

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

## News Nuggets

Media: "One in Ten US High Schools is a 'Dropout Factory': It Must be a Slow News Day

Surprise! One in ten US high schools fails to graduate a huge chunk of its students. Even more amazing, most of these students are culled (pun intended) from minority populations. Even more amazing is that this "bit of wisdom" from the "Tell us Something we didn't Know" department passes off for news.

It must be a slow news day if this issues plays in the media.

Another revelation: School districts and states under report the "dropout problem." Sidebar Old News! "Every year, approximately 1.2 million students—that's 7,000 every school day—do not graduate from high school on time. Nationwide, only about 70 percent of students earn their high school diplomas. Among minority students, only 57.8 percent of Hispanic, 53.4 percent of African American, and 49.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the U.S. graduate with a regular diploma, compared to 76.2 percent of white students and 80.2 percent of Asian Americans." Source: Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis article

Guess who Else is Dropping Out There is no fooling you, is there? You guessed that new teachers are dropping out, maybe even at a pace to outstrip the students. Sidebar Here are some statistics from the Alliance for Education "At the same time, teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate: 14 percent of new teachers leave by the end of their first year; 33 percent leave within three years; and almost 50 percent leave in five years. Estimated conservatively, American schools spend more than \$2.6 billion annually replacing teachers who have dropped out of the profession. Many analysts believe that the price is actually much larger and point out that the loss in teacher quality and student achievement must be added to the bill." Source: Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis article And, the reason is the same: Everyone likes (even thrives on) success.

Everyone likes how success feels, likes how success structures their self-talk in positive ways, likes how other people dole out praise, affection and admiration when they achieve success.

The "dropout rate" (best described as school leaving rate) is a measure of success. Aren't 70% of our students "sticking it out" to the bitter end (graduation)?

Here is the problem: For all the money we spend on education, our goal of educating every student remains elusive.

Where the "Coming up Short" States are

The states with the largest percentages of "Dropout Factory" high schools are the states with the largest minority populations. No surprise! These also tend to be states with the largest populations.

State-by-State Breakdown of "Drop Out Factory" Schools

Big Bureaucracy: No Solution in Sight

Hope that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) can be revised to address this problem remains a bureaucratic fantasy. Wishful thinking heightens expectations, solves little.

Looking to the Feds to solve local issues by sanctions against teachers hasn't worked. What evidence is there that the "same soggy solutions" will spark levels of change that are large enough to be observed and measured?

But, what if Big Bureaucracy is the source of the problem—due to inept and inefficient management, red tape, and the inability to achieve goals?

Or, what if Big Bureaucracy really wants public schools to appear to be failing so that government money can be funneled into church schools?

Sidebar

Classroom Toolkit has addressed the problem of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the real motive of fostering church schools at public expense so many times that listing them here is unwieldy. Simply launch this search link, and scroll down through the list of articles about NCLB.

Search of Classroom Toolkit articles on NCLB Big Bureaucracy: The Cause of the Problem? Most news coverage deplores the situation, and reports the same "By Line."

But the Black Commentator digs deeper and "Tells it like it is."

Link to the "Black Commentator";

The "Black Commentator" notes that one way to raise test scores for a high school is to ensure that students who can't pass the test leave school by the tenth grade—or holding them back in the ninth grade for three years, the skipping them to the eleventh grade. Sidebar "The secret of doing well in the 10th-grade tests is not to let the problem kids get to the 10th grade." Source of this strategy: Washington Post Education 'Miracle' Has a Math Problem

But since the Black Commentator focused upon the bureaucratic abuse of voucher systems as a way to subvert public education, they missed the second way that schools get students to pass the high-stakes tests, i.e., allow cheating.

Sidebar Classroom Toolkit addressed this issue in the article, Say it isn't So! 50,000 Texas Students Caught Cheating on the State High-Stakes Test?

Public school students found cheating on the test, and public schools that fail to graduate huge percentages of students are "tailor-made" arguments for "incensed and outraged" politicians to use to demand that "We Do Something," even if that "Something" means "voucherizing" education and further weakening public schools. "Dropout Factories" &#8212; Resources on the Web Dropout Factory Story from MSNBC &#8482; Google &#8482; Search for "Dropout Factory" for Original Sources Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis article Classroom Toolkit Article: NCLB is up for Re-Authorization: Bend an Ear, Twist an Arm, Shake your Fist, or Kick your Congress Person's Derriere to "Muzzle NCLB" and Salvage Education Classroom Toolkit Article: The High Cost of Dropouts: Rod Paige is Still the Voucher-System's "Front Man" Classroom Toolkit Article: NCLB: Up for Reauthorization, but "Not Up to the Task" of Benefiting Children Washington Post Article: Education 'Miracle' Has a Math Problem Blacks Pushed Down and Out Johns Hopkins University: What your Community can do to End its Dropout Crisis Education.Com &#8482: Why Some School Districts Might be Happy About Dropouts

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 09:00

## Short Article

Putting Students Ahead of the High-Stakes Test: Intra Classroom Public Relations Ploy?

Your students perform to their potential when they (think, feel, believe, know) that you care about them as (individuals, people, an important part of your life). But how can you "pull this off" when you are focused upon "teaching to the high-stakes test," and when your job is on the line?

Don't your students know that passing the high-stakes test is good for them, is pivotal for their economic survival, is their ticket to all the success and happiness of the "American Dream?"

Answer: They've heard this line hundreds of times (if not more), and they don't believe it. Fake it 'til you Mean It? The basic communication that you have to model, personify, be congruent with is; "It's not about me, your teachers, or about test scores; it's about you and your happiness."

Your attitude, thoughts and behaviors can't trick students, though. Your slightest self-interest will betray you.

Your approach has to demonstrate, show, objectify, "operationalize" real caring, and do this in a way that students recognize.

If you were a sales person, you would have to put the customer's needs before your commission checks. As a teacher, you are selling ideas, and you have to put your students' needs before the test scores.

It would be OK, if what students were called upon was easy, required nothing but a few dollars from their pocketbook, or required them to press the lever in a voting booth hard enough to dislodge the chad.

But no, what you ask students to do is substantial, difficult, with learning and unlearning barriers to surmount. The student that works after school 'till one A.M. is not lazy just because your homework was not completed and turned in in meticulous fashion.

The teen mother who got two hours sleep because she was nursing her ill and crying child is not disrespectful if she nods off during your extended period of pontification. When you take the time to know your students, take the time to find out how you can help them; then you will have the knowledge (to go with your gut wisdom) of creating a flexible path for each one's learning. The Most Unfair Method of Instruction: Treating Each Student Equally Students are individuals, and need individual pathways to happiness.

Students are like diamonds, and each one must be studied in order to bring out brilliance and sparkle.

Politicians often think of the students that we graduate as our products, but it is shortsighted to think of students as raw materials that is to be processed in conformance to quality control standards.

Instead, we make students our "products" by tailoring our work to their needs. Hard to Understand Concept: Instruction Changes with Each Student Master teachers understand that the ebb and flow of instruction changes with each student that is added or is subtracted from a classroom. Less talented teachers cannot comprehend the fact that communication changes, relationships alter, and assignments must be revised and adjusted to account for the new group dynamic.

Master teachers embrace this fact with relish and excitement because they learn something new, and because they perfect their skills with each student interaction.

Less talented teachers bemoan the fact that students don't act, think, feel, learn the ways that the teacher wishes that they would.

Celebrating the differences in students is the hallmark of a Master Teacher, and the lack of such perception of the value of each student is the "Scarlet Letter 'L'" (for Looser) that such a teacher proudly displays by their words and deeds.

So, the next time that a principal or school administrator browbeats you about redoubling your "teaching to the test" efforts; politely agree and promise to do your best.

But, know in your "heart of heart," that for you, students come first.

The paradox is that when your students come first, they achieve superior outcomes on those high-stakes tests. Students who perceive that the test scores are more important to their teacher than they are, lack the motivation, confidence and

self-esteem to excel on the test.

Make sure that your students know that you care about them, and they will take care of you (and your job security) at testing time.

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

## Feature Article

Planning Backwards: The Quickest Way to "Full Steam Ahead"

Planning is paradoxical.

So, is classroom planning. Some folks think of the school year as a journey, meandering in the general direction of where student learning should go&hellip;enjoying side trips and day excursions, then making a mad-dash sprint to the finish line on high-stakes test day&hellip;then a stroll, hobble, crawl, slide to make it to the end of the school year.

But this is wandering, not planning, and the capacity for getting lost, wasting time, encountering fog, dead ends, box canyons and washed out bridges to new learning increases as the vagueness of the goal keeps everyone guessing.

On the "walk-about," questions about what to do abound like berries on a bush. "What shall we do today? What should we have done yesterday? Why aren't the students learning what I taught them?"

All of this is backward to the strategy that you need to reach instructional goals and student outcome targets.

The "Thinking Backwards" Strategy

The questions that you need to ask in thinking backwards are few and easy to ask. It may be challenging to come up with answers, but the answers that you do decide upon streamline your planning.

Here are the questions: What is our goal, target, objective?

What step has to happen just before we reach that goal, target, objective?

What step has to happen just before reaching that previous step? We continue with this iterative process until we arrive where we are now (Our present situation).

This path (sequence of steps) becomes our road map, blueprint, flow chart, process map for project success. All we have to do is put the steps in reverse order, i.e., from now to final accomplishment.

Thinking Clarified: Extraneous Activities Filtered Out

First, write the goal down on paper, real paper. A computer screen will do, but paper is better. Writing a goal performs a "ritual magic" that brings wishes, hopes and dreams to reality, somehow.

The benefit of "Planning with the End in Mind" strategy is that you identify a path to the goal. This path becomes evident when you "march your thinking backwards" from the goal line.

Estimates of how long each step will take to achieve can be attached to the plan.

You Can't Get There From Here

Equally important, your roadmap can highlight goals that are not possible to achieve within a certain time period, for example a school year.

This is one reason that teachers take the "cop out road" of "covering material."

Covering material is an easy goal, all the teacher has to do is talk faster to claim that the objective was satisfied.

Helping each student to pass the high-stakes test is only slightly less vague. Of course, many of these tests are "minimal skills" tests, so teachers from ordinary schools shouldn't have to break a sweat.

What becomes a challenge (although doable) is something like, "90% of my sixth grade students who are reading three to six years below grade level will be reading on grade level by the end of the school year."

One thing though: Doing what you always did won't deliver on newer, better, brighter, successful outcomes that you want to achieve.

To Do Better: Think Differently &#8212; Do Different Strategic Things

Different has to mean better targeting and measuring along the path to your goal that your roadmap identifies.

Thinking differently means that you have to believe&hellip;That the goal is possible

That the goal is worth achieving

In your abilities, knowledge and skills to achieve that goal

In your students abilities, knowledge and skills in achieving that goal Staying on the "Straight and Narrow"

Success in achieving your goals means following the road map, blueprint, path to goal achievement. This means choosing activities that are on the next step, and avoiding activities that seem inviting but are not on that path. Either the activities are not on the path at all (in which case you never do them), or the activities are on a later step (in which case you defer them to a later time when you reach that step).

The Written Form for Your Roadmap

The written format that your roadmap will take is a personal choice. However, the components will look something like this&hellip;

Step #1: Desired Outcomes for Step #1:

Outcome Measures for Step #1: (Good enough, don't have to be perfect)

Trigger that Launches Step #2: Step #2: Desired Outcomes for Step #2:

Outcome Measures for Step #2: (Good enough, don't have to be perfect)

Trigger that Launches Step #3: Step #3: Desired Outcomes for Step #3:  
Outcome Measures for Step #3: (Good enough, don't have to be perfect)  
Trigger that Launches Step #4: Step #x: Desired Outcomes for Step #x:  
Outcome Measures for Step #x: (Good enough, don't have to be perfect)  
Trigger that Launches Step #x+1: Step #Final: Desired Outcomes for Final Step :  
Final Outcome Measures for Final Step: (Good enough, don't have to be perfect)  
Note: Listing Steps without identifying appropriate measures to (know, determine, prove) that you have reached that Step (and are ready to move to the next step) are self-defeating.  
It is difficult to set specific measures because (until you become used to this kind of management thinking, you can think of yourself as a failure.  
But, once you begin setting goals in this way, and measuring progress toward these goals as you go; you will actually become successful.  
This move to a professional style of instructional management will make the difference in transforming "what you do to cover material" to "what you do to teach, guide and transform student learning."

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

## Quick Tips

Google: A Wealth of Instructional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

Find Blog's on your favorite topics Book Search

Search the full text of books Catalogs

Search and browse mail-order catalogs Checkout

Complete online purchases more quickly and securely Desktop

Search and personalize your computer Directory

Browse the Web by topic Earth

Explore the world from your computer Finance

Business info, news, and interactive charts Google

Add news, games and more to the Google homepage Images

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

View maps and directions News

- now with archive search New!

Search thousands of news stories Notebook New!

Clip and collect information as you surf the Web

(Does not work with Windows Vista)

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

Search New!

Search the full text of US Patents Product Search

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

Search scholarly papers Special Searches

Search within specific topics Google Toolbar

Adds a search box to your browser

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

Search for videos on Google Video and YouTube

Web Search

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

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

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

manage a WebsiteCommunicate & Share Blogger

Build a curriculum-based Blog -- fast, easy, and freeCalendar

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

Docs

Create and share your projects online and access them from anywhere

Groups

Create mailing lists and discussion groupsGmail

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

Orkut

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

Find, edit and share your photosSketchUp

Build 3D models quickly and easily. Note: Another product that you have to install on the local computer. The same school district IT Department cautions apply

Talk

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

Translate

View web pages in other languagesYouTube

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

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

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

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

## Top Tips

Roboform: A "You Can't do Without it" Login and Account Password System

Teachers do you&hellip;?

Work online from home and school

Access E-mail for a variety of accounts

Maintain logins for online grade reporting, membership sites, Blogs, Forums

Need to keep your logins secure at school, i.e., password protect them in case you walk away from your computer

Need to Fill out online forms with the same information, over and over againThe low-cost solution is Roboform's

Roboform For SecurityThis product:Remembers and Secures Your Passwords

Logs You Into Web Sites Automatically

Fills Long Forms with Just One Click

Generates Secure Passwords

Prevents Phishing and Defeats Keyloggers

Has a Free and a Paid Version

This program is easy to use, and has earned a lot of commendations and recommendations.What you Really

NeedAlthough the free version is great, the paid version is even better. The reason is that you can purchase a remote application that synchronizes with the main application.

What you do is create a central database on the computer that you use to do the majority of your online work (probably your home computer).Then, you use the add on program to create a portable system that you place on a USB drive.

Now, you have secure access to all your accounts and passwords.One Password does it AllRoboform's

you to password protect access to all the login information that you store in it. This way you can prevent other users from sitting at the computer and accessing your accounts. So, when you first use Roboform's you have to enter a password. Then, if the computer sits idle for a while (you set the time), you have to enter your password again.This also

prevents someone who obtains your USB drive from using the program to access your accounts.Organize and Move your Accounts in Roboform's MenuRoboform's allows you to store account login information in a directory structure. You can also move and edit this information.One CatchOne catch when using Roboform's is

that the product only works with Microsoft's Internet Explorer and with Firefox's. If you use other Web browsers (about 2% of the browser market), Roboform's will not work.

With personal, daily, hourly use; you will find that Roboform's becomes indispensable for you, too.

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

## Teacher Resources

Thanksgiving Cornucopia: Real (Primary) Source Resources

Thanksgiving (like Christmas, Easter and Columbus Day) have undergone revision, transition and change as they transformed from fact to myth. Take Christmas: What about "the night before;" the flying reindeer; the reindeer with the nose of a drunk; a dancing, talking snowman; a drummer boy; bell-ringing pan handlers (pun intended) in front of the mall; etc.?

Or, Easter: bunnies and chocolate rabbits; candy chicks; baskets of plastic grass; showing off new outfits; pictures with a giant, flop-eared plush-coated person; etc.

Or Columbus Day: moved to Monday (some years), celebrating the brave explorer who didn't know where he was, a person imprisoned for cruelty in an era when slavery was outlawed by decree (except in the case where the slave's life would be "better off" under slavery than in their former condition. Sidebar Some folks think that the cannibalism of the Caribbean was exaggerated so that the Conquistadors had justification for enslaving the people there.

Surprise! Real cannibals are too warlike, fierce and violent to be easily subjugated into slavery. End the Myth: A "Tell-it-Like-it-Was" Thanksgiving Textbook and politically correct history is boring, limp and lame. But, real history, real people, real stories are exciting. Even students can be turned on and motivated by the "stuff that history is made of." Fortunately, in our Internet Age, real history materials (even primary sources are available at the beck and call of our keyboard-tapping fingers.

Primary sources, investigation, comparing discoveries&hellip;these make history exciting. If only teachers had time to explore learning in this way.

Sidebar Unfortunately, original source materials may not be politically correct. What if children learned what really happened? Who would they trust after finding out that their parents and teacher have been telling them fabricated facts?

Their parents' and teachers' defense: They believed the myths, too, and didn't know any better. Cases in Point Look at some real evidence&hellip;Turkeys: The English-speakers sent out men as "fowlers." They brought back birds, maybe Ruffed Grouse, ducks, geese, swans, cranes, other sea birds. These settlers referred to all kinds of birds as "turkey"

From the number of birds that the "fowlers" brought back, we can guess that their success occurred because they happened upon flocks of migrating birds. Otherwise, if they could have experienced this kind of hunting success all year, so many people wouldn't have starved.

Pilgrims: The settlers were not really pilgrims, i.e., travelers to a religious shrine. They were workers after land. Land that belonged to people other than the ones in England who financed the expedition

The real Thanksgiving: The first Thanksgiving is probably the celebration that took place a year after the celebration that is often referenced as the real one

Costumes: The black suits with rectangular collars and buckles were not the style of clothes that the settlers wore.

Religious Freedom: This was more of doing what they wanted. Only about half of the original settlers were Puritan. Their complaint was against King James for running the Church of England like the Roman Catholic Church. They wanted to get rid of the Catholic Church trappings, and make the church "pure."

Starvation: This was the result of stupidity and lying. These folks called their farms, "Plantations." This concept is irrelevant in the rocky, short growing season of Massachusetts. And, the crops that they could grow and ship (corn) didn't have the economic value of a product like tobacco (grown in Virginia)

These folks were supposed to earn money by fishing, but they found that they could make more money by trading with the Native Americans for furs (beaver and otter pelts). If they went fishing, they would have had food. Trading for furs gave them nothing to eat. But, trading furs was a lot easier than fishing every day

In defense of the settlers, they were not fishermen, they brought the wrong sized fish hooks, and eventually learned how to fish

The lying was a subterfuge to get the rich backers of the expedition in England to send more money. They wrote to England that the area was rich in fish, deer, crops (a paradise). But, instead of sending more money, the backers figured that the settlers didn't need as much, and sent less supplies

Pre-Winter Arrival: These folks couldn't have picked a worse time to arrive in Massachusetts, unless it was later during the "dead of winter (no pun intended). They didn't realize that the weather was more severe than in England. Leaving England on Sept. 23rd, they headed into the cold ocean currents, and the trip took over two months (66 days). They ate only cold food, and one person (a sailor) died during the voyage. Friendliness with the Native Americans: Neither group trusted the other. Relations got so bad that the settlers even posted dying people at the gate of their fort so that the Native Americans thought that they had more guards than they really had.

King Massasoit: The colonists mistook a local tribal chief as a "king." In fact, the word "Massasoit" means leader. This was not his real name. There were other chiefs of the Wampanoag Nation that were not as friendly as group that Massasoit lead. It is surprising that the the Wampanoag were as friendly as they were. The colonists&hellip;

Arrived after an incident where 27 Wampanoag men were kidnapped by English fishing boats

The settlers dug up (and took without permission) Wampanoag caches of corn

The settlers just moved in on Wampanoag land without asking Pure Speculation - Not History, but Plausible: The invitation of the Native Americans may have been an accident. The Wampanoag heard lots of shooting (maybe the sound of the fowlers blasting away at the flocks of migratory birds) and Chief Massasoit took 90 men to investigate. (If the Wampanoag were invited, wouldn't they have brought their wives and children to the party?) But now that they "showed up" the settlers had little choice but to invite the army of Native Americans, that outnumbered them almost two

to one, to stay and eat. Then, Chief Massasoit sent his men out and they shot five deer to contribute to the fiesta. (If they had been invited in the first place, they would have brought the deer with them as gifts when they arrived, wouldn't they?)  
Link to Primary Source - Hearsay Graphic Organizer  
English Colonists Cultural Chart graphic organizer  
Primary Sources 3-2-1 Chart graphic organizer  
Sources for "Myth-Busting" Information  
Plymouth Vocabulary (note the early spelling)  
What the Settlers and the Wampanoag Wore  
Plymouth Plantation and the Pilgrims  
Online Presentation  
Teacher's Guide to the Online Presentation: You are the Historian: Guide to the First Thanksgiving  
More Myth Debunking than you can possibly have time for&hellip;The sub menus are deep and the narrative is long  
Unrelated to Myth-Busting but fun, anyway: Thanksgiving Crafts

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

## **Book Review**

Home Schooling  
Author: Clement, Andrea D. ISBN: 1-57886-128-4  
Format: Softcover  
Pub. Date: 2004  
Publisher: Scarecrow Education  
Pages: 87  
Cost: \$17.95  
Available: Amazon&#8482; at \$17.95 + \$2.00 sourcing fee, but as low as \$1.01 (new) through other vendors - not found on eBay&#8482;

Subtitle: A Research-Based How-To Manual  
Ever wonder "how the other half lives?"

I have always thought it strange that families would "home school" their children because&hellip;It is so much work

They might not have teacher training

It dilutes the parental role because of the "dual relationship"

They pay school taxes so, they are paying twice

It is such a huge commitment

Their children loose out on social and communication skills from being around children from all religious, ethnic and social backgrounds

Sheltered religious thought isn't possible with the content of the media (TV, Radio and the Internet) anyway  
Of course, if the school district has expelled their incorrigible child and they can't afford to send the child to a private school, the parents may have to teach the child themselves. Of course, this kind of child is the worst possible student, a student that even teachers require special training and a controlled environment to manage.  
The Books' Topics: Theories of Learning

Academic Ability

Choosing a Curriculum

Motivation and Discipline

Testing and Grading  
The central themes of this book are: Parents need to consider a lot of things before undertaking the education of their children by themselves

Parents must decide if their children will benefit from instruction at home, decide if they can meet the standards set by the state that they reside in, decide if they are up to the task

Parents must plan, design, build or purchase a curriculum, and the higher the grade level of their child, the more academic demands the curriculum places on the parent-teacher  
Keywords: Home Schooling

Research-Based

Theories of Learning

Choosing Curriculum

Testing and Grading  
Main Idea: The main idea of this book is that applying research-based models to home schooling is a novel undertaking, and that most parents fail to comprehend the implications and nuances of the task before they set out on the path to teaching their children.

The author believes that parents who know the "research-based" background of education can make better choices.  
Quotes:

"Academic ability in this context refers to intelligence and the amount of prior learning. Both have an impact on what materials and teaching methods can be used and how rapidly material can be covered&hellip;The intelligence of the child and the intelligence of the homeschooling parent can affect what type of curriculum materials and teaching methods can be used effectively, as well as what type of time commitment must be made for homeschooling." (p. - x)

"One of the most thoroughly covered topics within this book is how to choose curriculum materials, or what will be taught, or whether materials will be used at all&hellip;An example of a type decision that must be made before committing to a particular type of instructional material would be how deeply or how rapidly topics will be covered. Other considerations include how much hands-on teaching time the parent will take with the child; whether and how testing will be done; and the results of diagnoses of intelligence, prior learning, temperament, and learning styles discussed earlier." (p. - x & xi)

"One of the most compelling questions asked by educators is how learning occurs. Just as anything we do not completely understand, there are a multitude of theories. As my students often hear, 'If I knew which theory was correct, that would be the only one I would need to teach.'"(p. - 1)

"It is apparent that there are many diverse views of how people learn&hellip;The most useful application of this information is probably to pick and choose concepts or strategies that explain or assist in a child's learning."(p. - 15)

"The ability of students and their homeschooling parents is important to discuss because this will influence several aspects of homeschooling. The student's level of intelligence will determine the difficulty of materials to be used, the speed with which material is covered, and the parental expectations, at least to some extent. The student's prior learning will have an impact on what the student is ready to learn, or in other words, where the parent should begin."(p. - 17)

"If IQ changes over time to just the type of environment in which the child is reared, do interventions specifically targeting IQ increases work? Programs like Head Start have shown increases in IQ scores if the intervention is continued for participating children; however, if it is not continued, these improvements seem to wash out in a couple of years. The implications of these findings reinforces what is believed by many homeschooling parents: the child will benefit most by long-lasting, enriching, challenging, caring instruction."(p. - 22)

"A parent with high intelligence will be able to understand the work that the child is doing, will be able to help the child when he or she finds the material difficult, and will probably be more confident about the teaching process. A parent with lower intelligence will have more difficulty and will probably be less confident. This does not mean that only geniuses should homeschool. It means that understanding where potential weaknesses lie, and accommodating for those ahead of time, may make the homeschooling experience more pleasant."(p. - 23)

"A highly intelligent child will be able to cover material quickly, may need little help, and will most likely proceed to eventually take more advanced subjects (calculus, chemistry). A child who has lower intelligence, on the other hand, will cover material more slowly and may need more help, possibly much more help."(p. - 23)

"Students should have schoolwork that is appropriately difficult but doable. The ability to tailor the level of the work to the student is one of the primary benefits of homeschooling. The goal should not be to ensure that the child is working at exactly the same level as other children at the same grade or age, but to have him or her challenged appropriately. If material is too far beyond his or her ability, he or she will not learn it and will be frustrated. If it is too easy, he or she will learn far less than is possible and will get bored. A challenge seems to be best."(p. - 24)

"Sometimes, for a child that has extreme deficits or extreme areas of giftedness, extra help may be needed. That could come in the form of consultation with someone that has worked with similar children, finding Web sites with helpful ideas, or studying to become acquainted with possible interventions."(p. - 24)

"Some personalities are better suited for homeschooling than others."(p. - 25)

"Much as been said about learning styles in recent years, and much of it conflicts&hellip;After becoming familiar with learning styles, the difficulty arises when one tries to decide how to use the information. Should the student be allowed or encouraged to use the style he or she is most comfortable with? Should the emphasis be placed on developing those that he or she is less comfortable with? Should he or she have to use all of them? There is not enough research evidence to make a determination."(p. - 28 & 29)

"Although there is little definitive research on the effects of accommodating learning styles, it seems to make intuitive sense to provide schoolwork that uses multiple senses. This way, whichever strengths children have will probably be tapped. They will also be presented with material that requires the use of their weaker areas and may strengthen those. Some lessons can be presented more visually, some more auditorially, and a few hands-on. The problem with too many hands-on activities is that they tend to be more time-consuming."(p. - 31)

"There are many formats that can be used when homeschooling, from un-schooling, which is very unstructured and looks very little like traditional school, to a traditional format that is almost indistinguishable from public school other than the location. Much of the decision about what format to use for homeschooling has to do with how much actual time a parent plans to spend in direct teaching activities. This could fall anywhere along a continuum from direct instruction (the most time in direct teaching activities) to self-study (the least amount of time in direct teaching activities.)"(p. - 34)

"There is a great deal of freedom in determining content when homeschooling. In most states, there is a vast amount of flexibility until high school. At that point, there are probably some required subjects, but the order in which they are taught and how they are taught is still up to the parent's discretion."(p. - 37)

"How much material should be covered? Even classroom teachers struggle with this question. If fairly traditional textbooks are used, it is typical to cover approximately one book per year in most subjects. Publishers have usually determined how much material can be reasonably covered in a school year. However, most of the powers that be that oversee homeschooling do not check the amount of material covered. Time is the main consideration for public school systems and most homeschooling umbrella organizations, which some states allow to oversee homeschoolers. A typical time requirement is four hours a day for 180 days, or the equivalent."(p. - 38)

"Often public school teachers were not able to complete textbooks during the course of a school year. This means the children were not taught the material at the end of the book. This can become a problem if the next year's textbook assumes that the material was covered. This is one of the great advantages of homeschooling."(p. - 39)

"An added benefit of homeschooling is the opportunity to cover material very rapidly (quantity). One of the most common complaints heard from parents of bright students in public schools is that their children are bored and could cover far more material&hellip;Some will double up and do two years of work in one&hellip;the student may have covered lots of

material, but he or she may not understand it well and may forget it quickly. Also, if the child returns to public or private school, he or she may be bored because of the necessity of covering the material again."(p. - 39 & 40)

"Many curriculum materials come completely prepared with lesson plans (what the child should cover each day, how many days per week), quizzes, tests, worksheets and possibly other materials. Possibly the most complete&hellip;are computerized programs. The student reads; complete activities, quizzes, and tests; and receives grades, all on the computer. At the other end of the spectrum would be the un-schoolers who use no curriculum at all."(p. - 40)

"Cost is a factor in the decision to homeschool had to determine what curriculum to use. If one has been accustomed to paying private school tuition, purchasing homeschooling materials will probably come as a relief, but if a child has been in public school, they may seem more like a weighty investment. After purchasing curriculum for the last three years, our average per-student expenditure has been \$200 -\$300. Of course, one could spend less or far more."(p. - 41)

"If behavioral principles are followed consistently, and the reinforces and punishers are strong enough, children will be compliant. Consistency is the most difficult but most effective part of the equation."(p. - 57)

"Briefer is better. For example, if looking at a child with the evil eye will stop his or her behavior, studying will be interrupted much less than if a loud lecture about why the behavior is wrong is given."(p. - 59)

"Punishment should consistently follow broken rules, praise should consistently follow obeyed rules, and rules should stay the same. If children know what to expect, they will be less likely to misbehave."(p. - 60)

"The first assumption made in this chapter is that homeschooling parents want to verify and document their child's learning. If not, this chapter can be skipped. This is not said tongue in cheek, because there are families who practice un-schooling who don't wish to grade or formally evaluate academic learning because they do not differentiate academic learning from day-to-day learning."(p. - 63)

"The first choice is whether to test or not to test. There are some homeschooling families as well as teachers in public and private schools and colleges who prefer not to test. There are other ways to assess learning. This can be done through informal oral questioning, assigning activities that have students use the skills that they have been studying&hellip;However, if a parent is not opposed to testing, it can be used to efficiently learn how well material is being covered, how effective teaching materials are, and how much effort the kids are putting forth."(p. - 64)

"Noise may or may not be distracting to a child. In public school there is often a great deal of noise, and school goes on. Therefore, a silent environment is neither required nor expected for homeschooling. However, some students may be distracted by noises, particularly other siblings and televisions. Some accommodations may have to be made to reduce the noise or move the student farther from the source of the noise if it hinders schoolwork."(p. - 72)

"If children are out of the way of household distractions, they may also be out of the way of adult supervision. There needs to be a way to ensure that students stay on task, do not cheat, and do not interfere with one another as they do their schoolwork. Sometimes it is worth having them weather a few distractions in order to keep an eye on them."(p. - )

"The basic questions that should be answered before homeschooling are: Do we want a traditional or nontraditional curriculum?

Who will be the primary teacher, and how do that person's personality characteristics mesh with the student's/students'?

Do we want to teach for mastery, quantity of material, or somewhere in between?

What format will we use in our teaching (remember, it doesn't have to be the same for all subjects nor for the entire school year)?

What are our beliefs about testing/ evaluation?

What types of rules will we have, and how will they be reinforced?

What would be most motivating to our child/ children?

How will we set up the physical environment for homeschooling?

Will we follow a strict schedule or be more relaxed in meeting the time requirements for homeschooling?"(p. - 77 & 78)

Issues Addressed by the Book: This book considers the theories behind the main issues of education, i.e., intelligence, learning, motivation, curriculum content, testing, grading and scheduling.

The book does not address the need for teacher preparation (in this case the parent's attitude, skills and abilities), and assumes that parents are in a position to make informed choices about all aspects of homeschooling for their children.

Support for this assumption is not provided by case studies, action research, experimental research, or even anecdotal records.

The author also fails to question the decision to homeschool in the first place. Instead of listing the reasons that parents might consider homeschooling an option, instead of questioning whether the decision is reasonable, valid or wise; the author avoids this controversy.

The Book's Shortcomings: The author summarizes research in only a general way. Of course this is about the level that most non-educator parents care to understand. However, the structure provides lots of theories, and little definitive strategy for making use of these divergent approaches. In other words, there are a lot of paradigms about curriculum, learning, motivation, intelligence, personality types, etc. So what?

The other shortcoming is a lack of focus upon learning outcomes. The most important thing about education is the observable and measurable achievement of each student.

Another shortcoming, appalling really, is the author's recommendation that parents can "multi-task," that is do the laundry, baby sit for younger students, cook dinner, watch TV, etc. while also teaching. I would like to be present when a teacher who is "called on the carpet" for doing other stuff instead of teaching tries to justify the "research" that supports this multi-tasking strategy in their classroom.

Teaching is more than a full time job. Home Schooling Parents who don't focus on instruction for six to eight hours a day are shortchanging their children. Of course this is difficult. That's the reason that children belong in a real school&hellip;and the reason that teachers must be "super-dedicated."

The author also fails to examine all the reasons that parents would embark on a home-schooling course of action, and separate these into rational and irrational categories. In addition, the author fails to stress the pitfalls and dangers of home schooling. The author makes it seem that cursory theoretical knowledge about a variety of theorists will get the parent through the "high seas, twisted currents and raging torrents" that encompass any project of the scope and magnitude of teaching one or more students for an entire year.

Imagine being the teacher of all subjects to multiple students at the same time. Sounds like the "one room schoolhouse of yesteryear."Comments:This book is like a college survey course minus the suggestions and recommendations.

Parents that read this book may receive an overview, but they don't know what they are in for if they undertake the full-time education of their children.

This book fails to make recommendations, instead leaving hard choices up to parents who choose the homeschooling route.

What might be more useful to parents would be arguments against taking on the obligation and commitment of homeschooling. Then, strategies needed to contend with the uphill challenge of actually pulling off a successful learning process for a year, or a student's K-12 career could be explored.

A survey of these theorists and their positions might prove helpful in a college philosophies of education class or such, but in the real world of "let's teach children the foundation for a lifetime of learning and employment, theories for homeschooling seem to come up short.

Application and action seem to be needed.

Parents cannot be confused and districted, or worse, come to believe that they are expert educators because they read a summary of some theories.

The ability to teach in the specialized content areas is also troubling. Algebra, calculus, plain and solid geometry, trigonometry, biology, chemistry, physics, history, geography, government, health and a foreign language (to name a few); mean that the parent has to learn the subject matter and prepare the lessons.

It is going to take a pretty smart parent to become conversant enough with these core content area subjects in order to do an adequate job.

In addition, special skills are required if students have special needs.Summary:The author states that this is a survey of research, however, the focus is on theories rather than action research.

Because the summaries are about folks who posited theories, rather than research based upon experimental groups that show results, the book is of little use to teachers.

As a rule, once teachers leave the ivy coated bricks of college, they have little use for theorists and their pontifications. Teachers need what the experimental folks call "operationalization." That is, take the theory and break it down into doable, repeatable steps, and create a method to track progress so that if those steps falter, that corrective action can be taken early enough to preclude failure.The lack of "accountability" for parents would seem like a major concern, and it is unimaginable that schools could be run the way that this book suggests that homeschools are run.From a teachers point of view, "Incredible&hellip;incredulous&hellip;unbelievable.

Rating (Four Point scale):

Useful - 2

Applicable - 2

Relevant - 2

Innovative - 1

Original - 1

Interesting - 1

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Overall Rating - 1.5

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

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

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Are you Automating Everything you Can?

Do you know any teacher that was hired to do less this school year than last school year? Do you know any school where there is a directive for teachers to slow down, back off the stress level, and only do what is reasonable?Is there a school district anywhere that recommends that teachers pace themselves, avoid stress and mental-physical-emotional strain, and do only what they are paid to do&hellip;within normal working hours?

Since work requirements are at less than sane, and since the needs of your students are open-ended and seem to be

on a trajectory that approaches "bottomless" (and we are not talking about a lack of underwear), you have several choices:

- Plan better, more strategically, modularize instruction
- Prioritize, do the most important, highest-payoff tasks first
- Delegate -- Let students take up slack for you
- Drop essential, but low-priority tasks
- Automate all levels of tasks, from the important to the urgent

The tasks that you can automate include: Materials Creation  
Lesson Planning  
Research

Grading and Grade Calculation  
Progress Tracking: Yours and Your Students'  
Parent Communication  
Centers and Center Development  
Software and Account Management

The tasks that you cannot automate include: Teaching: Your interaction with students cannot be replaced  
Supervising Student Progress

Analysis of Individual Learning Styles of Each Student  
Communicating One-to-One with Students  
Counseling, Consulting with Students, Parents and Colleagues  
Communicating your Personal Caring and Commitment

Creativity, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making There will never be an automated replacement for teachers.  
"Covering material" does not constitute teaching or learning.

Teachers apply themselves in a personal and professional relationship with their students. Students are "clients" in the sense of being in our care. As such, our decisions must be based upon their needs.

Teaching requires modeling of the qualities that we would have students adopt. And, teaching requires the development of habits: abilities, attitudes, knowledge and skills that become so practiced and proficient that they seem like automatic responses.

But, this is not automation in the sense that we are using it here, as a time saver. What you are doing by automation is freeing up time and energy so that you can apply and develop personal skills that make you a "genius-level" teacher.

Too Busy "Teaching to the Test" to Automate?

You say that you are too busy "teaching to the test" and scrambling for materials to automate anything.

If you are stressed for time, you are not automating enough.

The effort may require self-discipline at first, but the payback will be additional time for the future. In a way, all of Classroom Toolkit is focused upon automation. The process that we share is one of modularizing instructional materials so that teachers can mix and match materials to instructional goals. Automation Goals (and payoffs) for automation include: Developing and Automating Presentations

This is done with templates and fill-in-the-blank data merges. Increase Efficiency

Automation increases efficiency with instructional planning, and instructional delivery with such tools as E-mail, Web form submission, surveys, parent communication, data integration, and classroom management. The use of automation makes tasks that would otherwise have been performed manually more efficient and time-effective. Streamline Processes

Automation streamlines processes, especially if you bend the process to conform to the technical requirements of the automation software. For example, what if filling out a the campus form for each student is automated. Create your own form that looks close enough to the original, then automate the fill-in. This can save you hours. And, share the form with your colleagues. You can save them hours of work, too. Increase Cycle Time/ Reduce Time on Task

Automation speeds up the time that you can develop assignments and projects by increasing your efficiency. By automating everything you can, you communicate with parents and supervisors, develop materials and lesson plans, calculate grades, submit reports... tasks that you have to repeat can be automated. Tracking and Documenting

Developing a "step-by-step re-use process" instead of a "one off, one-time-use" treadmill creates time out of "thin air." Targeting Behavior and Learning

Collecting data and reporting progress can be automated. This is done by creating check-off forms using a database management system (database). Most teachers have one of these in the Office Productivity application that is part of their professional office suite software

Unfortunately, the learning curve for mastering a database management system is steep, and most teachers never develop the powerful uses that this software affords. Creating Learning Profiles

Sorting and grouping students into fluid and dynamic project and task groups. Measuring Results

Unless you can measure what you do, you cannot control what you do. Without measurement; situations, serendipity, fate, crisis and accident are in control. With measurement, you take control. Getting Back more Time than you Put in

Automation is like a magic box. You put in a little time, and you get back a lot more time. Automation Tools. Tools that you can use to automate instructional planning, management and delivery include: A professional Office Productivity

Package with merge features (for document files, spreadsheet files and database files). This is your automation workhorse

For example, Microsoft Office Professional Text research storage with one-button capture

For example, InfoSelect;

Full page storage for online research

For example, Surf Later; Vocabulary Mapping

For, example, Visual Thesaurus;

Data Analysis and Display Program

Inspiredata;

Mind Mapping Software

For example, Mind Manager;, Mind Genius; Education or Inspiration;

Screen Capture

For example, Snagit;, or Instant Screen Shot Screen Video Capture

For example Camtasia Studio; A Phrase Expansion Tool

For example, Paramind; Remember: Academic versions of this software can be purchased for a fraction of the list price or street price.

Another trick is to purchase an older version on eBay;, then upgrade. This usually results in a huge cost savings.

Online Tools Online tools that can streamline and automate your work include: Blogs, E-mail, Online Toolkits and Learning Management Systems

Blogs Blogger

Classroom 2.0

Teacher Lingo

Word Press

E-mail Systems

AOL Mail

Gmail

Windows Live Hot Mail

Yahoo Mail Online Toolkits For example Google; Tools and Google; Pack Learning Management Systems

For example, Moodle!

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

## **Professional Self-Development**

Rote Memory: Drill and Practice Road Kill

A bird's eye view over an educational timeline, no matter what parameter we examine, would appear to be like the swing of a pendulum. And, this is the state of direct instruction strategies that are related to "drill."

"Drill" currently enjoys a level of disrepute as thinking skills, problem solving, constructing higher-order knowledge, learning through literature or project-based communication or Multiply Intelligent styles.

So, what happened? How did the "quick-repeated-practice baby" get tossed with the

"overdo-it-to-the-exclusion-of-all-else" bath water?

Easy. We pumped in another quick-fix, overdose of "teaching to the test" as we let drill in all its forms, morphs, iterations and disguises flush down the drain. Good Reasons: Not Good Riddance Of course, there were good reasons to limit the stifling, unrestricted use of drill. For example, drill was used; To keep minority students quiet and under control, never mind that they learned very little by means of this method

By inexperienced teacher, by uncreative child dislikes, and confidence-challenged teachers in lieu of risk taking, personal interaction and experiment-to-see-what-motivates-students-to-achieve professionals

AS an "easy way out" by the "walking-retired," by the somnambulant moonlighters who focused more of their personal time and resources on the other job, and by the folks with couch-tomato energy and skill who believed that they were

hired to oversee seatwork

By the lazy, the burned-out, the bitter, and the "trapped-in-the-job" folks who marked time to the "I can't wait 'till I'm outa [sic] here" drum

Memorization: No More Allure Blame it on the Internet where billions of pages of content can pop on screen with the typing of a few choice search terms.

Blame it on knowledge expanding so fast that no-one can keep up, or on knowledge becoming so fluid that there are no constants. Sidebar Just 50 years ago, everyone knew that there were nine planets and that an atom had three parts that could not be divided (now we know that protons and neutrons are made up of quarks and leptons). Saturn had two rings (now countless), and Jupiter had nine moons (now 63 and counting). Since you are NOT using "Drill" Strategies, Why do we Bring it Up? The reason that we bring this issue of the "death of drill" up is that we need to re-introduce some drill (within reason).

For example, people used to have to remember several telephone numbers. Now, their telephone or their PDA remembers these numbers for them.

Likewise for addresses.

And to find the latest facts, Google<sup>®</sup> is able to provide up-to-the-minute access to the most relevant, authoritative and timely information. Even better, a search of Wikipedia<sup>®</sup>, the most "authoritative" site that Google<sup>®</sup> can recommend; can result in an army of minion editors revising the content, on-the-fly, as you watch it change! Stress of Complexity Many students experience stress when confronted with a world that is complex, intricate, fluid, ambiguous, evolving, dynamic and unstable (if only cogitatively).

Providing knowledge that seems solid and stable is soothing and comforting to children at the "concrete" level of cognitive development. Sidebar We haven't forgotten that children seem to pass through a series of cognitive stages before they are ready to run the high-stakes test marathon, have we? Giving some students the security of knowledge that will remain stable for a short time will increase their ability to focus. This is especially true of the 75% of students that prefer hands-on, tactile, kinesthetic leaning modes. Visual learners may be comfortable with picture-screen images that change every ten seconds, and auditory learners get to adjust to the transient nature of sound. But, our physical universe should not be changing at electron speed, and hands-on learners would like for that bit of their learning environment to remain static. Memories worth Knowing Basic Building blocks of knowledge are worth memorizing, even if drill, flash cards, buddy practice encompass a sliver of the daily learning schedule.

For example: The names of the teacher, principal, classmates, brothers and sister, maybe even the name of the current president are worth memorizing

It would be nice to know the room number, and which seat is assigned

Knowing the school bus number corresponding to the route home, and an emergency telephone number for contacting parents would be a plus

Remembering the steps of the Scientific Method makes sense, as does remembering the steps to renaming (borrowing and carrying). and the steps to long multiplication and division (students might not have their cell phone when they need to perform a calculation)

It might be nice to remember that our number system is Base 10, and that computer use a "Binary System," i.e., Base 2 Basic formulas for perimeter, area, circumference, etc.

Add your own crucial facts to this list The Raw Ingredients of Creativity and Problem-Solving What drill haters often overlook is that memories are the raw ingredient for creativity. Most creative people have sparkling and snappy memories. And, the unconscious mind needs a storehouse of memories, readily available, if ideas are to be incubated, hatched, nurtured to fruition.

Not every skill is enhanced by a key press. Mental acuity and the ability to think, communicate and interact engage components of learning that require more than an online interface.

Help your students memorize useful information in fun and stress-free ways, and they will appreciate you for it. Besides, friends and family often amuse themselves at get togethers by asking questions and quizzing children about items of common knowledge. If the students can't recite basic knowledge, friends and family will... Assume that you aren't teaching your students anything

Question whether they are getting their money's worth from the school taxes that they pay

Think that your students are slow learners, are falling behind, or are mentally retarded Prepare your students for the holidays, and they will appreciate you for that, too.

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

## **Open Source for Education**

Open Source Solutions: Real Technology Integration, But Can you Use it in your Classroom?

Open Source for teachers is a lot more than downloadable, installable-on-the-desktop programs. But, can you use them? Sure, you can use anything you want at home, on computers that you pay for.

And, in most cases, you will choose a computer that runs Microsoft<sup>®</sup>'s Windows operating system. Sidebar Yes, there are lots of Open Source software programs for Windows<sup>®</sup>. In fact, more Open Source software is developed for Microsoft<sup>®</sup>; Windows than for any other operating system. Even more, most Open Source development is done using the Microsoft<sup>®</sup>; desktop development environment, even if the software will be used on Linux. The question is not whether these programs exist, but whether teachers can use them to "integrate technology" in their classrooms.

The Open Source desktop programs may be useful at home, but in many school districts, teachers do not have permission to install software. The reasons for this reasonable IT Department survival policy include: School district IT Departments are concerned with software piracy, incompatibility with the desktop computer and the network, and with asset management (i.e., maintaining an inventory of what the district may legally install)

Untested software may conflict with other application programs, and the IT Department staff seldom has the workforce to test new software

Unnecessary service calls (to repair desktop computer configurations, remove Spyware, Nuisance war and viruses) place an additional, undue load on understaffed IT Department

Recovering user data (documents, test scores, files that the user failed to back up) places undue strain on the already overstressed IT Staff, often at the most inopportune times So, what is the Gung-Ho Tech-Savy Teacher to do? Options

for using Open Source programs with students include:

**Use Live CDs and Live USB Drives**  
**Pros** for this strategy include: These CDs and USB drives use a complete operating system and application platform that is "self-contained" on the CD or USB drive. A Linux system can run on the system without installing anything on the hard drive of the desktop computer. To use such a "Live CD or USB drive" you simply reboot the computer. (Of course, the computer must support booting from the CD or USB drive. You might find this ability turned off by the district's IT Department staff to prevent just such a security problem.)  
**Cons** for this strategy include: The strategy is limited to what ever package will fit on a single drive storage unit

The district's IT Department can disable the ability to boot from CDs or USB drives for security purposes  
Setting up and customizing these CDs and USB disks is highly technical, and generally not a focus of classroom teaching; i.e., teachers are too busy with instructional tasks to fiddle with the complicated and complex technical issues of making one of these CDs or USB drives work with the programs that they want

These CDs and USB drives run the Linux operating system, and most of the programs that teachers would like to use are Microsoft®; Windows applications

These Live CDs and Live USB drives may not be able to access the resources that are needed on the district's network. Access to district network resources generally requires authentication (entering a password on a computer that the network servers recognize as being trustworthy. Network servers are seldom configured to trust live CDs that teachers (or students) bring from home

The network resources that the teacher wishes to use may be incompatible with the Linux applications on the Live CD or USB drive

Launching an unauthorized operating system on the district's network may set off network security alarms and bring a panicked and/ or irate technology staff member to the door of the teacher's classroom, or to the door of the campus principal. Obtain permission before trying to run one of these live CDs or Live USB drives on a school district network  
Beg the IT Department to set up the software and customize the desktop for the teacher's use

**Pros** include: Great if you get this done once, but how many time a year will you ask for this favor?

**Cons** include: Good luck in getting the IT Department staff to go to this much extra trouble (unless, of course, you are married to the superintendent

The cost to the IT Department for this "desktop customization" is from \$18 to \$45 per hour. The work of IT staff is not free like the software that you are asking them to install

**Run Applications Online**  
**Pros** include: None of the problems with the strategies listed above  
**Cons** include: The online applications are not as "robust" as the applications that are installed on a desktop computer. This may be a reason that Microsoft®; has not pursued the marketing of online applications. (Or, it could be that Microsoft®; is making so much money as the market leader, with no real competition, that they don't want to bother

You might have to obtain district permission to place anything online. This could include items that you write or use for your classroom, even if it is placed on servers or with services that are outside your district

The district that you work for may claim that the materials that you place online belong to them

The district's Content Filter might block your applications or resources, and you might have to submit a request to get these applications or resources unblocked (Note: a Content Filter is the automated strategy that is used to protect students from detrimental content that can be found on the Internet. Examples of "detrimental" content include:

pornography, profanity, hate-mongering, bomb-making, terrorist recruitment, gambling, slave-trading and the trafficking in human beings or human body parts, racism, anarchy advocacy, etc. Don't worry, you are not interested in these topics, either. If you are, your employer has good cause to fire you.)

**Purchase your Own Computer and Bring it to Your Classroom**  
**Pros** include:

You can install what you want on the computer if you own it  
**Cons** include: The Internet will be off limits to this computer  
It is your money. You pay for damages

If you want to print, you may need to purchase your own printer for classroom use, too

Your purchase is not tax deductible

Poor building security could mean that the computer "disappears" overnight

You may still have to obtain permission to bring your own computer to your classroom

The computer probably came with Microsoft®; Windows, and you are wasting your money if you wipe the operating system off the computer and install Linux, instead. Buy a computer without an operating system if you really want to use Linux

**The Wrong Venue: The Wrong Management**  
If prospects for using Open Source software in your classroom seem bleak, understand that the problem does not reside with you.

You work for an organization that does not have the resources to manage technology integration, nor the staff that knows how to pull this off.

This leaves you to scramble and connive to get done what you can.

But, because the Open Source folks created software applications without a thought for instructional applications, you have a difficult time documenting to your school district's IT Department that the use that you have for a customized desktop computer with specialized software applications is directly connected to instructional and learning outcomes. The challenge is uphill. With all that you are required to do, this may not be a battle that you choose to join.