

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

News Nuggets

Teacher Jobs Aplenty on the Horizon: Can you Survive?

We train lots of teachers, yet there is a teacher shortage. What's happening here? Teaching is a great job, a noble profession,

Teaching touches the future. Teaching is the hope that we pin on human survival and the shared welfare of our society.

We even have "fast-track" job readiness programs, i.e., Alternative Certification Programs available in most areas.

So, why are so many jobs available? Sidebar Where are the Jobs? Occupations With the Largest Projected Growth

Through 2014: Registered Nurses: 703,000

Postsecondary Teachers: 524,000

Nursing Aides, Orderlies, Attendants: 325,000

Management: 308,000

Elementary School Teachers: 265,000

Accountants: 264,000

Computer Software Engineers: 222,000

Computer Systems Analysts: 153,000 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Cited by AOL on 6-17-2007

jobs.aol.com/article/onlinecampus/_a/where-the-jobs-are/20070618150. The Job Outlook for Education

The Education Explosion With about one in four Americans enrolled in an educational institution, education is the second largest industry in the country, accounting for about 12.7 million jobs. Most teaching positions -- which constitute almost half of

all educational services jobs -- require at least a bachelor's degree, and many require a master's or doctoral

degree. Secondary school teachers are expected to increase in numbers by some 18 percent by 2012. Salaries are

rising as well; the American Federation of Teachers estimates the average salary of all public elementary and secondary school teachers in the 2004-05 school year as \$47,602. Additional benefits include flexibility in vacation

time. Postsecondary teaching positions are expected to grow 38 percent over the next decade. Median annual earnings

of all postsecondary teachers in May 2004 were \$51,800. Postsecondary instructors enjoy flexibility comparable to

secondary teachers, and are generally able to focus on their specific field of interest. Source: Cited by AOL on

6-17-2007 jobs.aol.com/article/onlinecampus/_a/where-the-jobs-are/20070618150. Thin Shoes, Hot Pavement

Teaching is wonderful, a "warm fuzz-filled delight," an honor and a "blessing." But, teachers work in school districts that range the gamut from the "Mad Hatter's Tea Party" to "Grand Central Station," to the "Weather Underground" to the "Gulag

Archipelago." Some other school districts are mini-corporate cubicle clusters and others are lock-step military machines. And, hugging children zero's suspicion upon teachers as though the human resources director needs to pass

out ankle bracelets to all new hires on the first day of indoctrination, I mean, orientation. You are not the Crazy The first thing that teachers need to know is that are not the cause of the craziness that they feel and experience.

This craziness is mostly felt as "generalized stress," but it can be experienced as other things, i.e., gastritis, ulcers, colitis, high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke. Or, the affects can be personal and interpersonal, such as nervousness,

irritability, family discord, anger and short-tempered outbursts. So, our educational system has a "survival of the fittest" campaign to thin the ranks of the teaching corps (generally without the expense of health insurance, although some

teachers qualify for food stamps and public assistance) to ensure that there will always be teaching jobs. Shrinking Birthrate, Boomers Past the Fertility Years & still Lots of Jobs The reason that the job horizon is so optimistic is

because the outlook for first to fifth year teachers is so pessimistic.

Teachers was out in droves during the first three years on the job, and especially between the third and fifth

year. Why? Is teaching so difficult that these trained and ready teachers can't make it?

Or, is the job situation so skewed, oblique and convoluted that remaining on the job is the worse between the

unemployment evil, and begging in the breadline? Sources of Job Stress There are a number of sources of on-the-job teacher stress (particularly for the new teacher) & Principals that want all students to pass high-stakes tests and

are on a mission to weed all "non-performers" out of the profession

Budget cuts that force serious behavior disordered students into classrooms without assistance, generally in the classrooms of "newbie" teachers

Inefficiency that keeps the new teacher working week nights until 11:00 p.m., and 1:00 a.m. on Saturday

Placement in special programs (i.e., with Special Population students) with funding siphoned to the regular classes (where it will do the most good)

Expectations that new teachers know technology better, so that they will be models for integrating technology (even though the "old hands" haven't made headway into this storm of under funding, either)

A general public, whipped up by politicians that want to show that our public schools are "no good" so that they can provide vouchers for church schools

The general irrationality and ignorance of bureaucracy as it tries to slop through the No Child Left Behind Act and punish

schools, school districts and teachers for being "highly trained and of high enough quality"Rosy Prospects?The prospects for jobs in education are rosy…Just make sure that that cherry red glow is not:The glowing embers of stress under your feet

The enflamed ulcer in your tummy

The lights on the top of the ambulance that is scurrying you to the emergency room

The color of the red ink on your cash flow and statement of net worthReal-World HelpClassroom Toolkit and the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter offer antidotes for teacher stress. We also offer methods of streamlining instructional planning and instructional management so that teachers have more time to rest and take care of themselves.Remember: the Craziiness that you experience is not you, but the system. However, the craziness can overtake you, make you a basket case, or encase you in a coffin if you allow fail to attend to your own needs.Take care of yourself, so you can care for your students.

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

Short Article

Teaching: The Science of the Art

There has been a long-standing debate concerning whether teaching is a science or an art.Of course, the fallacy of creating a dilemma is that teaching is not an "either-or," but a "both."

Teaching is both a science and and art. And, teaching is a "whole lot more," too.

If teaching is more than a science and an art, what is it? Teaching can be labeled as a/ an…Baby Sitting

Banker

Cafeteria Monitor

Chaperone

Coach

Computer Trainer/ Technician

Consultant

Crowd Control (Playground Duty, Bus Duty, Hall Duty

Counselor

Executive

Information Marketer

Knowledge Worker

Law Enforcement and ParaLegal

Librarian and Media Specialist

Maid/ Custodian

Manager

Mediator/ Negotiator

Party Planner

Planning and Project Manager

Producer/ Director

Public Relations

Referee

Sales Person

Secretary

Software Trainer

Zoo KeeperNot a Great DebateAs debates go, the "science or art" debate is pretty ho-hum, dull.

Besides not caring about the debate because they are too busy, teachers have opinions based upon their personality and their indoctrination.

Sidebartl still holds true that teachers tend to teach the way that they were taught. This speaks volumes about the effect of modeling upon learning.It is also true that a "preponderance" of teachers are first born and only children, so maybe early learning affects later roles in life to a large extent.But, younger siblings are apt to become artists.But, there is a Science to the ArtThe basic focus of science is the "Scientific Method."

And, it is the scientific method that sets Master Teachers apart from their "Run of the Mill" colleagues.

This does not mean that Master Teachers are smarter than their colleagues. It also does not mean that they possess "Teaching Intelligence" and their colleagues don't.

It does mean that if their colleagues went about practicing the science of teaching, they could learn to be Master Teachers, too.What is the Key?The key to the science of teaching is observation.

But, this is not a "just watch what happens" kind of watching. This is a make a prediction (a hypothesis) about what you are seeing, hearing, sensing in the observation and communication with your students.

This is about making predictions about the way your students think and behave, about how your students learn and remember, about how your students process and perform.

Then, this is about performing an experiment to determine if your guesses, hunches, intuitions were accurate. It is the testing out of your guesses to find out if you were correct that turns a teacher into a Master Teacher. This "guess/ test out/ guess again/ test again process" forms the basis for teachers to zero in on the crucial elements to develop flexible habits of successful teaching…Acting on vision (AoV)

Plan into Action (PiA)

Executing with Elegance(EwE)

Activities and Instructional Deliver Skills (AnIDS)

Application and Performance (AnP)Driving Instruction with Creativity, Emotion, Intuition and EnergySome folks believe that these are the basic skills for the art of teaching.

But, this could be a "Shining Star" performer, a "center of social attention" and a less than effective teacher.

But, all the person of Creativity, Emotion, Intuition and Energy has to do to become effective is to adopt the Scientific Method, create "guesses" about what is happening in the minds of students and observe what is happening during student interactions with each other.

The important indicator is whether the teacher relinquishes the spotlight and steps off of stage center.

Driving Instruction in a Lab Coat

Of course, the opposite of effective can happen with too scientific an presence in the classroom.

A teacher that creates a "test-tube" environment where sterile, aloof, void of tenderness, feeling or heart can kill interaction.

Observer with out a personal presence is neither science or art, but incompetence in disguise as a human.

Authentic Human Interaction

In the end, the Science or Art debate is just silly.

But, one thing that teachers without theory is authentic human interaction.

For years, the idea of "authentic assessment" has floated with the "Tides of Fad and Foolishness," and the great idea (which fits into the science and the art models) has languished.

But, even more important is the idea that the teacher acts, expresses, and communicates as an authentic person.

The full expression of this would probably be called the Science and the Art of being and communicating as a fully human person.

Whether it takes a science or an art to be yourself, might set off a even more serious debate.

One thing is sure, if being authentic is all it takes to become a successful teacher, then there will probably be a passel of politicians and a Supreme Court ruling that outlaws the practice.

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

Feature Article

The Power of "Shared Thinking" for a Learning Community

Shared Thinking is the power behind a learning community. But this Shared Thinking involves stretching our perceptions and expanding our concepts of what Sharing means. (For sure, Shared Thinking is "not what we think." Shared Thinking is what "We'all (we all) think."

Sidebar(Note: this is the first-person-plural version of the noted, Texan second-person-plural, "Y' all.")

Shared thinking is possibility thinking, collaborative sharing, group wisdom, vision and success consciousness... "breakthrough" thinking at its best. Mistaking a Product , or Byproduct for the Process Some Shared/ Community Building advocates mistake the product (conversations) or the byproduct (friendship) for the target outcome. It is a mistake to think that the conversations that are developed by the community, is a product, or that the friendships that develop from meetings and interactions are a byproduct. Process, not Product The power of Shared Thinking is in the process, and depends little on the product. This is because real-world, stimulating, problem-solving focused thinking is never done. This kind of thinking is always "a work in progress."

The creation, development, testing and bug-fixing of ideas occurs as a process that relies on collaboration and learning; but the process is never finished.

Shared Thinking projects are "works in progress" rather than a wrapped and finished, final packages. Shared Solutions for Education Shared Solutions for education must take this Open Thinking process one step further, and establish a collaborative dialog among equals (our students, teachers and administrators are equal participants with our parents and patrons…all education stakeholders, even politicians).

Shared Thinking recognizes that the educational stakeholder community has more wisdom, knowledge and insight than a single, talented individual...and Shared Thinking recognizes that communities of school district stakeholders raise this wisdom, knowledge and insight to a level of magnitude higher than the insight held by some isolated groups (for example superintendents, principals, politicians, techies). Brainstorming: Thinking on Steroids Brainstorming in a tool that makes Shared Solutions powerful and relevant.

So, Shared Thinking advocates need to approach projects by examining various slants and vantage points of our stakeholders. We need to keep the process in view (and avoid the seduction of advocating a product), no matter if that product is superior to the competition.

We need to focus upon the process, and "hang on for the ride" because we can't predict where we might end up. Just because a product is superior today does not mean that the product will be superior tomorrow, or even an hour from now. "Leapfrogging" is a label that is used by competitors to mean that one product surpasses the others, not in a step-by-step race, but with a leap forward.

So, Shared Thinking must keep up with changes in products and performances, in fact, Shared Thinking must remain "one step ahead." What it takes for a Successful Educational Project For Shared Thinking projects to be successful in the education arena, our solutions and options must appeal to many constituencies besides the highly trained, specialized, and technical folks. So, our first goal is to increase the relevancy of Shared Thinking Solutions to as wide a range of school district stakeholders as possible, especially teachers and students.

When our thinking is stretched to include the view and vantage points of a multiplex and multitude of stakeholders; we come to understand that Shared Thinking Solutions are real-world teaching and learning projects.

Shared Thinking projects apply Shared thinking and Shared tools to the instruction process. Our teaching and learning projects are not software projects or hardware and infrastructure initiatives, or the latest repackaging of educational theory.

The use of tools, software, technology and theory always takes a back seat to instructional goals in the teaching and learning process, and Shared Thinking accelerates this action and activity. Change and Reform Successful Shared advocates come to see that Shared thinking promotes and targets Processes for change and reform Solutions based upon the dynamic interaction among clients and end users (such as teachers and students)

The dynamic interplay among trainers and trainees

The dynamic interchange among curriculum specialists and professional development providers

The dynamic interrelationship among technical support specialists and the rest of the educational

community Collaboration and a Real-World View: the Real Driving Force for Shared Projects The goal of any Shared Solution in education is the improvement of instruction in areas where Shared Solutions excel.

By considering, weighing and interacting with thoughts and ideas of our stakeholders (our clients); we stretch our vision, we encounter a greater depth of feedback. We widen, deepen, broaden and strengthen our insight. Shared Thinking advocates use this dynamic community-based feedback and this dynamic open discussion to problem-solve and to make decisions...crafting solutions and decisions that work in the real world...not just fantasy plans that seem to work on our "project management statements of work," just seem to work on "Scope of Work" documents, and just seem to work on critical path project tracking tools. Relevancy of Interests: Success of the Community Most school district stakeholders don't know that a Shared Thinking Community exists to serve their needs. And, most school district stakeholders hold vested interests in lots of things, but don't have a need to become vested in a letting the control of ideas vest in a community.

So, it becomes the Shared Thinking Community's responsibility to listen well and adapt to the beliefs, fears and reluctance to change that we encounter.

(Note: we have to be careful that we don't mis-label reactions that seem to balk and back off from our ideas. The tendency is to label these reluctant behaviors as "resistance" and to frame the resistor as "our enemy."

In reality, any balking and back stepping is a gift to our Shared Thinking because it reveals that there is something missing, something that keeps our community-based thinking from being complete. A Real-World Example The shortcomings and unmet promises of the technology integration movement should have proven, beyond debate, that "meeting teachers' needs first" not "demands of what we can extract from teachers" is the path to educational project success.

This listening, paying attention and believing what stakeholders at all levels tell us is where Shared advocates "make or break" an Shared Solution project in our schools, and in the area of technology integration, the listening to teachers and students wasn't done.

Shared Thinking advocates either draw these stakeholders into the project, honor and prize their contributions and points of view, understand that these stakeholders have greater wisdom about teaching and learning (than politicians, superintendents, directors, principals). When it comes to the real-world of teaching and learning, when it comes to the real-world of delivering instruction and when it comes to the real-world of driving student outcome improvements; a Shared Thinking project either reaches a substantial portion of its potential; or, fails outright. Shared Thinking and active listening make the difference, but only if the sharing is real. Target Real Problems, Or Else Shared Thinking advocates either target and solve our stakeholders' greatest issues, concerns and pains; or fail to meet the promises of improved teaching and learning that is expected from the community project.

Shared Thinking projects that get this right, that consider teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, and students as "indispensable project consultants;" are the projects and initiatives that are successful.

The projects and initiatives that ram "pretend-shared-solutions" through to adoption (by sales pitches, subterfuge and chain of command power plays) always fail to achieve their potential. Guaranteed! Relevancy or Else: No Relevancy equals "Missing in Action" Community Project Success

Shared Thinking Solutions must be relevant for all stakeholders.

But, politicians, superintendents, principals, director and technical staff cannot, should not, (and should be tickled with a cattle prod if they try) think that they know what teachers and students need unless, until and after they

Ask

Listen

Ask again

These bureaucratic, administrative and technical professionals should have more sense than to believe that "laws, policies, directives, and budget cuts" equate to test-smart, project-based, engaged-learning, outcomes-focused lesson delivery, or meaningful learning assignments. The Shared Thinking process blares, flags, screams for a focus upon adequate funding, sufficient professional development (time and time to implement), support and measurable curriculum-based objectives for every community project. Shared Thinking First Steps So, the first steps of a Shared Thinking project are "asking teachers and students what the learning objectives are" and "brainstorming with teachers, students and other stakeholders."

During the brainstorming and sharing process, all ideas are accepted and one idea may invoke a "piggy back" response, or provoke an opposite idea, an antithetical response. One idea, both, or yet another idea may prove to be beneficial. It is difficult to judge which ideas will bear fruit; so, open discussion is encouraged and promoted.

Another component of brainstorming is allowing participants and learners to make mistakes. This is another Shared Thinking strength...where the community steps up and shares the task of fixing what needs to be fixed. This strategy, when accompanied by a wide, deep and broad inquiry into ideas and possible solutions results in what some folks label as "breakthrough thinking."

The best implementation of the Shared Thinking philosophy means an open-minded approach to problem-solving and decision-making, a willingness to dialog with stakeholders of all backgrounds and a willingness to communicate with people with all levels of expertise. If only those in the highest echelons of authority or expertise are encouraged to participate, how will "Newbies" (who by definition, make mistakes) acquire the skills to progress in their own knowledge? Sidebar Note: This is another of the myths surrounding the lackluster performance of the technology integration movement. The myth has it that teachers were afraid to venture from their "expert status role" and be seen to be making mistakes by students. While this myth is plausible, the reality is that students know that technology involves mistakes. That is why video game players get a "fist full of lives" when they play video games. If there is only one "right answer" then the person or group that holds that card is king. That is "closed-minded thinking" at its finest, but darkest hour. Shared Thinking understands that all together we are smarter than the brightest and best single one of us. This makes Shared Thinking Solutions powerful.

And, weaving the discussion with the threads of many viewpoints (from many stakeholders) creates a rich tapestry of Shared ideas. Vision and Success Consciousness But, brainstorming is not the only component of Shared Thinking. Vision and Success Consciousness are even more important.

Vision is related to the clarity with which an Shared Thinking project's goals are sculpted and held to. And, success consciousness is the attitude and values of the of key players who develop the project.

The vision that the project's originators and sponsors hold affects the outcome of a project. Unfortunately, you cannot know what is in the hearts and minds of any other principle member of the project community, and this aspect of the project remains hidden until the results are observed and known.

The vision that key Shared Thinking project originators and community sponsors hold is difficult to know, and the level of success consciousness of these players is difficult to know. However, these are key crucial and key components for any project, especially Shared Thinking projects.

The open communication and the honoring of all stakeholders is an important aspect that reveals a sliver of success consciousness, but, it is still possible that manipulators, sales people, and power-focused chain of command people agree to the Shared Thinking model of communication because they know that the model propels success, rather than because they hold all stakeholders in esteem.

Unfortunately, even a clear vision can weaken as the community project progresses, and other folks can be brought into the project before they develop a clear knowledge of the vision for the project.

Success consciousness, in practice, boils down to the belief systems held by key project originators and sponsors.

This is also difficult to know because our vision into the hearts and minds of others is obscured by the mist and fog in our own heart and mind. We must perceive what is in our own consciousness before we begin to sense what is in the hearts and minds of others.

Unfortunately, Shared Thinking advocates face power, control and tradition-oriented community members who may not believe in the wisdom of community interactivity.

Some community stakeholders are complacent in their status and authority, and shy away from honest and transparent communication with others.

The upshot?

Make sure that a "people person" rather than a politician, bureaucrat, manager, administrator, salesperson or techie" is in charge of a community-based project. Shared Thinking Projects and School Leadership Unfortunately, some school district leaders are politicians, i.e., people who say what they think that other people want to hear (and possibly with limited thoughts of their own). Look out for these folks because they are found in every stakeholder group.

But, these folks have lack vision of their own except one built on the shifting sands of taking advantage of situations by reflecting what they believe are other people's opinions. The upshot: we seldom find clarity of vision in any of these folks, so never place a politician in charge of a project. In fact, avoid placing a politician in any position of authority, responsibility or importance. These folks wreak havoc in most endeavor that they experience. Sidebar Note: Evidence of

this dearth of vision in politicians abounds in the circus arena of government where clowns, ringmasters, jugglers, tight-rope artists, animal tamers and slight-of-hand performers entertain us with their antics. So, what is the Shared Thinker to do to motivate a project towards success when such important factors as the vision and success consciousness of stakeholders remain hidden?

Here are some steps to consider: Make sure that an honest and ethical person is in charge of the community project. Make sure that the vision for the project is communicated to everyone that is involved. Note: The Shared Thinking and the open (transparent) communication process serves to share the vision and serves to discover how the vision (and associate goals) will play out during its implementation.

The "buy-in" of project stakeholders and participants is really a "buy-in" for the shared vision for the project. Maintain a positive attitude and a belief that the project will be successful.

Hold to attitudes and beliefs (that the project will be successful) in a gentle, caring and friendly way.

Trust that open and transparent communication and a vision of success for the project will attract success-oriented folks and create discomfort for those people that would be detrimental to the project. It is amazing how negative, project-albatross type folks respond to positive, success-oriented communication by self-rejection.

But do not be surprised if these folks become hostile, disgruntled, backbiting and insidious. Just hold gently to the positive vision for the project.

Avoid any "in kind" response to the negative people that orbit around the community project.

Continue to respect these folks, continue to wish them well, and continue trusting the open and transparent communication process and the Shared Thinking process. Picture success results for the project as "already happened." Also feel, believe and sense this success in a multi-modal, multi-sensory way.

Listen to self-talk and listen to the success-talk of others in your mind as though they are commenting on the success of the project.

Project your thoughts into the future and perceive how that success continues.

If any thoughts or images seem to be in discord, redo the vision of the project until all images and all steps of the creative imagination process come into harmony.

You will be amazed at how the right people, the right resources and the right information are attracted to the project. Trust that the negative people will add many benefits to the project by pointing out areas where the project vision is weak. Silently and honestly thank these people in your heart and mind because they benefit your project in ways that you may discover later, or in ways that you may never know.

Consider your community project to be like a chick that hatches from an egg. The chick needs to struggle to exit the eggshell, and the chick even grows an attachment to its beak to assist in the exit process.

But, if we break the shell to assist the chick, we create a weak and sickly bird that never becomes healthy.

Somehow, the chick (like our community project) needs the struggle to become strong. Vision and success consciousness can "fall through the cracks" and take a back seat during the excitement and stress of a Shared Thinking project. Be sure Shared Thinking occurs during the implementation of your community project, not just at its inception. **Sidebar** Do not trust folks at any level of an Shared Thinking process who cannot hold to a positive vision, who cannot hold love and respect for teachers and children in their hearts and minds. Encourage everyone to participate with open and transparent communication, but understand that some stakeholders will do otherwise.

Hold success consciousness in your heart and mind, so that you cannot harbor hatred.

The person who cannot embrace the polarity of opposites, who cannot find value and benefit because of preconceived disgust for other's successes, and who cannot honestly embrace alternatives that might be best practices for the community project (because of bias) is one who stagnates Shared Thinking. Such a person is the one who mires (and fogs) any community project that they become involved with, yet they are indispensable to the community. **Collaborative Sharing** Collaborative sharing also is a creative process that is bigger, higher, wider, deeper than brainstorming. Brainstorming is a "wild ride" a stretching and a creating, a weaving of associations, and a kick off towards tangents and parallels. Brainstorming is like a skyrocket that launches fragments into colorful starbursts...delighting many but their glow is quickly extinguished.

But, collaborative sharing is the slow and steady, meticulous, often painful, building out of a vision.

Collaborative sharing is hammering out of dents, a smelting of ore and a purifying to rid the project of slag, an oiling of squeaky wheels, of giving all (read every) stakeholder groups their due.

Collaborative sharing is the process that a Dali Lama, a Mahatma Gandhi, a Mother Theresa would take to ensure that all people (stakeholders) receive respectful and caring treatment. No group is ignored, stomped on, ramrodded or forced to acquiesce to the "solution de jour." Everyone is respected and consensus, rather than "who comes out on top" is the prize.

But, why would anyone want to give up winning, give up taking personal credit; and let group-think prevail?

Answer: They hold the best interests and well being of our students and teachers in mind. Their vision is the "greater good of all students, teachers and stakeholders." **Group Wisdom** Even if an individual thinker is brighter, smarter, more talented...more talented than all the rest of the stakeholders; pushing through their personal agenda is "short-sighted."

The reason is that these community projects depend on other people to carry them out, and that it takes other people to see the project through to completion.

The community project depends upon the talents, skills, and knowledge of others; but the project also depends upon the attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values, insights, motivation and good will of others.

And in implementing a Shared Thinking Solution in a school district, the attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values, insights, motivation and good will of stakeholders positioned along all levels of the chain of command are crucial.

But, teachers in particular hold the key to instruction because teachers are the stakeholders that deliver direct instruction. Other stakeholders may just need to be happy that their issues and concerns are addressed, but teachers must have the support, professional development (and anything else that it takes) to ensure the Shared Thinking project's success.

Thinking Communities: Pay Attention to Teachers

Paying attention when teachers talk is more than just being polite. Taking to heart what teachers are saying, and acting upon what they tell us is more than good sense. Listening, and listening between the lines. Understanding what teachers (and other stakeholders) said, understanding what teachers and other stakeholders meant to say, and understanding what teachers and other stakeholders would have said if they could, even what they wish that they had said…are part of the conversation that exists when Shared Thinking prizes the wisdom of the group. Giving and Receiving Shared Thinking communities pride themselves in sharing, but, giving is the other side of the complex set of interactions that comprise giving.

Giving means more than sharing. If the begging bum panhandles a quarter, and you begrudge the quarter that you drop with disdain into his alcohol-perfumed hand, you have given next to nothing.

In the same way, if Shared Thinking community members hold attitudes of self-superiority, disdain, distrust, deception or a focus upon a project (without regard for the people involved in making that project a success); the project cannot reach its potential. Attitude and value make all the difference because people are not boxes and wires, but even boxes and wires respond in a positive manner when we care for them.

Of course boxes (such as computers) can turn from speedy track stars to brain-dead malingerers in the space of three years; but people remain precious throughout the life cycle of the project. And Shared Thinking community members must become aware of other negative thinking.

Take for example, any prejudice.

Of course, an attitude of prejudice is unwise because holding hatred and a vision of success in awareness at the same time is incongruous. And, holding any attitude of bias, stilts and convolutes thinking.

Holding prejudice in mind or heart costs Shared Thinking the flexibility that is needed, binds thinking to a type of tunnel vision that excludes opportunities and increases the burdens that are placed on the community. Often prejudice will force the elimination of elegant solutions in favor of a kludge that takes the long way around to avoid the object of that prejudice.

Of course, what really happens is that bias and prejudice leads the community project through a struggle that could have been avoided if only a spirit of giving and receiving were present.

Praising our competitors and people who disagree with us, and wishing our competitors and those "obstinate others" only good is the attitude that leads to success. Begrudging success to any other, even a corporate entity or incorporated organization, blocks that good from pouring itself upon a community project.

Since hatred is "alien" to an accepting-of-all Universe, the obvious conclusion is that those who hate, hate a part of themselves; and they are just projecting that hatred of themselves outward toward (real or imagined)

others. Breakthrough thinking is any change in thought, attitude, perception, planning or insight that leads us from "locked in our comfortable rut kind of results" to success.

What do we have to breakthrough, break out of, escape from?

We have to break out or escape from our belief that we know…

What is best for ourselves

What is best for others

How things really are

How things should really be

The best way to do or perform anything

What experience is like for others and what will help them do or perform better One characteristic of breakthrough thinking is that the components are simple, not complex. Others often say, "Now why didn't I think of that. It was right in front of us all along."

Whether the breakthrough is creative associative, i.e., putting common things together in novel ways; or, creative dissociated, i.e., separating things that have always "gone together; the breakthrough idea just stands out as better.

We break through barriers, mostly barriers of thought and assumptions; but often barriers of habit, feeling, attitudes and conditioning.

But breakthrough thinking at its best in Shared Thinking projects. This is thinking that accounts for the wants, needs, desires, fears and pains of multiple groups of stakeholders; and satisfies many or most of these issues with an elegant solution.

Everyone in each stakeholder group may not receive everything that they wanted or needed, but at least they are satisfied that their concerns were heard and every effort was made to accommodate their needs.

Teachers, students, participants, clients and end users who feel that their needs and issues were cared for in this way

build a real, vested buy-in (not the "lip-service, appear to be cooperative" buy-in that reveals its true characteristics at the most crucial, critical, "no turning back now, no escaping catastrophe" embarrassing, "egg-on-your-face" time. Efficient Solutions The collaborative solution may seem inefficient to the politicians and chain-of-command authority figures who pride themselves on getting their way.

But, the Shared Thinker has to be sure that the footprints that they leave is not one of their stomping on teachers, students and community members by forcing (kicking and whining) compliance to the community project.

There are all manner of "monkey wrenches" that disgruntled, unappreciated community members can toss into an Shared Thinking project if they are forced, bullied, beguiled, or cajoled to participate in a project that they don't like (or forced to comply with an authority that they don't like).

Even worse than a community project that fails to build buy-in, is a project that increases the pain that teachers and students feel and experience.

For example, A technology integration project that requires teachers to stay after school (without compensation) to learn to operate software

A technology integration project that increases the amount of work that teachers must perform (without increasing measurable student achievement), or

A "Catch-22" project that "everyone just knows will produce spectacular results", but doesn't, therefore the problem that scuttled the project must be because the teachers

All learning community projects fail if teachers and students are not considered first. The Technically Superior Solution Shared Thinking also skirts the problem of the "technically superior solution" because the technically superior solution is impractical in the real world. Open and transparent communication exposes the "technically superior solution for what it really is.

For example, stunning technology rollouts, without professional development, without an educational (or business case) for the project and without stakeholder buy-in are "real-world impractical." Prescribing technical solutions without exploring the feelings, fears, stresses, conflicting commitments, bureaucratic system inconsistencies and management incongruities is "real-world impractical."

But, Open dialog is practical. Brainstorming is practical. Open and transparent sharing is practical. Success consciousness is practical. Breakthrough thinking is practical.

For example, teacher members of Shared Thinking collaborative would not want to be bothered with the intricacies about setting up Web servers, and minor distinctions between computer specifications would hold limited appeal to a campus principal or curriculum specialist. But members of each of these groups would be interested in the professional development issues, educational case justification for the community project that used these resources. Teachers, principals and curriculum specialists would be glad to turn the logistics of managing software for the community project, as long as they were consulted about the need and value for that software.

The technically superior community project starts with teachers, students, principals, curriculum specialists; then matches the appropriate professional development, technical support, hardware, software and infrastructure to get the measurable increases in instructional delivery and measurable increases in student performance done.

The technically superior community project focuses upon the process of arriving at superior results, and then brings only the highest quality processes and resources to bear on the solution.

But, Shared Thinking community members need the integrity to explain what conditions apply to the project, and they need the professional and ethical integrity to steer community members away from high-tech, superior technology if that technology stands little chance of delivering on the community project's real world goals.

This is what technology integration should have been before recommending so many initiatives that lacked measurable teaching and learning goals. The Shared Thinking solution will focus on a direct relationship to measurable content area and subject matter achievement in learning communities.

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

Quick Tips

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

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

How many of your colleagues "gripe and complain that students "just don't think." What do you think they mean by that?

Are your colleagues referring to a math and logic set of thinking abilities?

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

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

Money, Time and Measurement

Number Lines, Coordinates

Estimation

Geometry

Patterns and Sequences

Probability and Statistics

Logic

Sets and Matrices

And, the ubiquitous "word problem"

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

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

No.

Address math systematically, continually during the entire school day. Every Subject Relates to Math and Logic Every subject relates to Math and Logic, so, work math and logic questions into every lesson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Top Tips

EnglishPage.Com: More than you Thought you Knew

Do you teach English, or Writing?

Want to know the modern, accepted "best practices" in English, and how to explain them? Want to send students directly to a resource than can help them better than a homework help line?

Then, check out the EnglishPage.Com Lots of Usable Content There is enough information here to enable you to ditch the textbook Sidebar See our article eBooks: Inexpensive, Available Content … Why use Textbooks? Weekly Lesson

Grammar Book

Vocabulary Verb Tenses

Conditionals

Modals

Gerunds

Prepositions

Mini-tutorials

Irregular Verbs

Reading Room

Listening Lounge

Games

Student Forums

English Schools

There are also a lot of dictionaries:

English-Foreign

English-English

Irregular Verbs

Phrasal Verbs

Verb + Prep

And tutorials: Vocabulary

Verb Tenses

Conditionals

Modals

Prepositions

Mini-tutorials Enough for everyone! This isn't more than enough English for everyone, than what is?

Of course, the unwritten rule of English is that "Rules are made to be broken, but the 'breakers' must know the rule first."

This is where the EnglishPage.Com comes in. If the rule isn't listed here, it just ain't [sic] worth "knowin'."

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

Teacher Resources

eBooks: Inexpensive, Available Content... Why use Textbooks?

eBooks are available, inexpensive or free, and more interesting to students than the canned, static, ossified content known as "textbooks." But, teachers use textbooks to drive instruction because textbooks...

Are there Come with Teacher Editions

Contain a lot of material focused upon central topics

Contain safe, antiseptic content

Provide an "It's not my decision to use this book" excuse when parents complain about the content that is being taught

Provide lots of associated learning aids, even test-building software So, what's the problem? One-Third of Student don't

Graduate from High School in Some Places Has anyone stopped to assess just what role textbooks have in this "dropout rate" Answer: Yes. But, we keep using textbooks, anyway.

What are the "downsides" of using textbooks? Textbooks are... Boring, dull and lifeless

Conservative

Uncontroversial

Academic and aseptic

Written by committee and consensus

Built with controlled reading levels and vocabulary

Written to sell to large states such as California and Texas

Outdated before they are printed

Generally mediocre their in portrayal of minorities and minority issues, i.e., "whitewashing the issues (no pun intended) With all these strikes against textbooks, it is a wonder that textbooks even make it to the ballpark. eBooks

Available Everywhere A search on Google... revealed that there were about 1,700,000 results for the search term, "free eBooks." Link to the search for "free eBooks"... And, Project Gutenberg... lists 17,000 eBooks in their collection. Plus the Project Gutenberg... has eBooks in a bunch of languages.

Link to the Project Gutenberg... Online Catalog Probably many teachers could teach using only Project Gutenberg... text and Internet research instead of textbooks.

A check on eBay... revealed that about 14,000 eBooks were for sale, page after page at a cost of \$0.01 USD. Link to eBay... The Upsides and Downside of eBooks

The upsides and downsides of eBooks are really "flip sides" of the same issues. For example... All of Project Gutenberg's materials are out of copyright. This means that they are really old, or that they are Government Documents. Old documents can be primary source documents, great if you

are teaching history, romantic literature, and such

Government documents can be primary sources, too. But you have to be a scholar to know which information is accurate. Previewing is a pain. With textbook "pabulum" a teacher is safe not to preview. With "raw meat" sources, teachers need to "bone up" on the contents of assignments before handing them out

Using eBooks with a strategy where every student reads the same passages and responds in the same way makes learning "equal but unfair" and boring. But, this strategy makes grading uniform, and diminishes challenges to the grades (by students and their parents). Assigning every student to read the same material defeats the advantages of using eBooks, so, if you are going to require every student read the same content, stick to textbooks

eBook reading level is all over the place. Finding easy enough content, especially for lower level readers takes a lot of teacher time. But, over time, teachers can build a library of these materials. Why not have students read segments of these eBooks to each other and score the passages based on the number of errors. This could build a classification system in a school year

Canned textbook questions are boring, but at least the answers are available with a key. Create your own questions, and you have to also check the answers. Maybe this takes too much thought and concentration. Create your own answers, and you have to justify your choice of questions under the challenge of students who guessed another answer. On second thought, this might be a positive approach to stimulation students to think

It takes time to find high quality eBooks that are usable for instruction, but the ones that are useful interest students and have real-world information that benefits students

The content of eBooks can be current, practical and useful; or the content can be outdated, goofy and detrimental to anyone who applies the eBook's suggestions. Sorting out the differences is real-world learning

Students could pass around eBooks that they like. Imagine, students reading stuff that wasn't assigned to them "on the

sly." This happens so infrequently with textbooks that€Students would be ashamed to admit it Reporting the occurrence could make the newspapers with human interest, similar to a "Man bites dog" storyThe Classroom Toolkit ResourcesClassroom Toolkit advocates building a library of Graphic Organizers, Templates, generic assignment for "Mix-and-Match" flexibility.

Link to the Classroom Toolkit Graphic Organizers section…Link to the Classroom Toolkit Graphic Organizers Starter Kit…

This strategy is a natural for stirring student interest, for keeping content and instructional delivery fresh, for drumming up debate and for teaching real-world information and skills.

This strategy is also a perfect match for project-based group assignments, for rubric scoring, and for building competent citizens.

How many times have you been asked a question that you could quote a textbook answer? Maybe none unless you are "teaching from a textbook."

Great Selection…The Price is Right

With choices from modern day how-tos to the classics, the

Another catch, who pays for printing out all these eBooks?

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

Book Review

Loving What IsAuthor: Byron Katie (Reid)

ISBN: 0-609-60874-6Format: HardcoverPub. Date: 2002Publisher: : Harmony BooksPages: 258Cost: \$24.00 USD (List)br />Available: Amazon™ at as low as \$10.85 (new) - \$6.89 at eBay™Subtitle: Four Questions that can Change your LifeThe Books' Topics:Controlling your Thoughts and Emotions

Overcoming your Illusions and Delusions

Accepting "What Is"

Gaining Peace of Mind by Questioning Irrational ThoughtsThe central themes of this book are:Bringing your life under control is easier than you think. In fact, the key is your thinking

We all learned "goofy" ways of thinking, and no one ever helped us examine these beliefs about "the way things should be"

It only takes Four Questions to bring some rational order into the thoughts that "are driving us crazy"

Accepting "what is" is the result of this "examination of our thoughts," and amazingly, the peace we feel results in the change we sought

The cause and effect relationship turns out to be the reverse of what we expected, i.e., instead of achieving peace once we solved the issue, instead, when we reach an inner peace, the issue often seems to resolve itselfKeywords:"The Work"

Four Questions

Internal and Rational Dialog

Personal Inquiry

The "Interpreter" role of our BrainMain Idea:We grow up without examining the attitudes, beliefs and values that we hold. We accept these formulations are "fact" when, in fact, these "solid realities" are our fantasies about "what is," and about the way "things should be."

Just questioning ourselves to discover if these ideas and assumptions are true leads to "peace of mind, insights, and creative breakthrough, often quickly and easily changing situations, and "changing people."

This dynamic interplay of people and the beliefs that lock us all into a matrix of drama are difficult to unravel for ourselves because we are so close to the "script" that we don't see the "unreality."

Byron Katie (a woman) dredged and wallowed through this process for herself, then formulated an "action research-based" method for others to follow

This method distills into "Four Questions" that, when we answer honestly, assist us at arriving at a place of peace and acceptance.

Quotes:

Byron Katie peppers the book with a lot of quotes that seem philosophical and insightful. In fact she quotes a Buddhist Sutra, sounds like she is a Zen master, and has the insight of a deep thinking philosopher. In fact, she claims that "The work" is really simple…

"To realize your true nature, you must wait for the right moment and the right conditions. When the time comes, you are awakened as if from a dream. You understand that what you have found is your own, and doesn't come from anywhere outside." (p. - xi)

"The Work is merely four questions; it's not even a thing. It has no strings. It's nothing without your answers. These four questions will join an program that you've got and enhance it. Any religion you have --they'll enhance it. if you have no religion, they will bring you joy. And they'll burn up anything that isn't true for you. They'll burn through to the reality that

has always been waiting." (p. - xxiv)

"What I love about The Work is that it allows you to go inside and find your own happiness, to experience what already exists within you, unchanging, immovable, ever-present, ever-waiting. No teacher is necessary. You are the teacher you've been waiting for. You are the one that can end your own suffering." (p. - 1)

"I am a lover of what is, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality." (p. - 2)

"If you are living your life and I am mentally living your life, who is here living mine? We're both over there. Being mentally in your business keeps me from being present in my own. I am separate from myself, wondering why my life doesn't work." (p. - 3)

"If you put your hand into a fire, does anyone have to tell you to move it? Do you have to decide? No: When your hand starts to burn, it moves. You don't have to direct it; the hand moves itself. In the same way, once you understand, through inquiry, that an untrue thought causes suffering, you move away from it. Before the thought, you weren't suffering; with the thought, you're suffering; when you recognize that the thought isn't true, again there is no suffering. That is how The Work functions." (p. - 6)

"I use the word inquiry as synonymous with The Work. To inquire or to investigate is to put a thought or story up against the four questions and turn around…Inquiry is a way to end confusion and to experience internal peace, even in a world of apparent chaos. Above all else, inquiry is about realizing that all the answers we ever need are always available inside us." (p. - 7)

"You're either attaching to your thoughts or inquiring. There is no other choice." (p. -

"The first step in The Work is to write down your judgments about any stressful situation in your life, past, present, or future--about a person you dislike or worry about, a situation with someone who angers or frightens or saddens you, or someone you're ambivalent or confused about. Write your judgments down, just the way you think them…Don't be surprised if you find this difficult. For thousands of years, we have been taught not to judge--but let's face it, we still do all the time." (p. - 9)

"Even if you've forgiven that person 99 percent, you aren't free until your forgiveness is complete." (p. - 10)

"When you do The Work, you see who you are by seeing who you think other people are. Eventually you come to see that everything outside you is a reflection of your own thinking. You are the storyteller, the projector of all stories, and the world is the projected image of your thoughts." (p. - 10P)

"Please avoid the temptation to continue without writing down your judgments. If you try to do The Work in your head, without putting your thoughts on paper, the mind will outsmart you…The mind can justify itself faster than the speed of light." (p. - 11)

"The turnarounds are your prescription for health, peace, and happiness. Can you give yourself the medicine that you have been prescribing for others?" (p. - 16)

"Everything is a mirror image of yourself--your own thinking coming back at you." (p. - 22)

"The Work allows you to go inside and experience the peace that already exists within you. That peace is unchanging, immovable, and ever-present. The Work takes you there. It is a true homecoming." (p. - 25)

"My experience is that the teachers we need most are the people we're living with now. Our spouses, parents, and children are the clearest masters we could hope for. Again and again, they will show us the truth we don't want to see, until we see it." (p. - 27)

"Our parents, our children, our spouses, and our friends will press every button we have, again and again, until we realize what it is that we don't want to know about ourselves, yet. They will point us to our freedom every time." (p. - 29)

"Reality is kinder than the stories that we tell about it." (p. - 64)

"There are three ways to do the turnaround. A judgment can be turned around to yourself, to the other, to the opposite. There are many possible combinations of these three. One statement can bring many realizations when it is reversed. The point is not to find the most turnarounds, but to find the ones that bring you the shift in self-realization, the enlightenment that sets you free from the nightmare you're innocently attached to. Turn the original statement around any way you want to until you find the turnaround that penetrates the most." (p. - 77)Sidebar"The Four Questions and the Turnaround

- 1.) Is it true?
- 2.) Can you absolutely know that it's true?
- 3.) How do you react when you think about that?
- 4.) Who would you be without the thought?

and

Turn it around"p. - 15

(Note: Turn around works because you write as if it were written about you. It goes something like this…

Original statement: I am angry at my students because they gripe and complain all the time.

Turn around statement: I am angry at myself because I gripe and complain all the time. Issues Addressed by the Book: This book addresses ways to alleviate the normal stresses, frustrations and pains that develop in our dealings, relationships and communications with others.

We don't get our way, and others seem to thwart our noble intentions with their dishonorable habits, unsavory customs and treacherous backstabbing.

Of course, we are not like that at all.

What this book shows us is that, "Yes, we are exactly like that, too."

What's more, the book shows us that when we accept the reality that we are exactly like the traits that we loath so much, then we remove the pressure on ourselves, and parts of these situations seem to clear up.

You have to see this in action to appreciate that it is so.

On the other hand, if we go back to our old habits of though, we can as easily slip back to The Book's Shortcomings: The book consists of lots of dialog that are transcripts of the author asking the four questions to people in pain.

This is sort of boring, when we have our own pain.

Another problem with the book is that, as the author points out, our mind easily tricks us, and we probably can't uncover ourselves at the deepest levels, just by reading, if we go it alone.

But, the writing that the author suggests is time consuming and boring, if we do it alone.

I confess that I only played with the writing out of the judgments and mentally only tried to questions instead of writing them out, too. But, I wasn't seriously bothered by anything (Or is that just my mind tricking me?).

Another shortcoming is a lack of long-term follow-up with the people that were being helped to determine if these habit of inquiry lasted over the long haul, or if these were only temporary improvement in habitual thought. Comments: An amended system of the four questions might be useful in a classroom where the teacher plans very small steps over the course of the school year to teach these self-inquiry skills to students.

But, opening a student to these questions, and uncovering something that a teacher is not equipped to deal with, i.e., rage, resentment, abuse, hostility, and prejudice might be too dangerous.

On the other hand, these techniques might fit perfectly well into an informal get together by colleagues on the faculty to explore attitudes, fear and frustrations. The problem with this approach is that the proceedings might not remain confidential, and there could be some repercussions if campus or district administrator learn of statements that you made. Summary: Loving What Is brings a level of awareness that often seems beyond the purview of teachers. The book seems more like a book for counselors and psychologists.

But, there is much that teaches can apply in their daily lives, and, the more pain that a teacher feels in their life, the more that they need to work through this book.

Just reading the book is boring, but resolving areas of pain and difficulty in your life makes up for that a lot.

Fortunately, the questions and the process are simple enough that partners and friends can work with each other on the process. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.2

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

Site Progress

The Model of the Modern Safe...

We are rebuilding our site and wonder if teachers want solutions based on lessons learned from the "modern safe." We would appreciate your opinion about how a "Modern Safe" focus could help you in the real-world of your classroom.

You don't have any idea what we're talking about? Read more… Sidebar An article, "Closed-Safe, Closed-Loop Cash Management," caught our attention.

This article was about how a modern safe solves the security needs that are created by handling large amounts of cash. Source: McGunn, Ed. "Closed-Safe, Closed-Loop Cash Management" in Integrated Solutions for Retailers, 11,7,2007 (July) <http://www.ismretail.com>

The issue is that security issues soar whenever a safe is open. The old solution, lots of armed guards, controlled-access, heavy doors, intrusion detection systems, etc. The Modern, Strategic Solution The new strategic solution is the modern safe.

A strategic solution means "strategic thinking."

Money in the safe is most vulnerable when the safe is opened, or when the safe remains open. To find strategic solutions, first ask questions...

For example…

"When do we open the safe?"

Answer: We open the safe to count the money to prepare for the armored truck pickup, to provide working cash drawers for our sales clerks, etc.

"What if" questions... "What if you could keep the safe locked as much as possible?"

What if we could build a safe that we didn't have to open, ever?

What if we could build a safe that we could look inside, anytime, without having to open it? A Real-world Solution What if

the safe...Counted the money as the money was put in to it?

Checked to see if the money was genuine or counterfeit as the money went in?

Printed receipts?

Placed the money in a sealed cassette with electronic records for the armored truck pickup?

Provided remote administration and visibility on the inside from control room somewhere else on the network?

Increased ability to monitor the following of business policies related to the handling of cash?

Increased staff effectiveness, (they can spend time with customers instead of counting and reconciling cash)?Guess what? This solution exists...

Sidebar"This seamless process closes the loop from one secure environment to the next. These features not only reduce the threat of theft, shrinkage, and counterfeit currency, but also provide businesses the ability to securely execute cash transactions in a 'closed-safe' closed-loop' environment."

Source: McGunn, Ed. "Closed-Safe, Closed-Loop Cash Management" in Integrated Solutions for Retailers, 11,7,2007. p. - 44.

"A closed-safe, closed-loop environment not only reduces risk, but also enables productivity gains. Retail staff can spend more time with customers, since they spend less time conducting cash transactions, transferring cash from the POS to the safe, counting cash in preparation for a bank deposit, and reconciling the discrepancies when counts do not match receipts.

Last, cash management solutions need to be backed by outstanding delivery, installation, training, and customer service programs in order to deliver a total solution. Together, these capacities will reduce risk, increase productivity, and enhance your customers experience..."

a

Source: McGunn, Ed. "Closed-Safe, Closed-Loop Cash Management" in Integrated Solutions for Retailers, 11,7,2007. p. - 44.

What does the "Closed-Loop" Model Mean for your Classroom?

Answer: Close the vulnerabilities and the time wasters as much as possible. Automate where possible and set up classroom routines to model the "Closed-Loop";

Think in new, strategic, streamlined ways about your ordinary tasks, especially the tasks that keep draining your time and your energy.

For example...

Increase your productivity and by decreasing the risk of data entry errors. Figure out how to create administrative and teaching processes that use the same data. If you do, you can spend more time with students.

Find ways to eliminate the drudge of grading. If you spend less time grading, you can spend more time with your students during school hours, and with your family on your own time. And, you will have more of your own time.

Spend less time slogging through paperwork, less time handling sticky-red-tape by automating your forms, reports and lesson plans.

Automate your discipline plan and discipline record keeping.

Try to build Closed-loop Solutions to automate much (most, all?) of the busywork that saps your productivity, and, try to develop a system that provides a real-time vision into the progress of each student...while eliminating the drudgery of collecting, inputting and managing that student outcome data.

The key is to plan, to create "at-a-glance" forms and formats, and to delegate as much as possible to your student assistants.

Strategic Closed-Loop Solutions also allow for formative-assessment-based changes of direction for instruction and management, i.e., you catch procedures and methods that are not working and make changes before the entire effort is a waste of time, requiring re-teaching.Current, Inefficient Methods become ObsoleteClosed-Loop Solutions could make current, inefficient methods obsolete...(For example...)A computer lab where every student's work has to be printed out and hand-graded by the teacher…why not develop a rubric system that can assess students work on screen

Where students have to figure out how to place their assignments online for access by their teacher, host a free, online system, use software such as Moodle!, and let students post their work online

Where the teacher has to search multiple folders, disks, CD or Flash drive to collect each student's work for grading…have student project groups use rubrics and score these items, all at once

Where the teacher has to enter each grade into a separate grade sheet

Where the teacher has to average the grades with a calculator…use a spreadsheet that totals and summarizes the grades

Where the grades have to be numerical form in order for the grades to be recorded…use a spreadsheet program to translate rubric scores into numerical equivalentsReally Integrate TechnologyWhat about the Integration of Technology?

Closed-Loop Solutions represent a change in focus from the integration of technology, carried on the backs of unwilling teachers, to an integration of technology eagerly used by teachers because the technology transforms itself into a real resource, (an automated, time saving, productivity-enhancing, education-related) for teaching and learning, resource. from a "too-hard-to-use" tool

How could the original proponents of integrating technology for teaching and learning have been so focused upon the technology that they could not see the teachers' or students' needs, or see the teachers or students' frame of reference?

Aren't we glad that the Closed-Loop model can lead us out of the morass of those dark ages?

Closed-Loop Solutions could make the early failed attempts to integrate technology seem like the remote, distant past because we tend to remember only the good things…and for most teachers, the integration of technology past was unpleasant.

You could breathe a sigh of relief as the busy work clears itself from the tedium of your school day (and nights) if real technology integration proves to benefit you. And if real technology integration lets students enjoy more quality time with you, it will be time that is more "quality" because you are less stressed.

Teacher Productivity: Updraft or Down Current?

School district executive decision-makers talk up the idea of increasing teacher productivity, but they have done little to make that a reality for teachers because they have failed to provide the funding that was needed.

School leaders talk about increasing student outcome measures (test scores) but fail to match these aspirations with funding initiatives.

And, the rhetoric about increasing teacher productivity was not matched by an initiative to eliminate "bureaucratic busywork" from teachers' schedules, not matched by initiatives to analyze trends in teacher burnout, and not used to analyze or predict "classroom trouble spots" so that remedies could be instituted before these trouble spots have time to fester and rot.

Teachers have to do these thing on their own, and automation, using the technology that should be integrated is the ticket.

Ways that the technology might be integrated, and the Closed-Loop system integrated can be used to save teacher time.

Closed-Loop systems that automate technology solutions mean increased quality of instructional delivery, automated (or semi-automated) classroom training of students, and a focus upon care and "customer service" for students.

Closed-Loop solutions are ones that produce results, as measured in student learning outcomes.

A Closed-Loop Focus

A Closed-Loop focus on simple to do automation that meets teaching and learning needs, a focus upon time-saving solutions and focus upon educational goals is what will pay off for teachers. Find ways to measure student performance, use educational intelligence, use instructional goals; but, make sure that doing these things is easier and less time-intensive than what you are doing now.

When Closed-Loop strategies mean intelligent assessment (instead of the grading drudge), then teachers have more time to teach.

When the boundless abilities of our students are prized instead of bureaucratic-focused paperwork, then Closed-Loop time-savings can let teachers soar.

Like the Closed-Safe, Closed-Loop system, teachers can free up time (quality time) that can be spent with students.

Let your Imagination Soar

Imagine breaking free from the tethers that now hold you and your students back…tethers of under funding and stingy management, teathers of administrative ineptitude…by freeing you from the trivial and making quality time available for your students.

Our current, obsolete school district, bureaucratic procedures could be seen as training our teachers and students in the same way that baby elephants are trained, i.e., trained so that a small rope holds them (when in fact, they could easily break free as adults).

Closed-Loop Solutions can help teachers and students break free, free from the shackles of meaningless busy work, and free from the shackles of "no-can-do" thinking. But first, teachers need to know that such freedom is possible.

All you need is a clear and detailed vision and a simple plan. Then, you can work out the details (use the technology, find someone to help you with the technology) for making this a Closed-Loop solution do something useful.

Closed-Loop solutions mean finding real-world targets for real-world-needs of teachers.

Let us know what Closed-Loop systems would solve your most urgent needs.

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

Open Source for Education

The Open Source Playbook: School District Marketing Strategies for Failure...

Open Source Solutions present great opportunities for teachers and students. Open Source benefits include teaching and learning tools, measurable teacher and student progress accelerators and strategies that focus upon instructional improvement targets. But, Open Source advocates most often market "backwards," and that is the reason that, compared to the potential for "close to universal impact" in our school districts, the implementation of Open Source trails and our Open Source marketing proves a "dismal failure." Do the Math Here is the math...

The percentage of school districts that could benefit from an Open Source initiative: Let's agree on a conservative number, say 80%. (Note: of course we all know that the number is probably way over 90%, but let's accept a lower number for the sake of this illustration.)

The percentage of school districts with a functioning and vital Open Source initiative: Let's agree on a extra generous

10%. (Note: of course we know that the number is probably lower, but let's accept this higher number for the sake of easy math.)

The difference, i.e., 80% - 10% or 70% equals the market share that Open Source is missing. This is a "market gap," and demonstrates a marketing flop.

But, let's consider the numbers for the sake of the folks that think that Open Source is making headway in our schools. If we could raise the estimate of the number of schools that are benefiting from current Open Source initiatives to 20%, we would still have a market gap of 60%.

But, we can't lower the 80% estimate of school districts that would benefit from Open Source Solutions because that would be saying that many more school districts don't need Open Source Solutions. Accepting such a premise, although in the realm of logical possibilities, is a marketing "No No." Accepting such a premise is also marketing suicide. Open Source Marketing Faux PasSo, what is the marketing faux pas rampant in Open Source circles?

Open Source markets backwards by developing a product first, then setting out to find customers.

Worse, some advocates take products that were built for other industries, and try to get customers to change to fit the product. (Note: If this approach were a horse, it would not even rise to the level of a "long shot;" but, it would be shot because it is lame, with no hope of recovery.)

The correct marketing approach, and the only one that works, is to discover what customers want and deliver that solution to them with an overwhelming offer of benefits. Divining what Customers NeedA second marketing faux pas is to build a product that customers "need."

How can this be bad?

The reason that building a product that customers need fails is that customers may not agree with your assessment of their needs. The only results-producing solution is to build what customers "want."

For example, an Open Source advocate believes that teachers need Open Office; instead of Microsoft Office. Or, maybe teachers need FreeMind; instead of Kidspiration; or Inspiration;. Or, maybe the Webmastering teacher needs nVu; instead of DreamWeaver;.

Let's listen in to the self-talk of teachers who hear this kind of marketing campaign.

"Hmm. Open Office has minor compatibility issues, we have Microsoft Office at home, and my significant other needs Microsoft Office for bring-home, after-hours work. Why deal with the hassle of a second program that introduces complexity into my life...especially when Microsoft sells the product to schools at one-tenth of the real price.

And, why would anyone propose Freemind; instead of Kidspiration; or Inspiration;? Don't they know that the object of the software is for students to think and for students to visualize relationships? Having to creating from scratch what is built into Kidspiration; and Inspiration; wouldn't be worth the hassle, even if the FreeMind; program was just as easy to use. Then again, FreeMind; lacks all the instruction-specific templates that drive instruction and student thinking.

And, who in their right mind would teach students Webmastering with nVu;? Nobody who wants their graduates to be competitive in the job market, anyway. Any company that hires our graduates expects their new employees to know DreamWeaver; , even if the company uses a content management system. Our graduates would be laughed out of the company's waiting room, even before they reached the interview, which if their resume lacks mention of familiarity with DreamWeaver; would never produce the invitation call."

It is a "costly and fatal" marketing mistake to assume that we have a product that customers "need." What's in it for Me? Instead, marketers must build a product that customers "want."

The final Open Source marketing faux pas is that the "What's in it for me?" question goes unanswered?

What is in it for teachers who adopt Open Source Solutions?

What is in it for students who adopt Open Source Solutions?

We have to spell out these benefits as "irrefutable evidence" for our marketing to be effective.

Where is our "irrefutable evidence?" Where are our success stories? Where are our testimonials? Where are real, "in the trenches" people saying how Open Source products improved their lives, saved their marriages, got them a promotion, kept them from getting fired, made them campus heroes? Real-World Open Source Needs This means that the Open Source products must be something that teachers and students want. Something that provides tangible, countable, measurable, feel-good-about-it benefits.

An Open Source Solution cannot be just a download (or a CD full) of Open Source software.

The solution must overflow with "real-world, solve our most pressing problems with one click, today, one-of-a kind, can't get this anywhere else" customizations that make teachers' and students' jobs easier and that make the jobs of teaching and learning tremendously more effective.

The Open Source Solution must also make gathering the results of teachers' and students' improvements easy to collect, easy to display, easy to share...so that we can use those success stories in our future marketing.

Open Source advocates must become Open Source marketers instead of "techie do good. software gurus." The sooner that the focus shifts from Open Source products, to Open Source Solutions, the sooner that we quit focusing on how to convince teachers that they need Open Source solutions; the sooner that we begin to develop solutions that take Open Source Solutions to the "next level." Ground Zero Starting Point Where do we start?

First, let's pick an issue that focuses upon teachers' greatest gripes, stresses and pain.

Next, let's tailor an Open Source Solution that solves that issue in a way that does not require a lot of teacher time, effort, expertise, techie skills or commitment. Let's make sure that our product is compatible with existing solutions, interoperable, manageable and scalable. Let's also make sure that our solution contains the requisite professional development and follow-up support.

Once we have a solution that we can market, we can build a viral campaign and our product will spread world-wide in a matter of days. Measuring Marketing Success What is our "success-measures" target?

Do we want hundreds of thousands of teachers and students to clamor for and grab our product solution each week?

The answer to this question is not what we say. The answer is what others see us do.

If we focus on what teachers and students want, and deliver a solution that satisfies that want, then we mean business...and we are sailing toward safe-harbor success.

If we decide ahead of time that we know that teachers and students need our solution, and we simply repackage "off the shelf" compilations of Open Source software; then we are steaming headlong into turbulent waters, with windless sails...and our destination is a castaway desert isle.

The choice is ours.

Do we have the wherewithal and the insight to tailor our solutions for teachers' and students' wants? Or, will we "shoot ourselves in the foot" and insist that we know (better than they do) what they need?

Excuse the double entendre, but the answer to both questions seems like a "no-brainer."

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