

Sunday, September 30, 2007

News Nuggets

Teachers Packing Guns? Coming Soon to a School Near You! An Oregon teacher is suing the school district that she works for so that she can be allowed to carry a gun to school (as a concealed weapon). In some states, police officers are not allowed to carry guns into campuses. And, in the wake of some high-profile school shootings, it is no wonder that most school districts and teacher groups are appalled at the prospect of "pistol-packin' teachers."

But, Oregon state law is on the teacher's side in this case (as well as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) [Link to Google](#); search for "oregon teacher carrying gun to school suit"

"Lawyers for the Medford, Ore. high school teacher who wants the right to bring her Glock-9mm pistol to school filed suit in Jackson County Circuit Court Tuesday, in a case that's being closely watched by both gun rights groups and school boards nationwide."

Source: <http://www.kptv.com/news/14145616/detail.html>

"The teacher has not been identified in media reports, because she says she is a victim of domestic violence, and fears for her own safety, and that of her daughter. In the lawsuit filed Tuesday, she's identified only as 'Jane Doe.'

But in an editorial printed in The Oregonian's Sunday editions, she wrote that she's seeking the right to carry a gun to protect against an ex-husband whom she claims has violated restraining orders and threatened to kill her.

Police are stationed in her school, she added, but far enough from her classroom that she feels exposed, especially since her ex-husband is an approved substitute teacher for the district.

'It is abhorrent that any district would be so hypocritical to insist students receive instruction on the importance of individual rights only to trample the rights of their teachers whenever it sees to do so,' the teacher wrote.

The lawsuit, filed by Lake Oswego attorney James Leuenberger, seeks to void the district's policy, saying that the district should not be "regulating, restricting or prohibiting," the teacher's licensed use of a firearm." Source: Oregon Teacher Files Suit to Bring Gun to School

"A solution is unlikely to come from the current state legislature, said Chuck Bennett, a veteran schools lobbyist, given the politically ticklish nature of the dispute, which many see as an infringement on the right to bear arms.

'We have had children shot, and we couldn't get them to pass legislation like this,' Bennett said, harking back to the 1998 shooting at Thurston High School in Springfield, Ore., when a 15-year-old student killed two of his fellow students and wounded 25 others. 'Even if the employees have the absolute need to protect themselves, the fear is, who is in the crossfire?' Source: Television News Commentary "School Board Rights Of course, a school board's jurisdiction does not trump the authority of a State Legislature. But…

"People are trying to make this into a debate that it isn't," said Medford School Board President Mike Moran. 'This is not about the Second Amendment (the right to bear arms). We are defending our right as employers and maintaining student safety.' Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said the Legislature needs to clarify the law. She plans to sponsor a bill that would specifically authorize school districts to ban weapons on campuses even by permit holders. She has pitched similar proposals in past sessions since 2001, but all were defeated. Funded by the Oregon Firearms Educational Foundation, the teacher's lawsuit has fueled the debate over the merit of armed teachers in preventing massacres like those at Virginia Tech in April and Columbine High School in Colorado. Proponents contend teachers with guns could help avert school shootings or reduce death tolls. Source: Mail Tribune Article Commentary: To paraphrase a Star Trek™ phase, "The wants of the one and the politics of the few outweigh the needs of the many. Or… What does it matter if a few children are caught in the crossfire, we should expect some collateral damage in the war to protect individual rights and the freedom to bear arms. Stress-Free Sanctuaries? Let's add another stress to our children's' school career by alerting them to the fact that their teachers are carrying guns.

And, if students are legally certified to carry concealed handguns, won't they demand equal rights on our campuses.

What right do our campuses have to be safe havens and bastions of love and caring? The demonstration and teaching of Morals, Values and Religious principals are unconstitutional, and threaten to tear away the fabric of our society.

Teachers can be fired for praying, but will have the legal right to carry a Glock™ Sidebar A Glock™ is not an ordinary pistol. Here is some background information about this weapon. (Note: 9mm stands for the diameter of the bullet. This means that the bullet is .35 inches in diameter. A thinner bullet means that more bullets can fit in the magazine that holds them. These are the objects that you see in the movies and the shooter drops one out and installs another. The other factor to consider about a bullet is how long it is. The longer the bullet, the heavier. The heavier the bullet, the more "punch" that it packs when it hits its target.)

"The 9mm Glocks are generally preferred by those who have less experience and are not planning to shoot a lot.

Conversely, the more experienced shooters who do shoot a lot enjoy cheaper ammo prices. Many Shooters advocate the Glock 9mm for a variety of other reasons. On the plus side, ammo for the 9mm is plenty and considerably cheaper than other Glock ammo. It's also reliability, more controllability, has greater magazine capacity with high capacity mags (still available, but getting very pricey). The 9mm is used by military armed forces around the world. Many claimed it to

be equal to .40 S&W and .45 Auto stopping power with the current best loads…MINUS FOR 9MMIt's limited choice and availability of good defense loads. For instance the +P+ loads are generally sold to law enforcement agencies (LEA's) only, but you can, occasionally, find them at gun shows and ammo distributors. A Glock 9mm with the right load is an adequate and fine PDW. Translation: This is a "military grade" weapon with the capacity to hold a lot of bullets with "stopping power", i.e., inflict maximum damage. The 9MM Tactical Weapons Just think of how many shots a teacher can get off when protecting themselves. It is only necessary to aim in the general direction of the attacker. Then, as the teacher keeps pulling the trigger, one shot is bound to hit the attacker. And, with the right bullets, one shot that connects with the attacker is enough to "stop them in their tracks."

Of course, those other shots that miss the attacker are where the collateral damage comes in. Even if children don't step in between the teacher and the attacker, they might be running and screaming behind the attacker. Or, they might be in lock down in a room behind the attacker. Sidebar Many modern school building are constructed with non-load-bearing walls. This means that beams inside the wall holds the ceiling up. This also means that most of these walls are hollow. In addition, portable buildings consist of thin paneling with insulation sandwiched between the inner and outer shells. This means that the walls of portable buildings are easy to penetrate, too. Why so Much Detail This article delves into so much detail so that you understand the full impact of this news item.

This lawsuit is about bringing a military-style weapon into a school, not about bringing an ordinary, run-of-the-mill gun. This is the kind of weapon that erstwhile school attackers and terrorists would lust and drool over. Just imagine what those crazed and demented school shooters in Colorado and Virginia could have done if they had one of these beauties. So, while we uphold the individual rights of one teacher, let's fund a new "Violence Prevention Program." But, where are we going to find the money for the program and its bureaucracy, you ask? Easy, we can take the money from family planning and sex education programs.

And where are we going to find people to teach these courses, you ask? Easy, we will have a regiment of teachers who are already legally certified to carry weapons.

Aren't weapons the best tool for deterring violence? But wait, these weapons will be concealed.

So, start your lobbying engines. Once guns are allowed in schools, people who carry guns in plain view, i.e., in holsters on their belts like cowboys, deserve equal rights…

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Short Article

The Myth that Schools are "Under Funded": Busted! Everyone agrees that our schools are "under funded."

But, this collective group wisdom is a myth of mythical proportions, an Urban Legend of the most pervasive kind. Let's explore the facts…

To do that, we need to inspect the mission of our schools.

Here are some of the goals that our schools are tasked with… Transport students both ways in air conditioned busses fitted with seat belts. Not!

Watch over our children and return them home in one piece in better condition than they arrived (i.e., babysitting)

Feed our children on schedule, possibly with better food than they can get at home. If that is not possible, at least give them better food than they can get at the fast food places that their families frequent

Teach children how to pass all the high-stakes tests that "flesh is heir to" Putting our Schools' Fiscal House in Order The first step in eliminating this myth is to cut the fat from our school district's budgets.

All superfluous activities and money-wasting expenses, i.e., not focused upon improving test scores, must be eliminated.

These include: Art, Music and Drama Classes

P. E. Classes and Sports

Sex Education

Driver's Education

Technology and Computers

Labs. Let's concentrate on "book learning"

Counseling

In-School Nursing Rule: "If it ain't [sic] one of the three R's, we don't need it."

Places to cut back… Special Education programs

Dyslexia programs

Programs for Gifted and Talented Students The key strategy here, because these groups bleed our schools through court rulings, is to provide a commensurate education. This strategy is easy. Determine how much money there is to spend, and back off on regular education targets so that the regular education targets match the average Special Education goals. In this way, everyone will focus on the same, lowest common denominator, and the budget math equation will be balanced.

As far as the Gifted and Talented students go, they have oodles of ability, and can take care of themselves. Who needs a separate program for them? Next Step: Back to Basics Off loading any staff member that isn't directly teaching (to the test) will result in huge financial savings to our school districts.

But, trimming only at the teacher level, without pruning administrative and executive positions leaves an already top-heavy bureau cry with an unstable budgetary center of gravity (i.e., the budget tips and wobbles at the top. Scaling back the paper shuffling requirements that most of the top level managers, administrators and executives twiddle with can free them up for productive work in the district's classrooms. Do we Really, Really Need to Pay for These Perks First of all, health insurance for teachers, even though we provide minimal coverage at high cost to each teacher can be eliminated. And, since we don't need sickly teachers (they prove to be poor role models) we can replace them when they get sick.

Likewise, any teacher that is clumsy enough to be injured on the job and callous enough to file a Workman's Comp claim can be terminated at a school district's earliest convenience.

And, teacher sick days and personal days off create a drain on our school's budgets while providing no productivity benefit. A budget-minded school district should patch these money rat-holes at once. Belt-Tightening Service Reduction There is a need to perform a cost-benefit analysis to determine if certain services that the school provides are cost effective.

For example, transportation.

In some states (such as Texas) a school district is only required to provide bus transportation to students if some students are transported. If no students are transported, imagine the savings. So, many school districts should get out of the transportation business. Bus Fleet operation is not a core school district competency anyway, so, let all students (and their parents) fend for themselves.

The key here is a cost-benefit analysis. This analysis will determine if the loss in revenue from lower students' average daily attendance, and the increased legal and litigation costs (of taking parents to court for not ensuring that their children are in school) is smaller than the money saved by eliminating school bus service. If the savings are greater for eliminating bus service, then by all means, ditch the buses. (No pun intended)

Air conditioning and heating.

One belt-tightening solution here is to move to a four-day school week.

The benefit here is that school buildings only have to be heated (or cooled) for four days instead of five.

Provide only cold water from both taps in the rest rooms, or, remove one tap and install automatic shut-off valves instead of faucets. If you remove the hot water faucet, remember to salvage the copper. The price of copper has increased, and if the money earned from the sale of scrap copper may cover the cost of the labor that is required to remove the extra faucets from all district rest rooms.

Many students don't wash their hands with soap and hot water anyway, after using the rest room facilities; so, these procedures will have limited statistical impact in the increased disease and illness that students and staff experience.

As far as saving electricity, remember that all staff must to turn out the lights when they leave their room or workspace.

Docking staff member's pay with a small fine for leaving the lights on while out of the room may be legal in some states. Check with the Attorney General of your state before instituting this procedure. Living within Our Budgets School finance is simple. Living within the district's means is doable.

This is as easy as listing all expenses in priority order, then drawing a line that reflects real money. Every budget item above the line is funded. Any budget item below the line is discarded.

Of course, standards have to be set so that adequate funds are provided to ensure that each of the items will be funded to a level that guarantees success. The "business as usual" strategy of doling out partial sums and spreading resources too thin has to change.

In fact, this exercise in "fiscal irresponsibility" is the single cause that propagates the "schools don't have enough money," myth. Public Accountability The clamor for accountability often targets teachers in its gun sights. But, the correct accountability for our schools is for the public at large that pays for them. The din is raised demanding that teachers do a better job of teaching. What is overlooked is that the public needs to do a better job of looking at its own culpability. Actually, the public receives better schools than they pay for because teachers are driven by idealism and fear of complaints.

The public wants to pay for a no-frills educational flat, but then wants to move into the penthouse.

And, it is the complaint-adverse bureaucracy that props up such a stupid notion, and perpetuates the under funding myth. Why should teachers work without compensation

Not our Business Brothers' Keepers

If addition, our schools mission lacks a funding commitment to provide pre-employment technology training. So, most of the money that is spent on technology can be saved. Once we realize that if employers want our schools to train students in the use of technology, then those employers should fund that training directly, and in proportion to the benefits that they derive.

Schools cannot afford (no pun intended) to carry businesses when those businesses fail to contribute their fair share of the costs.

So what if the community believes that schools should prepare students for future job markets. Does that same community submit to the tripling or quadrupling of the money that they invest in taxes to pay for this luxury.

If this "community demand" is not matched by money on demand for our schools, then the demand is a veiled, hollow complaint. High-Roller Budget Panic: Wastrel Tactics of Budget Managers How many times a year, in how many departments, do budget managers play "high-roller wastrel?"

Everyone knows this tactic by its pseudonym, "spend it or lose it."

This "money wasting extravaganza" happens in school districts in two ways: Budget managers approach the end of the budget year with dread. If they don't spend all the money that they were allocated, then they will lose the unspent amount for the following year

A huge sum of money is made available by rolling over funds, for some state or federal program, and hundreds of thousands must be spent within a few weeks. So, higher ups scramble to purchase "big ticket" items, most of which will never be used. Suggestions for handling this fiscal misfeasance: Lose the money! It is better to have a smaller budget the next year than to dump money in the "spend it now or lose it landfill." Reward the budget managers who didn't spend the money with a 10% finder's fee. Send the money back to the state or federal government, or find out what teachers need ahead of time with the secret technique of "asking them." Gather teacher purchase requests, and hold them until the state or federal money becomes available. Planning and sound fiscal management are the cures for bureaucratic waste and abuse. Enlightened management could be rewarded, instead of being punished like it is under the current system. Call the executive decision-makers bluff. Let the budget amount fall to draconian levels where the department of organization cannot function. Then place a special request for the funds. The ploy here either will work, or, it will get the budget manager fired. Maybe both. But, letting a budget fall to unworkable levels will be seen as the "fault" of the highest levels of the school district, and, with luck, might just get the people who really cause budget waste to be fired. These perpetrators (perps) should be prosecuted for the waste and abuse that their unenlightened approach to budgeting and spending creates. Summary While these recommendations distort and obscure the boundaries between fantasy and satire, one thing is clear. Our schools need leaders with the courage to confront the "under funding myth" with a clear message. "We deliver the best quality educational product possible, and we do this as efficiently and effectively as possible. However, we are only going to do what we have money to do, and mediocre results from partially funded initiatives are a thing of the past. We are only going to do what we have money to do. If our community has other or more priorities, then prove it by providing the funds. If the community can't cough up the money, then quit complaining. You are getting just what you are paying for." And, reward the staff members that save real money, and fire the folks who trod the bureaucratic budget road to perdition.

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

Feature Article

Answer: Self-Esteem and Self-Concept -- Question: What are Pass-Along Strategies? What do we mean by "Pass-Along" Self-Esteem and Self-Concept Strategies? Answer: This means that the first step for teachers in supporting improved self-esteem and self-concept of their students is to "work on themselves."

How can a teacher give what they do not have?

Faulty self-esteem in teachers prevents them from seeing the innate good and the innate value of each student. Faulty self-esteem is replaced by positive self-esteem when we treat others (and ourselves) with dignity and respect.

Sidebar What is the difference between "self-esteem" and "self-concept?"

The words are most often used interchangeably. So, in practical use, there is no difference.

However, the word "esteem" refers to the "feeling" that one has about one's self; while "self-concept" refers to the attitudes, thoughts and beliefs that one has about one's self. Both terms also refer to a process of increasing the positive value of these feelings, attitudes, beliefs and values so that the person feels, acts, thinks in a positive manner about themselves, and the statements that they make to themselves about themselves also are positive.

Self-esteem and self-concept, in their early stages, and the stages where young people are in school reflect (mirror) the situations, relationships and reactions that the students experience in their world. Later, as adults, most people shake at least part of the outward-only basis for self-esteem and self-concept, and base some of their self-esteem and self-concept upon Intrapersonal (self referred) information.

This transformation from an infant (being parent directed), to being peer-group driven (reaches its height at about Middle School age), to being one's own person (maybe [hopefully] by around the age of 18) is the journey to maturity.

But outward events can batter and pound the self-esteem and self-concept of some students. Sometimes self-esteem and self-concept development is "arrested" and the student seems locked into feelings, attitudes and beliefs befitting an earlier age.

We say that individuals that are locked into feeling, thinking and behaving in non-age-appropriate ways are "immature." Of course, if the student masters the feelings, attitudes and beliefs that occur from environmental pounding (because either the hits were mild, there was a protecting force such as a parent or teacher, or the student had high Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligence) we say that they have positive self-esteem and positive self-concept. Can We have too Much Self-Esteem? Can we have too much self-esteem?

Answer: "No."

What people label as conceit, bravado, megalomania … people who are "too full of themselves" is actually the opposite of self-esteem. These asocial behaviors stem, in large part, from a low level of self-esteem and minimal level of self-concept.

The higher one's self-esteem and self-concept, the more positive one's feelings, attitudes, beliefs and self-talk about

others. This seems to describe the Master Teacher. How Self-Esteem and Self-Concept is "Pass Along" Self-esteem and Self-Concept are "pass along" because "actions and attitudes speak louder than words." This means that a lecture about why students should feel, think and believe better about themselves will be ineffective. Telling students that they should have positive self-esteem and self-concept is next to useless; producing minimal effect and minimal student "change for the better."

But, teachers modeling the traits and attributes of self-esteem and self-concept from a place of congruence in one's own self, and, treating students with consideration, value and honor are contagious.

Of course, some students will respond with immediate positive regard for themselves, and it is rewarding to watch them blossom. But, other students (the ones where life has provided so many "hits" and where support system from significant others are lacking) will take more time before positive self-esteem and positive self-concept can be internally self-nurtured. These are the students that everyone else has "written off" as "total losses" that bring so much joy to the Master Teacher. Teachers finding ever supporting positive esteem and the positive attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, ideals and values in themselves; their actions, their body language and their intuitive sense of timing bring positive feelings, attitudes, beliefs and actions in the "hard to reach" students. This "pass along" process may take time, but improving the quality of life of a student by "coloring their person positive" is worth the patience that is required. And where does this patience come from? Answer: It bubbles up, gushes, then overflows from the positive self-esteem and the positive self-concept of the teacher. Have you nurtured your self-esteem and self-concept today?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Featured Article at 08:00

Quick Tips

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

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

NY Times Word of the Day

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

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

Working words from past weeks into lessons and conversation

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

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

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

You're right again. And, we lose our opportunity to increase students' ability to memorize words in isolation by attaching meaning and enhancing the personal involvement that our students have with the word. You got it! Meaning, Communication, Interaction, Internalization (MCII or MC12) The "Word of the Day" should be a daily reminder that a curriculum driven by high-stakes test objectives lacks usefulness. Rigorous experimental study would determine that such an approach generates substandard measurable student outcomes.

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

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

The most important strategy: You use the observations to change course, i.e., change to instructional methods that are delivering results. For example: "What increase in learning occurs when your students enter the "Word of the Day" into their daily journal? What happens when they write a variety of short devices using the word? What happens when they gossip using the word. Etc. What happens when you work the word (or a concept related to the word) into the **Daily Inspiration Message**? What the "Word of the Day" strategy can do is enrich and broaden your students'

vocabularies. What the "Word of the Day" also can do is enrich and broaden your instructional delivery strategies. The "Word of the Day" is an easy way to introduce students to newer and more complex learning routines. What can we say about "Word of the Day" strategies? They Rock!

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

Top Tips

Don Quijote .Com: Why Learn about Spanish Culture? The statistics are impressive. The United States has the third-largest Spanish speaking population in the world. The size of the US Spanish speaking population is smaller than #1, Mexico; and almost as large as #2, Spain. Larger than the populations of 19 other nations that claim Spanish as their official language! If you don't have children of Hispanic speakers in your classroom now, you will be blessed with them in the future.

Hispanics are the fastest growing population in the United States.

Sidebar Why Study Spanish Spanish is the world's third most spoken language, after Mandarin Chinese and English, and ranks second in terms of native speakers. Almost 500 million people worldwide speak Spanish! Spanish is the second most used language in international communication Spanish is the native language of approximately 350 million people in 21 countries. The countries with the largest Spanish speaking populations are: Mexico: 98 million

Spain: 39 million

USA: 39 million

Argentina: 35 million

Colombia: 36 million

Venezuela: 22 million

Peru: 20 million Hispanics account for 12.5% of the US population, and, 29 million US residents above the age of 5 speak Spanish at home. This is one in ten people who live here.

Source: Don Quijote .Org Knowing a Language is not Enough: You have to Understand the Culture Vocabulary and concepts do not a language make, at least not in its entirety. So, what else makes a language? Culture

Attitudes and Beliefs

Values and Ideals

History

Literature and the Arts

Architecture and Dwellings What cultural learning is available at Don Quijote .Com? Spanish fiestas

Spanish music

Spanish cinema

Spanish food

Spanish flamenco

Spanish siesta

Spanish painters

Spanish writers

Languages in Spain

Spanish dances

Spanish History

Spanish Customs

Free Membership Don Quijote offers a free membership. Link to free Don Quijote Membership application Impressive Quality and Depth of Information Compare the quality of Don Quijote.com with a site like

Thinkquest; Thinkquest;

WikiPedia; Culture of Mexico You can see that Don Quijote offers a richer, deeper experience of the

culture. Online Courses and Study Abroad Opportunities Don Quijote seems to have chosen strategic locations, i.e., great cultural, historical and tourist spots to offer immersion classes. Link to Study with Don Quijote information;

Valuing Students and their Culture Sharing appreciation for the richness of all cultures showcases a Master Teacher's ability to establish relationships with students and communicate at a deeper level. Showing and demonstrating this appreciation for each culture does more to convince students that their teacher is "for real" and not just trying to con them into cooperating.

Teachers can devote an entire year to thematic units based upon the cultural heritage of the students in their classes.

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

Teacher Resources

African American Culture: Learn it Like you would a Foreign Language African Americans lost their demographic status

as "The Minority." Now, there are more Hispanics in the US than African Americans. But, this does not decrease the importance of teachers understanding African American culture. Whether you have African American Children, or children of other minorities in your classroom, your role as a Master Teacher demands that you…
Know the history and culture of African American communities
Recognize that African American communities are rich, and diverse
Understand that cultural communication requires experience and language sensitivity, even if the language used is English
Analyze your language, and discover ways that you could communicate attitudes, beliefs and feelings in a more culturally aware (and supportive) way
Synthesize understandings and communication skills so that your students perceive your caring and insight
Evaluate your own positions, and those of your students
These higher-order cultural learning challenges are also true for knowing the status of other group with a culture of their own, i.e.,…
Muslims
Home-schooling
Conservative Christians
Gays and Lesbians
Children of Incarcerated Parents
Children in Foster Care
"Underclass" (Economic Poverty) Children of any Race, Religion or Culture
End of "The Major Minority" Status
African Americans may not be the largest minority, but they are people, and they are important.
Ten out of 100 children in our schools are Hispanic, but eight out of 100 are African American. Teachers can find African American students in their classrooms, even in affluent suburbs.
But, just as the study of language requires learning the culture of the speakers of that language; so too does the study of ethnic groups require a study and understanding of that culture.
Teachers must speak to the hearts of all students, whatever the culture of the students, and whatever the culture of the teacher.
Knowledge, the Secret, Not! Intellectual knowledge, the ability to recite facts, even the ability to intellectualize compassion and at-a-distance caring for a cultural group is only a small step toward sensitivity and a working relationship to a culture.
Seeing the shoes that members of that culture have walked in is different than slipping your feet into the tight-fitting, "holes in the bottom blocked with newspaper walk in their shoes" kind of "reality-understanding" that is needed.
Resources for African American Cultural Awareness
For background information, and resources that are "wide, deep and broad," check out the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture. The National Museum of African American History and Culture has an online exhibit.
Link to the exhibit…
Sidebar
Even better, the National Museum of African American History and Culture site uses a dynamic Mind Map similar to the one that the Visual Thesaurus uses.
For information about getting a copy of Visual Thesaurus, visit…
Visual Thesaurus Information…
The museum also is opening its first "go there and see it" physical exhibit on October 19 at the National Portrait Gallery. This exhibit tracks 150 years of photographs of scholars, abolitionists, artists and athletes who
The exhibit is entitled, Let Your Motto Be Resistance
African American culture is just as important as it always was, even if there are now more Hispanic students in our schools.
Be sensitive to all cultures, races, and ethnic groups.
Diverse perspectives enrich our own, broaden our insights, and provide additional options and choices for problem-solving and decision-making.
Cultural understanding means wider and deeper thinking than simple higher-order thinking. It is as though higher-order thinking is two dimensional, while cultural sensitivity adds another dimension. Even better, cultural thinking adds melodies, harmonies, shades, textures and colors (no pun intended, really) to our thoughts and concepts.
We are richer and our lives are better because of our positive communication, interaction and sharing with multiple cultures.
Sidebar
The best analogy that I ever encountered concerning the crossroads of ideas, and the stagnant nature of isolation came from a Public Radio program, quite a few years ago. The commentator pointed out that, "There is no concept or experience of building boats in Tibet."
The entire culture of Tibet is devoid of knowledge, integration, and need for boats, and this gap is reflected in the absence of words that relate to boats.
Make sure that your language and concepts contain the accumulated knowledge and wisdom that can be acquired by communication with other cultures, including the African American culture.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Resources at 05:00

Book Review

Teach with your Strengths: Authors: Liesveld, Rosanne and Miller, Jo Ann with Robinson, Jennifer ISBN: 1-59562-006-0
Format: Hardcover
Pub. Date: 2005
Publisher: : Gallup Press
Pages: 203
Cost: \$24.95 (List)
Available: Amazon at as low as \$16.47 (new) \$9.42 (used) - \$9.99 at eBay(TM)
Subtitle: How Great Teachers Inspire their Students
The Books' Topics: Myths of Teaching Ability
Profiles of Innate Strengths
Flexibility and Unorthodox Behaviors of Great Teachers

Putting your Talents to Work

Managing and Working Around your Weaknesses
The central themes of this book are: Talents (and weaknesses) are innate, and it is more productive to focus upon maximizing strengths than in minimizing weaknesses

Research methods for assessing strengths and talents are only useful if we study people with strengths and talents

Characteristics of greatness tend to cross job categories, making great people in all fields more similar to talented people in other fields than they are to mediocre people in the same field

Keywords: Strengths

Talents

Innate Abilities

Weaknesses

Myths about Great Teachers

Strength Finder Research
Main Idea: Talents and skills seem to be innate, and it is more effective to focus upon developing these than to remediate weaknesses

Great teachers break the stereotypes about teaching because they are flexible and because they do what is necessary to teach their students.

Great teachers are unconventional, and are often not recognized for their abilities because they do the right thing at the right time. They don't necessarily do the things prescribed by common wisdom...the things prescribed by lowest-common-denominator of insight and talent that controls the job site. Quotes: "All great teachers are alike in a key way--they use their natural talents to the utmost, whether they are aware of it or not. What's more, great teachers don't waste time on their weaknesses if those weaknesses don't interfere with their teaching, although they do manage weaknesses if they must. When good teachers understand their talents, then build on those talents to create strengths, they become even better with students." (p. - 11)

"Fixing your weaknesses simply doesn't work; at best, if you work really hard with great devotion, you can become mediocre in those areas. In the meantime, because attempts to fix weaknesses distract attention and effort from what you naturally do well, you squander the opportunity to be great." (p. - 12)

"The first thing about great teachers is that they are in the best way, unorthodox. Great teachers' methods and intuitions are different. They don't operate like other teachers, and they don't believe everything that they are told. They work by instinct more than they even know, having worked out the strategies and approaches that succeed for them in reaching different students." (p. - 15)

"Great teachers know that a lot of what they've learned about teachings is tremendously useful, but some of it isn't, and they can tell the difference. The distinction is important. Operating from poor assumptions about education and students' behavior can undermine learning, poison spirits, and encourage students to tune out, sometimes permanently. In fact, interviews with educators have uncovered two essential feelings common to great teachers: One is love--love of students, learning and teaching. The other, which is no surprise, is exasperation with educational nonsense--conventional wisdom about teaching that is, in fact, misinformation." (p. - 16 & 17)

"Students are not prisoners or employees. Teachers with little talent for the job assume that they're working with a captive audience that must follow orders, but they're wrong...Students are essentially volunteers, and great teachers know that students must be emotionally engaged to learn effectively." (p. - 17 & 18)

"Young people that are not engaged won't work hard, which is why they are labeled as lazy." (p. - 18)

"Great teachers know that it's harder to reach some students than others. But they know, instinctively, that it's possible to engage almost any young person." (p. - 18)

"Great teachers use their students' needs, interests, and curiosities and turn them toward the curricula--'captivating them, not entertaining them,' " (p. - 19)

"Teaching demands talents for teaching--natural abilities that require cultivation and hard work to master. Assuming that anyone can teach breeds mediocrity, just as surely as thinking that anyone can be a doctor, architect, or police officer would foster unremarkable performance in those professions." (p. - 20)

"The not-so-good teachers spend their careers trying to do something at which they won't ever excel, that never gets easier, and that is increasingly less rewarding. And the exceptional teachers are often forced to compromise what they know is right to fit in with the pack. What's more, the outstanding teachers rarely get the recognition they deserve, and they are pressured to assume models that aren't meant for them--models that lead to mediocrity." (p. - 20)

"Thinking that teaching requires no more innate ability than driving a car or making toast leads to mediocre educational standards." (p. - 20)

"Experience doesn't translate into exceptional job performance in teaching, or in any other field." (p. - 21)

"Meta-analysis, the mathematical and statistical study of the combined results of several studies, has uncovered the five-year fade-out effect. That is, someone who has been teaching for six years has all the benefits of experience, as they relate to job performance, that a 30-year teaching veteran possesses...It's the people with the personality traits for the job that keep getting better, year after year. Some teachers have the right personality traits--and some don't, no matter how long they've been in the classroom. That's why some veterans of education are so helpful to young teachers and students and some aren't." (p. - 21)

"Unfortunately, many teachers never realize that experience and talent are two different things. The fact is, young people don't respond to seniority or post-graduate degrees. They respond to teachers who have passion for their work. And people that don't have talent for teaching soon lose whatever passion they had." (p. - 22)

"The measures of teacher quality that are used by most public school system to screen candidates and determine compensation--certification, experience, and education level--have been well researched, but there is little definitive empirical evidence that these characteristics, defined in general terms, are associate with higher student achievement." (p. - 22)

"So educator experience has less influence on students than simple good teaching. The masters of science degree that half of all teacher have earned are less important to students than they are to the people that hold them." (p. - 23)

"Many great teachers find the image of the hardened disciplinarian disturbing, if not distressing. The get-tough approach suggests that students lie in wait, like half-starved pumas, for a moment of pedagogical weakness, then leap out and ravage any hope of learning--and teachers had better keep beating the kids back into the tall weeds or lose authority forever." (p. - 23)

"Punishment kills learning, and punishment eventually corrodes teachers.…Young people are thirsty for a caring adult. If you exhibit that you care about your students, they'll come to you. You'll have to peel them off you like Velcro." (p. - 24)

"Great teachers don't set high expectations. This might some as a surprise. Rather, great teacher set the right expectations for each student. Talented teachers have an innate sense of what those expectations should be." (p. - 25)

"The problem with high expectations is that they can be mistaken for impossible standards, even by educators, and especially by students. Rather than inspiring student to greatness and encouraging them to achieve, those impossible expectations doom students to failure." (p. - 26)

"Low expectations are just as damaging. In some cases, low expectations are thought to boost self-esteem because they provide successes. But after the first couple of successes, even young people recognize hollow victories when they see them. Low expectations suggest, however subtly, that students aren't capable of doing better." (p. - 26)

"That's why I hate 'teaching to the test,' says one teacher. It doesn't give kids any incentive to gain more than minimal competencies." (p. - 26)

"Teachers have been burned before. Sometimes they find themselves just finishing the (mandated) implementation of one 'brilliant' method when the next one comes along. Veteran educators have seen such curricula and methods come and go, some lingering, some dismissed as soon as they arrive." (p. - 29)

"The reason that great teaches think that 'magic method' is nonsense is because they know that every student is different and learns differently. Fortunately, human brains are similar enough that education doesn't have to be reinvented for each child, but no single method can accommodate the difference in the aggregate and yet speak to the differences in every individual." (p. - 29 & 30)

"Great teachers respect and admire students for the work that they do. They became teachers for the young people but stay for the learners. Even the best teaches, however, know that no one can like every student all the time." (p. - 31)

"One of the telltale signs of a great teacher is his or her inclinations at these times [conflict between theory and best practice -- Classroom Toolkit note added -- not in the original] to do, for the right reasons, what conventional wisdom says is wrong." (p. - 33)

"A great teacher has the ability to establish basic standards and develop boundaries that make it possible to deal with many students in a learning environment while adapting to the needs of those students. The inconsistency of great teachers is a product of flexibility." (p. - 34)

"On average, teachers spend \$443 of their own money each year on classroom materials--\$470 in large schools. Putting a dollar value on what is obviously emotional engagement may seem crass, but it illustrate an important point: Teachers care enough about the quality of their students' education to invest, in some cases, half a paycheck a year in materials." (p. - 34 & 35)

"The best methods of measuring student achievement, however, are less clear. Should society use national, statewide, or local standardized tests? Non-standardized tests written by individual teachers, boards of education, outside experts? Essay tests, no tests, criterion-referenced tests from kindergarten to 12th grade? The No Child Left Behind Act settled the question of whether testing would occur, and states now have in place some form of standards and testing for grades 3-8." (p. - 39 & 40)

"People think that totally dissimilar job roles are, well, totally dissimilar. But the truth is that there is a deep similarity among high performers in every job category. An incredibly effective teacher has more in common with an incredibly effective aeronautics engineer than with an ineffective teacher." (p. - 45)

"Conventional wisdom says that studying the worst performers will show us what not to do, and by doing the opposite, we'll figure out what we ought to do. Low performers will teach us what make high performers so successful. Nonsense. Studying low performers mostly teaches you about low performers. The truth is that studying the best is much more revealing and productive than studying the worst." (p. - 46)

"Most people have been taught that they can do anything that they set their minds to. This is particularly true in American society, where one of the predominant myths is that people can be if they just work hard enough." (p. - 47 & 48)

"The idea that people should work very hard to do things they aren't naturally good at for the sake of being well-rounded is a mistake. Everyone has a unique set of talents that are tremendously powerful and the potential basis for strengths. When you're busily trying to fix as lesser talent--a weakness--you're ignoring your far more effective talents, perhaps even ignoring some fully developed strengths." (p. - 53)

"Ultimately, however, fixing weaknesses is impossible. Weaknesses are your brain's rough roads and overgrown paths, and trying to make them useful usually isn't worth the effort, especially when an eight-lane superhighway is a few neurons away. Working on weaknesses means that you keep doing, with dogged and pained determination, what you don't--and can't--do well. " (p. - 53)

"In a way, your weaknesses are like your greatest talents: They're innate and you can't get rid of them. The best thing to do is manage them or work around them. " (p. - 54)
Issues Addressed by the Book:Improving teaching is the focus of this book. And, our students deserve nothing less. However, the road to improving education is fraught with the mine fields of mediocre teachers, and the common wisdom of choosing, training and rewarding teachers does not work.
The Book's Shortcomings:This book strikes too close to home for many in the teaching profession, and therefore, will not gain enough traction to reform the inertial and gridlock that the status quo holds on the educational environment.

The book also makes no recommendation about how to rid education of the marginal performers that are trapped in the system, or, now to attract top talent with recognition and more money when certification, advanced degrees and experience prove not to be the crucial variables that make teachers great.
Comments:This is a code on the inside cover of this book that allows you to access an online test to narrow down a picture of your strengths.

Unfortunately, the library book that I used for this review didn't have the number, so I am not able to review the test.

There were a number of strength patterns listed in the book, but without access to the test, you have to guess at your personal attributes for greatness.

Buy the book if you are interested.
Summary: Teachers must read the first section of this book because the author's real-world data dispels many of the myths of what makes great teachers.

If you want to see past the "tunnel vision" that your professional course of study left you with, read Section One of this book. **Rating (Four Point scale):**Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 3.7

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Teacher Survival Strategies

Teacher Survival: Advice to New TeachersHere is a summary of teacher survival strategies…
Root out Stress: Relax and Trust your Abilities
First, get your stress level under control. When under stress, your thinking is less than it should be because the stress somehow causes you to use your least-preferred, least effective (of your Multiple Intelligences) for planning, problem-solving and decision-making.

SidebarWhile limiting and decreasing your stress, be sure to do the same favor for your students. It's the System, Darling!
Second, when confronted with the "craziness" about you, tell yourself, "I am capable and developing skills as a Master Teacher. I am fine. It is the system that is 'out of whack,'"

And, be careful who you share your thoughts with. Exercise analysis and judgment in your decision to ask for help.

Be "super, extra careful who you engage as your "mentor."
SidebarInspect your mentor candidate. Look for results, not "big, brave talk." Avoid the seduction of "classroom control" and "test score reputation" as mentor selection criteria. Some of the absolute worst teachers are "subversive, hate and manipulate students, brainwashing technicians." These colleagues treat their students in the same way that enemy armies treat "prisoners of war." (POWs)

Students in these classes seem to "love their teacher," but this is love in a distorted sense of affection and admiration…similar to the twisted feelings that POWs seem to have developed for the captors who were torturing them. Beware any learning that you receive from members of this group. They are poison to your relationship with students, and to your long-term career.
Take care of YourselfThird, take care of yourself, and treat yourself well. Treat yourself as kindly as you would your most cherished student. (In fact, you are learning, and you are your most important student.)

You need to remain healthy and strong so you are in the best possible condition to help your students.
Planning: Think Ahead, Way Ahead

As for planning, plan for the year. Map our large blocks... for grading periods, then for each week. Use this map to guide yourself past the tendency to be activity driven, i.e., scurrying to find enough to do for your class tomorrow.

SidebarClassroom Toolkit provides loads of tools for planning and classroom project management. Explore the site. There is no cost for any of the resources and materials you find there. You should find enough materials to keep you busy for quite a while.
Modular Approach to Materials HandlingA strategic, modular approach streamlines daily lesson management. Build a reusable library of generic materials such as Graphic Organizers. That way, you will be ready for learning opportunities that present themselves; and you can avoid the "What am I going to do tomorrow?" rat race. The Graphic Organizers on this site forms a foundation that you can use for a long time. Train your Students for

SuccessTrain your students, step by step, with what you want them to do. Show them one step at a time, then add to their repertoire. You will be amazed at how their ability to complete complicated tasks increases over six weeks. Use your IntuitionCollege coursework, professional jargon are fine when discussing issues with colleagues. These benchmark communication skills provide a shorthand method for streamlining professional conversation.

But, for real progress, trust your intuition, your hunches, your "gut feelings." Only, be sure to test your interpretation of every one of these hunches, flashes of insight and bright ideas. Sometimes, your hunch is right, but your analysis is defective. Test everything in small doses and tiny trials before rolling out major initiatives in your classroom. Teachers who test the waters before leaping in gain the admiration of their students, but teachers with "egg on their face" gain little. Trust your Students' AbilitiesYour students have talents, abilities, and capacities that stretch beyond the narrow confines of our industrial age curriculum.

These abilities spectacular, and we miss them. Our expectations for our students are almost like taking a picture of a sunset with a camera that is loaded with "black and white" film.

Open your eyes to the melodies and music that your students sing, and see your students' talents with your heart.

(Excuse the mixed metaphor)Survival Skill SummaryTake care of yourself and take care of your students. Do what you have to to help everyone "Live long and prosper."

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Professional Self-Development

Learn from your Students: Pay AttentionWhen teachers think of "teacher survival," their thoughts migrate to all the attitudes, knowledge and skills that constitute "Master Teacher" levels of instructional delivery. Unfortunately, something more important than instructional delivery is often overlooked. What is that?

Answer: A teacher relationship with students trumps instructional delivery as a component of teacher success. SidebarFor a free sample of the attitude, knowledge and skill approach, check out these eBook resources…Elementary Teachers' Survival KitSecondary Teachers' Survival KitThis is not a recommendation for the purchase of these books because Classroom Toolkit offers many of these same types of teacher tools at no cost. So, why are these instructional delivery tools not enough? Free AgentsConsider each student to be a "free agent." This means that they have their own (unique) interests and motivations. The days of compliant, "Let's struggle at learning because doing so will please the teacher" never were; but modern students are more vocal at describing just how "out of sync" such a belief is.

Instead, teachers need to establish a relationship with their students. Then, teachers need to listen to what their students are saying. This includes "listening between the words" to

Establish a connection with students, communicate, person-to-person, let real caring and commitment shine through during personal interaction and instructional dialog. Talk to a classroom group of students, but still communicate one-to-one. Avoid lecturing, let the dialog be

Students pay minimal attention when teachers talk at them, and when teachers care more about the instructional content than about the "instructee."

It is short-sighted for a teacher to preach that dogma of "caring about students," then commit sins (i.e., do and show) that demonstrate that the caring is only a scheme to manipulate and trick students into cooperation. Even students with challenged academic ability see through these ploys and are not fooled. And, teachers cannot afford to lose the trust of their students by acting out a deception.

For the teacher that thinks that insincere manipulation will motivate student learning here is one bit of advice, "Find another profession where deception is the norm (maybe politics or selling used cars) because anyone who believes that students can be fooled about what is in the heart of their teachers lacks the "Intrapersonal intelligence" needed to perform the job. The Real Key to LearningResearch shows that the teacher, rather than…Technology Philosophy

The Amount of Effort and Extra Hours the Teacher DevotesThe Amount of Materials in the Classroom

The Number of Students in the Classroom

…is the key (independent) variable that is responsible for increased student achievement. But, what teacher characteristic exactly accounts for the improvement?

Answer: It is the relationship that teachers have with their students that makes the difference between mediocre student learning and stellar student outcomes and outstanding performance.

And, one of the best ways that teachers can relate to students is to listen to them, listen to each student as an individual, listen from the heart. This is "no tricks, no manipulation" listening. This is "no rules, no formula" listening.

This is take the messages as you find them, alter your teaching style when addressing each students.

This is in-the-moment, fully present (my-mind-is-here-now) awareness of the interaction, and no distraction of thinking about the future or the past.

And don't worry if this interaction fails to fit into any of the theories of education that you learned in your college classes. (What do college professors know and what do textbook author-committees know about the personal lives, loves and motivations of your particular students?)

In fact, what do you know about your students until you listen to them, until you suspend pre-judgment, and until you know who they are.

At best, the professors and the textbooks can give you a clue to "what your students are." What you need is to know "who your students are."

If you will "be you," your students will like you and respect you.

Students see teachers mostly as "phonies" and role-model actors during their school careers. It is amazing how students flock to real people, almost the way that moths head for a light bulb.

This student behavior would seem to indicate that students are "hungry" for personal, human contact. Give your students this personal contact by listening to them.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Professional Self- Development at 02:00

Open Source for Education

Adopting Linux in our Schools: A Useless Debate A heated debate ensues whenever technology advocates attempt to convince school district folks, especially teachers, to switch to the Linux operating system. The problem is that teachers and students don't care what operating system they are using. They just need to get their work done. (Note: Even in the Indiana Project, often touted as an Open Source success, Linux is never mentioned to teachers. The focus in teacher training and professional development is always on instruction and learning outcomes.) Link to information on Open Source in Indiana Schools
Indiana's Open Source Experiment Here is the problem: Linux advocates see the Linux adoption issue as a technology issue, when, in fact, adopting any major program in our schools is an educational and instructional issue. If this was not an educational and instructional issue, why would anyone in our schools be engaging in the conversation? Misperception of the Issue People who see the problem wrong (i.e., Linux advocates) will never be able to develop or propose a workable educational solution until they see that only educational and instructional problems need to be solved.

Most of these Linux advocate folks are computer professionals, not educators, and they focus upon software specifications for their evaluation. But, it is their zeal for the demise of the Windows operating system that really tarnishes the wisdom of their "recommendations." The Only Reason to Choose an Operating System Applications, not operating systems are important to teachers and students. Standard industry practice steps

1. Identify the instructional goals

2. Research direct connections between goals and applications

3. Test applications to determine suitability to meeting the educational and instructional targets

4. Determine what Operating system the applications run on

5. Examine Budget

6. Determine Support Staffing Needs

7. Allocate 30% of the project Budget for Professional Development

8. Allocate 10% of the budget for instructional outcome testing

9. Obtain buy-in from all project stakeholders

10. Implement the project with teachers in advise and consent roles at every phase And, in a school setting, applications must be compatible with everything else because technical support staff are not available to manage compatibility issues.

More than Desktops and Servers

School districts require more than separate and individual desktop computers and Web servers.

School districts need integrated networks with 100% compatible components. This is referred to as "Enterprise Computing." Few of the Linux advocates take this into account. The isolated desktop computers, and even the one-use word processing labs that Linux advocates recommend fall short of a school district's needs.

And even the much touted Indiana Project, referenced above, only provides one Language Arts lab per small high school, for the sole purpose of writing research papers. Even at that, no research data shows that student writing performance outcomes clearly benefit from the use of word processing computers in a lab setting. In fact, consistent research shows that it is the teacher, not equipment or software that is the independent variable with predictive validity that motivates improvements in student learning. The difference between individual desktop computers and an integrated and large-scale network of computers is easy to understand. Just look at the school cafeteria that is feeding 700 to 1,000 (or more) students in 1 1/2 hours; and compare that operation to your kitchen at home. It is plain that different (and larger) equipment is needed, even if that equipment does the same thing as the equipment in your home. The distribution channels also must ramp up, and the cleanup must be industrial strength. In the same way, the computer network and its components must be up to the task.

In fact, the computers that are sold to schools are a heavier grade (business desktop) than most people use at home. School district computers are tougher and built with more expensive parts. This is similar to purchasing a pick up truck for moving light loads once in a while, and purchasing one that is going to tow fully loaded, heavy boats on trailers over long distances. **Playing Nice: Interoperability in our Schools** There is one Linux solution that can handle the end-to-end needs of a school district. But, Linux advocates seldom recommend this solution because it is a commercial

solution. However, only a commercial company that examines school district needs and tailors its products to those needs can really compete at the enterprise level. In addition, it takes a company with a lot of resources to build a technical support staff that is available when school districts need help. There also is a standard that ensures that software products play nice with each other. This is called the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF). But, it is expensive to meet these standards. There is one enterprise-level Linux version that is also SIF compliant.

So, why don't Linux advocates advocate that schools move to an enterprise-level Linux operating system (and, in fact, all Linux applications) meet the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) requirements? Sidebar This would ensure that data that was created in one application, say a library automation system, could be used without having to export the data from one application and import that data into the other application. It is easy for teachers to see this problem, re-keying data wastes time, and, every time you want to update, you have to rev up the "export and import" cycle; again and again. One Technical Tune, Limited Audience Until Open Source advocates understand that they need to view Linux adoption as an educational solution (not a technological one), and deliver enterprise-level, not desktop level integration, the Linux movement will continue to stall in our schools.

Sidebar Note: This movement is different than the Open Source Movement where teacher use lots of Windows; software that comes without license fees. When teachers think of Open Source software, if they think of it at all, they think of Windows; software that they can download and run on their home computers. Many school district computers are "locked down," and teachers and students are not allowed to install software.

This requirement is not because the school district's IT Department wants to exercise draconian control, but because school district can be fined and can be forced to pay for pirated software that district employees or students install.

Besides, untested software can crash computers, and put additional strain on already-under staffed IT Departments. Working Conditions Linux advocates also need to understand the on-the-job working environment, and the at-home working requirements of teachers. They must understand that teachers do most of their planning and grading work at home. In addition, they must understand that schools use many specialized software beyond basic word processing. For example, schools require an operating system that will run software for; Textbook add-on and instructional aids

Electronic microscopes, programmable calculators and science lab probes

Library automation systems

Textbook tracking

Food service Point of Sale (POS)

Transportation planning and tracking

Reporting to state and federal agencies It is naive to think only in terms of desktop solutions for our schools.

Linux needs to have instructional and management applications that perform all the tasks that are needed by school staff and teachers. Application software must also deliver seamless integration with Microsoft's active directory so that students can benefit from; Home Directories (with home and school access)

One account access to all network services

Online portfolios, with teacher access to all student files

Safe browsing and a filtered Internet experience Or, the Linux enterprise network system must have an equivalent directory system of its own. An enterprise Linux system (Novell;) meets these requirements, but Linux advocates seldom recommend it. If a Linux Solution for Schools Exists: Why do Linux Zealots Ignore it? It is amazing that Novell; has done its homework, and has developed an enterprise solution that is SIF Compliant, scalable and interoperable,, yet Open Source advocates continue to push Linux in all its un standardized, desktop (not enterprise-level) "distros." Sidebar Note: a "distro" is a distribution. This is a customization of the Linux operating system. Unfortunately, one "distro" is not fully compatible with another "distro." Actually, another commercial Linux system is in operation, this one is called Xandros; . Although Xandros; lacks the extensive educational customizations that Novell; offers, it is easy to use and contains smart server components that configure and connect to each other. Customized and Distinct "Distros:" Strain on IT Staff School districts under staff their technology support departments.

Most often, school district IT Department staffing is at levels that are 1/3 to 1/2 what is reasonable (and necessary).

School district IT Departments don't have the staff that is required to manage their networks and provide the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) [guarantees of uptime and service availability] required to convince teachers that everything will be working when teachers need it to be working, i.e., every class period. Repairs need to be complete in minutes and hours, not days and weeks, before teachers gain trust in the technology.

Installation and management of incompatible (and untested) network components would stretch the capacity of beyond its already limited ability to deliver support. Making an Educational Case out of IT There are two areas where Linux advocates should know better, but don't seem to know enough about education to communicate effectively with teachers; Every school district initiative requires an educational case justification (like a business case). It is not enough to communicate computer program specifications. In fact, these specifications only become relevant in the conversation of, "Here is the direct connection to measurable student outcomes, and this is the way that these specifications apply to the educational task."

Applications, not operating systems, should be the basis for making technology choices, and only when research validates the direct connection of these applications to improved instruction Animosity Against Microsoft; More

Open Source software is available for the Windows operating system than for Linux, so why are so many Linux advocates against Microsoft's products? Instead, Linux advocates might be more effective in getting school district staff to consider limited Linux components by promoting Windows versions of Open Source software...as long as file formats of the application programs are completely (100%) compatible.

Another way that Linux advocates might be successful in introducing Linux components into a school district network would be to build and deliver education-specific applications that produce measurable student achievement (i.e., increase test scores). Until the Linux advocates get into our schools, find out what makes teachers' jobs easier, produce research-based instructional applications, and make teachers the gatekeepers of every Open Source project; Linux in our schools is doomed to failure, just like the "Technology Integration Movement."

Linux advocates should study what Novell has done to customize Linux, and to .

Better yet, Linux advocates they should just stop debating technology and discuss education. They would get much farther advocating school district adoption of Novell's enterprise solutions instead of isolated Linux desktop solutions for one-purpose lab installations.

Discussing education, not technology would go a long way in actually promoting a viable instructional improvement process that includes Open Source applications.

Linux advocates should keep the "techie talk" to themselves. They should learn to think like teachers and learn to talk "teacher talk" if they really want to get Linux adopted in our schools. Until then, Linux advocates will continue to be perceived by teachers as "geeks who talk a some strange code."

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Open Source at 01:00

Site Strategy

"Open Source for Education" End-of-Life: What Happened? We received two comments requesting that we continue publishing our Open Source for Education articles. So, we wrote a "hard hitting" article this month explaining part of our decision to drop the Open Source for Education section of our newsletter.

Maybe this article will clear up the distinction between Open Source programs for Windows that teachers use

Open Source advocates that demand Linux replacement for desktop computers and the elimination of all Windows software

Classroom Toolkit's Open Source for Instructional Materials movement. Classroom Toolkit views operating system debates as a distraction to educational decision-making. Our article exposes the fact that Linux arguments and debates about replacing the operating systems for the desktop computers and servers are technical arguments that focus upon technology instead of instruction

Ignore teachers and how teachers work

Focus only upon one kind of learning task that students perform, i.e., writing research papers

Miss the "forest" (a school district's network as a dynamic, living ecosystem)

Focus on a "few trees" (extending the useful life of some old computers)

Ignore the fact that all instructional project require at least a 30% budget for training and professional development. Read the article.

This article will anger the Linux crowd that would ban Windows from our schools because Microsoft charges money for software licenses.

But, the article will show teachers what this debate is about, and explain the reason that Classroom Toolkit decided to make an editorial change and drop Open Source as a separate article section of our newsletter. Classroom Toolkit will still share sources of affordable and usable tools for teachers, no matter what company produces the tools. We just intend to distance ourselves from the radical and useless arguments that tell teachers what they need

That are propagated by non-teachers who do not know the "ins and outs" of education

Advocated by non-teachers who don't know how to teach

Pushed by non-teachers who don't know just how much professional development is needed to make their "recommendations" work

Extolled by non-teachers who don't care how much work they add to a teacher's workday. Until these Linux advocates figure out how their recommendations can produce measurable instructional goals, and until these advocates can produce an educational rationale for their recommendations; teachers should put them in their place.

Whether a politician or a technical expert, have you told off the clueless non-teacher who wants to run your job their way? (That is, make you job harder. Take up more of your time on non-instructional distractions?)

The day is still young.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Site Progress at 00:30

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

Site Progress

Classroom Toolkit Newsletter Joins BlogRush

Classroom Toolkit has joined the Blog Rush[®]; free service.

Here is the link if you want to join, too.

Join Blog Rush now...BlogRush[®] is a cooperative Blog referral service.

And, BlogRush[®] is completely free, i.e., without cost.

See for yourself...

Join Blog Rush now...

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Site Progress at 03:00