measures
Taxes on Tobacco Products to Support Education 2 ballot measures passed
Restrictions on Non-Citizen Access or Restrictions on Affirmative Action 2 ballot measures passed
Gambling to Support Education Funding 2 ballot measures failed
Source: GiveKidsGoosSchools.Org
E-mail Action Alert: Subject: How Did Education Fare in the 2006 Mid-Term Elections? Date: 11-14-2006 10:23:36 A.M. Central Standard Time From: info@GiveKidsGoodSchools.org
No, this article is about forgetting what leaving no child behind means. In particular, the corollary to "test and complain" about our schools' lack of making "Acceptable Yearly Progress." The Rest of the Story
A common bureaucratic tactic (politician speak) is to "opaque over" important information with the intention of distracting the people who want to know what is happening. Sidebar
The words "District" and "Distract" differ by only one letter. I learned this because of the "Freudian-Slip" typo that I just corrected. The area that school districts are not talking about is related to the rate of school leaving (dropout rate) that school districts and states have been storing in the "let's keep this from coming to light" file for years, files under "disgrace"…
The question, "What happens to students who don't pass the state-mandated, high-stakes test during their allotted number of tries?"
Answer: Who Knows, Who Cares?
According to the San Antonio (Texas) Express-News article, In Limbo and Under the Radar (November 5, 2006, Pages 1A & 17A), the state of Texas cannot tell how many students lack a high school diploma because the student failed one or more of the exit exams.

Here are some numbers…
25,556 (11% of the state's high school seniors) were in danger of not graduating in 2006

6,327 seniors in the class of 2006 completed all graduation requirements except passing all exit exams
20,637 students met all graduation requirements except passing one or more of these tests (over the last eight years)
Of those students, no one know how many many ultimately pass, because after these students leave school, no one keeps track of them. Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A
Why does this not surprise us in a state that has deliberately undercounted school leavers for decades?
State Education Commissioner Shirley Neeley declined repeated requests for an interview. Her deputy, Robert Scott, said state education officials would like to know who these students are and what happens to them, but the agency doesn't have a mechanism for following them once they leave school, such as combining the information with state employment data. 'We're attempting to track those kids who have failed the test, and we've run into obstacles with federal privacy laws,' Scott said. Our comment: the teenage statement of wisdom, "Yea, right!"
Why no Outcry?
School leavers have been an invisible group for years, "invisible by design" to school districts and state departments of education, that is.

Of course, school leavers show up like launched flares on unemployment rolls, Welfare rolls (is there such a thing as a social safety net any more) and the rolls of social service agencies for the poor.

But, we figured out the reason that there is no outcry about the social ills and less-than-equal opportunity that these "ABD - all-but-diploma" students "earn." Sidebar
The words "earn" and "learn" also differ by only one letter; the same number as the number of tests that it takes to keep a former student and their family in an economically vulnerable state (the state of their finances, not the State they live in) for years. By the time that former students take the high-stakes exit test for the "Bakers' Dozenth" time, they are 23 years old, and no longer children. (Note: In Texas, students can take the tests four times a year for as long as they can stomach the process and endure the humiliation.)

So, we are not leaving them behind as children, but we are leaving them behind, at the end of the pack of young adults who are scrambling for economic advancement. Adults can fend for themselves…they are not vulnerable like children…the plight of adults doesn't grab us by our "empathy bone."
Scathing Criticism
Here is the low-down on high-stakes tests as graduation requirements…
Critics of high-stakes exams argue that tests should be used to assess student weaknesses so educators can intervene early. They say that the true role for testing should be to help students, not to serve as a passport to a diploma. Students who show up and play by the rules play the penalty for lousy teaching or a school environment not conducive to learning, they say. Moreover, poor and minority students concentrated in the lowest-performing schools fare worse on the tests." (Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A)
Other Abuses…
Linda McNeil, co-director of the Center for Education at Rice University, has reported that some Houston-area educators have counseled students to quit school rather than be counted against the school's test scores
Lame Excuse

"It's amazing that in this society that credit card companies know everything about us, but we don't even know how many students are passing the exit exam…" (Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A)Final NoteYou can reach the author of this newspaper article at:jeanner@express-news.net

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

Short Article

Creative Thinking: An Undervalued Teacher Resource?

Creative thinking is a top ability that teachers and their employers often overlook.

Teachers overlook their need to create and express novel ideas because they are busy, stressed and overworked. The people that employ teachers overlook the need for teachers to create and express novel ideas because they both "feel and deal in stress", and because the bureaucracies that they work for cherish a complaint-free, no-risk environment. Of course, new ideas involve risk. Therefore, new ideas are considered to be disruptive, risky, anti-harmony, anti-authority, "anti-my-way" forces that need to be squelched by some folks who are in charge. If Teachers don't Protect their Creative Freedom, Who Will? Teachers must advocate for themselves if they wish to protect their creative freedom. Yes, unfortunately, this sometimes means relocating to another campus or school district. Some bureaucratic jurisdictions are so restrictive that teachers cannot, in good conscience, remain working there. Children in some campuses and districts are so poorly served that just drawing a paycheck becomes untenable.

Fortunately, in most employment venues, teachers are free to create and express, as long as they remain under the "complaint-driven" radar. Creative Principles Here are some strategies for developing an "all that you can be" creative, self-expressive environment… Do what is important, and find a way to defer urgent (but unimportant) tasks Teachers need "stress-free" time to think in higher-order ways, incubate ideas, and reexamine possibilities The "never-stop the action" daily routines that teachers face are poor environments for thinking and innovation Motivate yourself to find your passion and desire, your personal stamp of self-expression See each step (especially the steps that collapse under your feet) as learning opportunities and stepping stones Communicate your successes (in subtle ways) to your supervisors to gain their confidence in your creative ideas

Balance your ideas with the ideas of others Creativity is kind and caring. Empathy and understanding improves most creative expression, while different viewpoints and vantage points enhance most creative ideas Learn to view ideas as dependent, independent and interdependent on other ideas Ideas do not flourish in a vacuum, but neither do ideas blossom in an overly compressed environment

Relationships are important, associations, branches, Webs spawn other associations, branches and more Webs Cross pollination, cross fertilization, planning and accident, meticulous structure and mutation, control and serendipity… what surprises most about creativity is the unpredictability of the outcome

Why didn't I think of that "simple solution" is as much a hallmark of creativity as as an "earth-shaking, cutting-edge breakthrough in avant-garde technology Self-Care: Caring for Students Teachers who take care of themselves enjoy the most favorable position for helping their students.

Setting the stage for creative planning and creative problem solving requires the same timing, requires the same props, and requires the same direction and mind set as taking care of yourself.

Students learn better, more, faster, more thoroughly in the same stress-free environment that enhances memory and increases creativity.

Of course your students deserve the advantage of your creative ideas… applied to your instruction and applied to your life.

Create the space where creative ideas flourish and learning just about takes care of itself.

Your creative potential is vast, never over-tapped, always replenishing, and your greatest resource.

Praise yourself for all the creative ideas you have generated so far, and ever more remarkable ideas will bubble up, even erupt geyser-like, to benefit everyone.

Be ready!

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

Feature Article

Teacher Leadership: Business Models or Modern Alchemy?

Modern educational "theory" (which we advise that you sip in small doses) [See our article, Plan Simply -- Build a Simple Plan: Loose the Ideology] seems to stem more from psychology or business theory than from educational knowledge. Why?

Perhaps this is because psychologists are "nasty scientists" and because business people are "greedy pragmatists." (Note: Credit for labeling psychology as a "nasty little science" is given to William James.)

See supporting links: Theistic Psychology Or: Functionalism Notes

Therefore, any educational "theories" that devolve from business or psychology are automatically suspect based upon

their source.

But, why don't teachers devise theories of their own?

More than likely, master teachers are too busy teaching and guiding students to worry about philosophy and theory.

What "theories" actually assist teachers in the minute-by-minute performance of their jobs?

Here are the problems...

Psychologists are trained to be "impartial observers." They believe (incorrectly) that an "antiseptic" observational process can identify behavior and develop theories. But, the fact is that any observer affects the outcome of the observed situation by the act of observing. (Note: This is true even for light particles in a lab. And, what about the "Abdicating Our Roles? Just as politicians have no business meddling in education, psychologists and business people also should keep their distance from the educational enterprise.

Sure, teachers should adopt sound business practices and sound psychological procedures that improve the mechanics and interaction of education. But, teachers should hold to their own theories.

Can anyone identify a business or psychological "theory" that improves education? (Note: We will gladly publish any professional debate concerning this issue.) Why Business and Psychology Lead Educators Astray Let's look at some popular leadership theories that do not hold "educational water." Theory X Assumes that people are inherently lazy, that people don't like to work, and that it takes a strong (dictatorial) manager to get them to perform a bare minimum level. (Aside: Sort of like high-stakes testing and the NCLB Act Theory Y People are intrinsically motivated, like to achieve goals and master their environment, and enjoy work if it is meaningful and if they can provide their own direction This theory leads to the democratic manager and a "participative" style of management. Neither of these theories enjoys a blanket application in education. Here are the reasons:

First, education is unlike factory-floor production, and the goal of education is not to churn out products. Factory models of education flourish because these models provide a rationale for cheap and measurably mediocre education, about what our politicians and our society are willing to settle for.

Second, education that focuses upon uniformity and standardization loses most of its value.

An analogy that explains this would be if all precious gems were cut to the same size and shape of diamonds. There would be a lot waste as large diamonds were ground down to the standard size, and a lot of rejects as diamonds that were too small to begin with were discarded.

But, the effect on emeralds, sapphires, rubies and other lesser stones would be far more damaging because being cut as diamonds would not allow for their innate, natural beauty to express.

The parallel in schools is to use a minimum skills, high-stakes test to squeeze students into a standard mold. Then, to reject all the talents, energies and delightful differences in students as they are squeezed into "narrow skill sets" that are suitable for low-level management. Myths Dispelled Here are some common (useless) myths that come from outside education and plague our profession: The human mind is like a computer

The education process should run like a highly productive factory

Standardized tests tell how well a teacher is teaching

Measuring student test scores is effective in "benchmarking" teacher performance

Education must be the "same" for all students if it is to be fair

Teachers must avoid humor, and avoid "smiling before the Winter Solstice" The Truth about Education These myths shelter hold more holes than a termite-ravaged dead tree. But, what is real about education? Here are some truths…

Teachers work with the most precious resources in the world, our children. For proof of this, check with 99.999% of parents. With rare exceptions, parents will tell you that their children are precious to them.

Teachers work with the behaviors, emotions, images, cognition, beliefs and language development of students. This is the most malleable resource in the world, capable of infinite variations, unlimited capacity and boundless energy (before it solidifies into constructs, compulsions and cravings.

Teachers draw on an unlimited capacity for students' talents, skills and abilities… what we ask students to perform is a miniscule subset of what they are capable of

Teachers stimulate creative ideas, higher-order thinking, the construction of new knowledge and solutions to issues that locked-tight minds know there is no solution for

Teachers launch students toward attainments that surpass previous generations in quantum hops…

Teachers model caring, empathy, compassion, fairness and justice; contributions far more important for the future of our country than all the political deal-making, budget allocations and legal wrangling that is supposed to offer solutions

The New Alchemists It is not without reason that the legend of a special stone that could transmute materials was called the "Philosopher's Stone." But, even though teachers cannot touch lead and convert it into gold, they can perform a far more important miracle.

Teachers can touch a child's heart and soul, change the path of that child's life, and sow the seeds of benefits and improvements for families as yet unformed, for generations to come.

There is a modern name for the "Philosopher's Stone" of human health, harmony and happiness. That name is, "master teacher."

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. 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

Top Tips

E-mail Management: An Overlooked Time Saver?

You can save time by managing your E-mail. The problem is that you probably have several E-mail accounts. School, home (from your Internet Service Provider (ISP), night school class at a college or university, and several "free" or throw-away accounts.

Tips fall into two categories, i.e., Category One:

E-mail from an integrated communications environment (such as Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Outlook Web Access), or Novell Groupwise."

Category Two:

Web Mail such as the service provided by your ISP or any other Web-based system
Integrated E-mail System
Here are some tips to help deal with this complex communications software. Fortunately, the complexity of this software allows for automation streamlining. Create and use folders to organize and store your E-mail messages
Keep up with this process, move messages and update at least once a week.

Create folders for important campus and classroom communication, and don't delete these until the end of the school year
Export messages in whatever format your system allows
This allows restoring the messages later

This recovers messages that could be lost in a mail server crash

Note: Do not just drag and drop mail messages into a desktop or hard drive folder
Many messages, particularly those of a message thread have the same subject line. Copying multiple messages with the same subject line will cause the last copied message to overwrite the message that was copied before it

This overwriting happens without warning
Sort messages within folders

Avoid using "gimmicks" such as stationary, icons, or any "Spyware-related" enhancements
Spyware slows down your computer system

Spyware compromises the security of your computer, compromises the security of your personal information, and compromises the integrity of your school district's computer network

When a program offers to "improve, change, adjust" the functioning of your E-mail program, DON'T YOU DARE!

Even if you don't appreciate the marketing success of Microsoft's, please understand that Microsoft's engineers are saints compared to the "scum" that create Spyware

Turn off weird formatting on messages. Dancing flowers, fluttering birds and "junk" of any kind has no business in professional E-mail.

And, never click on an invitation (on the bottom of an E-mail message that you receive) to give your E-mail messages the same "enhanced functionality" (Note: "Scum-speak" euphemism for "installing Spyware") You might just as well wear pajamas and bring your teddy bear and blankie to school as to litter your E-mail with "trash"

Just because you work with children does not mean that you should act like a child Create templates, either within your E-mail program, or with a text editor or word processor

Create Groups or Recipient Lists, and send one message to everyone in that group

Allow the program to auto-complete addresses within the system

Turn on the "Span" filter on your account, but check before deleting all the messages in that folder

Turn off the "Preview Pane" Some viruses can launch even if you don't open the message, just by your scrolling through the list of messages with the "Preview Pane" enabled

Scrolling through an overly large message could cause the system to seem to "hang" as the entire message is processed Add a signature to your E-mail with your contact information

Avoid sending attachments in Microsoft Word format. Convert the attachment to RTF or PDF formats

Sending a attached document in Microsoft Word format also sends much more information (such as history and deleted paragraphs, and lots of document properties that you might not want others to unravel

That paragraph that you thought you deleted at the last minute because you decided that it was inappropriate could still be embedded in the attached document

Don't say that you were not warned Web mail Tips The tips for using Web mail are easier... Try to consolidate the reading of as many different E-mail accounts with the same program

Set this up with a E-mail reading program that can access and read as many accounts as possible

Set up accounts to forward all mail to a central account

Use "Free" or "Throw away" accounts whenever enrolling for online sites or services All sites promise not to release your name, but some do anyway

Some sites send you so much mail after you sign up that you can't tell the difference between that mailer and a Spam mailer

Only enroll in sites that offer a "double opt in" (confirmation process)

Be prepared to abandon your free account and establish another when the Spam level becomes too time consuming to process

Establish an approved correspondents "white list" so that messages that you want are not filtered by the Spam filter Final Tips Remember, E-mail is for "quick and dirty" communication. Keep messages short, and keep your "cool."

If the message is long, controversial, or written in anger; write it on paper, and mail it tomorrow when you have a fresh perspective (and the ability to trash or rewrite before the letter is sent).

Equally important: Be sure that you check whether you are replying to one person or to many people before selecting the "send" icon or menu item. You know the horror stories.

Unfortunately, this is a mistake that is easy for teacher to make because they experience so many interruptions. Coming back later, it is easy to forget that your confidential comments were written for only one recipient. Readdress first, and check again before sending. Another Shameless PunCare in using E-mail can keep this time-saving tool from tipping the scales against your future employment.

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

Teacher Resources

Tons of Free Professional (Trade) Publications: Print or E-mail -- Your Choice

Many teachers can use free technical publications, even if they receive only one copy.

Sometimes a printed copy is better, other times an electronic copy is more useful. What if you could receive free copies in one format, or the other, or both? Many trade publications are available to teachers, free for the asking; requiring only a few minutes work in filling out the online forms. What kind of Publications are Available? Here is a list (and links) to a summary of the types of publications that teachers may find useful;

<http://techrepublic.tradepub.com/>

Agriculture

Automotive
Biotechnology & Pharmaceuticals
Computers
Construction
Education
Engineering
Executive & Management
Finance
Food & Beverage
Government
Healthcare
Human Resources
Industrial & Manufacturing
Internet
Information Technology
IT - Data Management
IT - Security
IT - Software & Development
IT - Storage
Insurance
Mechanical / Machine
Meetings & Travel
Multimedia
Network / Communications
Purchasing & Procurement
Retail
Sales & Marketing
Small & Medium Business
Telecom & Wireless
Trade/Professional Services
Transportation & Logistics

Utility & Energy Uses for Printed Copies of Trade Journals Uses for printed copies of trade journals are limited only by your imagination. Some options include:

Learning Centers
Classroom Library
Classroom Career Center
Classroom "Science and Technology" Resource Library
Rip issues apart for reports and presentations
File and catalog clipping file resource database

Etc. Uses for Electronic Copies of Trade Journals Uses for electronic content are limited only by "Fair Use" copyright considerations. (Note: Students have more leeway in the use of copyrighted material for their assignments than teachers have in classroom instruction.)

When in doubt, obtain permission to use the material. Use only a small portion of the material, and make sure that instruction "surrounds" the use of the material. One use that is generally safe is satire.

Another strategy is to site all sources, something that you should model for your students, anyway.

And remember the "tongue in cheek" difference between research and plagiarism, i.e., "If you copy from one source it is plagiarism, but if you copy from three sources it is research."

You are generally safe if you compare quotes from three "authors/ experts" and ask students any of the higher order questions concerning the different viewpoints, vantage points, talking points and "hidden agendas" of each author.

For a discussion of higher-order thinking skills, see our Classroom Toolkit Higher-Order Thinking page…Free Resources Even if you only develop a library of the printed publications and allow students to read them during "spare or sponge activity" moments, you don't know when reading about a career, technology of industry will influence a student to pursue a new course of study and a better life.

Widening the horizons of students pays off in amazing ways, ways that we may not discover until years later…or ways that we may never discover.

Part of the joy of teaching is realizing that our service to students reaches beyond our need to know about or take credit for the benefits that our students receive.

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

Book Review

The Excellent 11

Author: Clark, Ron ISBN: 1-4013-01410-X Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2004 Publisher: NY: Hyperion Pages: 266 Cost: \$19.95 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$6.99 (new) - \$3.87 (new) at eBay(TM)

Subtitle: Qualities Teachers and Parents Use to Motivate, Inspire and Educate Children The Books' Topics: These are the "Excellent 11" that frame the book's narrative...

Enthusiasm

Adventure

Creativity

Reflection

Balance

Compassion

Confidence

Humor

Common Sense

Appreciation

Resilience The central themes of this book are: Dedicated teacher do whatever it takes to submerge students in learning experiences

Working within the "system" takes time

Teachers need passion to buoy them across a sea of obstacles

Whatever the cost in terms of time, effort and low pay, teaching is worth it Keywords: See the Excellent 11 above Main

Idea: Dedicated teachers work overtime, work more than full time, work day and night for their students.

Passionate teachers "take failure hard and to heart" when even one of their students fails.

Creative teachers can develop unlimited opportunities for expression and activity that further learning experiences for most students.

Unfortunately, many of these "above and beyond the call of duty" take their toll on a teacher's family life, social life or other "free" time; so that a teacher might not have a life at all outside of their classroom-world. Quotes: (Note: There are so many worthwhile quotes in this book that I could be sued for copyright infringement if I posted them all. Instead, the image shows how many quotes I could have picked. Here are a few of the sparkling and polished gems: "...there always seems to be a few students in each class who are impossible to reach. They aren't interested, are usually below grade level, and tend to be discipline problems. Figuring out ways to reach them is an enormous challenge. I found that sometimes I spent so much time trying to reach those few that the rest of the class was suffering. At what point do you abandon the efforts to reach the stubborn few in order to meet the needs of the rest of the class? For me that is always hard, because the more troubled a student seems, the more I want to help." (p. - 15)

"When we are active and truly enthusiastic about our lives and jobs, we are often much happier. When individuals don't enjoy their jobs or aren't pleased with some facet of their life, they tend to have less energy; they gain weight, can't get sound sleep, and experience lethargy. When we engage in activities that we enjoy and have an occupation that excites us, we feel better about ourselves, have greater self-esteem, wake up energized, laugh a lot more, and live longer." (p. - 22)

"Too many students are sitting in classrooms day after day, watching the clock and feeling bored...we must find a way to get these students motivated and excited about something in their lives. We have to place a spark in their hearts and give them something to look forward to." (p. - 23)

"For all children, school should be a safe place. It must offer structure and stability, and teachers must make sure that there is a certain amount of organization and discipline in the daily routine. Once that is established, it is a good idea to throw some spontaneity into the day to keep the kids from getting bored." (p. - 53)

"Taking advantage of "teaching moments" is a quality that all great teachers have. When students show interest or when there is a spark or an eager question that is shared by all, there is no better time to veer off the course and use those teaching moments. When possible, it's always best to connect the new topic to the one you were covering." (p. - 65)

"The best principals put learning and kids' enthusiasm ahead of all else, and they are willing to let down their guard, laugh at themselves, and take on whatever role is necessary to build school morale." (p. - 74)

"In fact, it is a shame how much money teachers are already spending. Each year classroom teachers in the United States spend over one billion dollars of their own money on school supplies." (p. - 87)

"No matter what the subject, showing kids how much they have learned and how far they have come is a great way to build confidence and give them a sense of accomplishment, and the process can actually be an easy one. You can compare writing samples, math tests, and any number of assessments that will show students how much they have learned." (p. - 105)

"Kids learn differently; some are visual learners, some respond better to things they hear, and others respond to things they experience. Some kids focus best when they are in quiet surroundings; others enjoy reading while listening to U2 and watching MTV at the same time. It is important for teachers and parents to present information to students in many different ways so that we are covering all the bases and reaching all the children." (p. - 112)

"Recharging is necessary, and it will make us a better teacher and also a better person. It is important for everyone, not

only teachers. On average, American have less time off and fewer vacations than any nation in the world. We strive for success and focus on output, and oftentimes we sacrifice our health and emotional well-being to meet the needs of the job."(p. - 120)

"The power of the teacher can never be overstated. We have the ability to inspire our students to greatness and truly make them realize their potential."(p. -159 & 160)

"The number one thing that parents and teachers can do to positively affect the lives of our children and students is to become more aware of the way we speak to them…Children see themselves reflected in our eyes..."(p. - 182)

"Entering the profession is quite challenging, and it is a shame to see so many exceptional teachers leave the profession after teaching only a few years. They enter with so much energy and zest, but they soon burn out…Most new teachers are thrown in without life support."(p. - 191)

"The key to improving education in America isn't more technology, newer schools, bigger libraries, higher test scores, or even lower class size. All those things play a part, but the factor that above all other has the greatest impact on our students is the classroom teacher…unfortunately…teacher pay is not in proportion to the expectations of the job.…As teachers are drained each day mentally, physically, and emotionally, and there cannot be a harder job…It is incredibly difficult. and it is a shame teachers aren't compensated in a way that is equal to the amount of effort that is required."(p. - 209)

"Respect teachers' time. This issue comes up most often in discussing teacher meetings. If there is going to be a faculty meeting, the principal must be there on time, there must be a good reason for the meeting, and the principal must not allow the meeting to drag on and on. Thirty minutes is a good amount of time for a faculty meeting after school."(p. - 214)

"Behaviors and attitude tend to trickle down in school systems. If a superintendent is demanding and threatening, the will usually spread to the principals and then to the teachers. The students end up suffering in that environment…The main thing for someone in such an important position to realize is that they should exhibit the type of characteristics that they would want to see in those working for them."(p. - 228)

"With a supportive principal it is wonderful, but with a principal who seems to be working against you, life can be impossible. How are teachers supposed to follow their own true course and not get fired? How are teachers supposed to try new techniques and methods with a principal who doesn't approve?…These are difficult questions to answer, and I have watched numerous teachers quit and leave the profession, claiming they will never return because of the negative influence of a principal. There were times that I wanted to quit, and the only thing they [sic] kept me from doing so were the students."(p. - 238 & 239)Issues Addressed by the Book:Here are some of the ideas and suggestions presented in this book…How to of planning a stupendous field trip…i.e., out of state, to New York, to Washington D.C., to South Africa!

How to practice reading test skills with students

How to organize and track a system for organizing students' work binder and notebooks

Recommendations for not "shafting" first year teachers with the classes with the worse discipline and assigning first year teacher to endless committees

Tips for mastering the taking of testsThe Book's Shortcomings:The book documents one very passionate and dedicated teacher. But, this is a teacher who doesn't mention his family at all. (Assumption: he is married to his classroom.)

It is not reasonable for a low-paying job (such as teaching) to consume a teacher's life to this extent, no matter how much students benefit.Comments:Ron Clark took students on trips to other states, and even to South Africa. A stupendous effort when, in many school districts, just obtaining permission to leave the county requires a Herculean effort, and where the uphill saga is not worth the personal aging effect upon the teacher.

Ron Clark went so far as to parlay his paycheck at 80% face value with a gangster "loan" officer so that he could purchase awards for his students. He claims that he didn't have money for food for a month. It is difficult imagining a professional teacher living on the hand-to-mouth edge of their personal security so that every dollar was fed back into classroom materials, supplies and motivational rewards.Summary:Ron Clark presents some real how-to strategies and techniques if you are willing to dig through the narrative to find and list them. (Note: Many similar ideas are found on the Classroom Toolkit site.

The difference between the author's philosophy and our philosophy is that teachers should protect themselves, their family time and their identity outside of their teaching job.

Ron Clark seems more like the runner who carried the message from Marathon, exhausted, ready to collapse from giving his all.

Teachers, on the other hand, should be like health conscious walkers, keeping up a steady pace, able to traverse the course well into their "golden years."

In the end, Ron Clark seems like a heavyweight prize fighter, admired, beaten up…but none of us desires to take his place.

Teaching would be a better profession if teachers were taken care of on a par with students.Rating (Four Point scale):Useful - 3

Applicable - 3

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4
Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 3.7

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

Site Strategy

Site Strategy and Progress

Work on our second ISO downloadable CD, Teacher Time Savers, was completed. Unfortunately, the site in Great Britain where we were posting the updates cancelled our hosting account two days ago.

Fortunately, we were able to post the ISO Images on another free site, i.e., <http://www.xdrive.com>. Link to both ISO CD Images. Access the ISO Images on Xdrive.Com

Unfortunately, you have to create a screen name in order to access these CD images.

We will develop another strategy, but this was our best move on short notice.

We will update this newsletter article once a more streamlined solution is developed.

Remember, these CD ISO Images are large files, so don't try to download them on a dial-up connection.

The Teacher Time-Saver Image is 180 MBs, and the Graphic Organizer ISO Image is 140 MBs.

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

Open Source for Education

Project Gutenberg and eReader: Free Electronic Books

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

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

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

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

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

Copying and converting raw text files requires edit and format time

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

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

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

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

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

Drawback: The created Web pages are filled with junk code

Drawback: Formatting is necessary (and time consuming)

Convert the file to PDF format

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

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

Convert the file to the eReader format

Drawback: Formatting is necessary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

is, after ten days, the "Pro" version degrades to the "Free" version.

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

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

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

Pocket PC

Windows Mobile Smartphone

Symbian

Windows Desktop

Macintosh Desktop

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Send a description of what you would like to share to … joseph@classroomtoolkit.net

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