

Monday, December 31, 2007

News Nuggets

Paying Parents to "Do the Right Thing"

Paying "Low-Income" Parents to "Do the Right Thing?" Is this a viable antipoverty strategy? Do you think that an approach like this is "crazy?" Would you rather just put parents in jail for "Doing the wrong thing?" Is putting parents in jail for doing the wrong thing cheaper, or more expensive than paying them to do the right thing? There is a catch. Should we only pay parents of the lowest socioeconomic strata for doing what is right?

What do we do with middle class and wealthy parents who don't do what is right for their children? And, if paying low-income parents is the "right thing," why isn't it "right" to pay all parents?

And what is the "Right Thing?" Here are some examples: Getting a library card for their children: \$50

Taking children to the doctor or dentist: \$100

Getting the children vaccinated

Passing a state high-stakes content exam: \$600 to student (Up to five exams) Source: New York City Government site: Schedule of Incentives

"The education incentives are designed to promote school attendance, parental engagement and improved performance on standardized tests. Health incentives will be offered for maintaining adequate health coverage as well for making timely medical and dental visits. Work-force incentives will be offered for those who sustain full-time employment and upgrade their job skills. Families that complete the noted activities will receive their cash payments every two months. The \$50 million program is being privately funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Starr Foundation, the Robin Hood Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the American International Group and Bloomberg." Source: ABC News <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=3589074&page=1> For a description of low-income parents that would have done the right thing anyway, but who are collecting the money, and how parents may delay doing the right thing until they are eligible for a payment, visit

http://www.nypost.com/seven/09132007/news/regionalnews/this_dad_is_paid_if_his_kids_g.htm Political Future or

Wasted Money? Of course, not everyone looks favorably on this program, although it is being funded with private (not government money), and the program was supposed to modeled after programs that were tested in Mexico. How could anyone object to poor parents earning extra money?

"The program is being offered to 5,000 low-income families, with payments in varying amounts to the families, if they get more involved in their children's schooling, grades, attendance, doctor's visits, etc. One excuse given in the story was that "Sometimes, people need a little encouragement, so maybe this will help wake some people up". Whatever happened to parental responsibility?! Parents need to pay close attention to what is going on with their children, their schooling, grades, their health, etc. But now parents are going to be paid to do what they should already be doing?! Hmm, paying parents to do what they should already be doing for their children, because it's their children. Isn't that what we call Bribery? Where do I sign up? I've got a kid wanting to go to

college." Source: <http://www.tellinitlikeitis.net/2007/09/mayor-bloomberg-paying-poor-to-do-the-right-thing.html> (Writing last month in Gotham Gazette, Heather MacDonald took the opposite view, arguing that it could set a dangerous and absurd precedent: "Not just attending classes, but refraining from hitting your teacher, not bringing a gun to school, showing up for an exam, bathing your kids and feeding them — all will be candidates for a

bribe.") Source: <http://www.gothamgazette.com/blogs/wonkster/2006/10/17/paying-parents-to-do-the-right-thing-new-york-is-smart-to-look-to-mexico/> And, what about the Mexican program that the New York City was model upon? This kind of cash incentive "is based on a highly successful Mexican antipoverty program, known as Oportunidades, that is now being tried by at least 25 other countries" and resulted in bigger, healthier and better-schooled

children. Source: <http://www.gothamgazette.com/blogs/wonkster/2006/10/17/paying-parents-to-do-the-right-thing-new-york-is-smart-to-look-to-mexico/>

Read a report about the Mexican Anti-Poverty program

The Mexican program started in rural areas, and migrated to urban areas (no pun intended). Economic Opportunity One issue is clear. Parents who live in poverty do not want their children to become sick, suffer, die. These parents do not want their children's to feel pangs of hunger, neither do these parents want their children's teeth to rot out. The financial incentives may look like "easy-street" freebies to some parents, but this program uncovers contentious

issues. Classroom Toolkit is just going to mention these issues, but we do not have solutions. Forces of Contention Here is a list of "hot-button" issues (in no particular order): Unskilled workers cannot earn a living wage in a city with a high cost of living (such as NYC), even by working two jobs

People who cannot support themselves on their wages cannot support children

Crime, drugs, alcoholism, gambling, prostitution and gang activities tend to find recruits in impoverished areas

Alcoholism in particular creates chromosome and genetic abnormalities that can be passed down for several generations

Mental illness may be a root cause of some of the poverty

Affluent people in plain view of the impoverished people often cause the impoverished people to feel of resentment just because the affluent people have more luck, choices, benefits than they do

The emphasis upon government assuming responsibility when parents cannot or will not take care of their children is costly

What about providing "Universal Health Care" for all children. How about "Universal Health Care" for parents so that they remain well enough to take care of their children?

Political solutions that emphasize punishment of the underclass are seldom effective. Whether true or not, people in the lowest economic stations of life often feel like they are being punished already. Imagine Paying Someone to do What they Should do. Paying someone to do what is right sounds like a novel idea. What if our politicians learned about this?

Oh wait! Don't we already pay our politicians to do the right thing?

How are the folks who can't do what is right by their constituents (because they play "party politics," make "back-room deals," "sell their votes to the highest-bidding lobbyist" going to help the poor do what is right.

Surely the poor cannot look to our politicians as role models? A Drop in the Bucket \$50 million USD is a "drop in the bucket" compared to the kind of money that it would take to make a significant impact in the poverty conditions of a city the size of New York City. \$50 million is a meager sum for running a school district of 5,000 students.

\$50 million sounds like a lot of money until you start to "crunch the numbers. If there were just over 1 million students in the NYC school system, this is a sum total of less than \$50.00 for each student. Were the program to give \$50 per student to the 100 largest school systems in the country (just over 10 million students), the program would cost over \$540 million.

Poverty is a problem in our country, we just don't believe that we have the money to fix it.

And what is \$50 per year? In the school district budget crisis a few years past, teachers were given a "token raise" of \$50.00. Of course, \$50.00 divided by 12 months, minus taxes, minus retirement; equals a barely noticeable increase on the paycheck.

What is your take on paying low-income parents to do the right thing?

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

Short Article

Schools should be Run as Businesses: Reprise

Last month, Classroom Toolkit published an article about the long-term complaint (gripe) that "Schools should be run as businesses." [Sidebar Link to the article, Should Schools be Run as a Business? What Business?](#) The complaint about schools being inefficient and poorly run resonates with politicians, the media and the public. In fact, many teachers, if they could

Sidebars was my personal observation when working for multiple school districts that in some cases the custodians had more common sense about what it took to run the school district than the district's administrators.

Teaching children is not quantum physics or advanced nuclear chemistry. Learning is innate in children, and children are eager to master their environment.

Schools where children don't learn are inexcusable. There is no excuse and no defense for such conditions. And it does not take terminal educational degrees, advanced calculus, multivariate statistics and experimental psychology to know that our schools have to expend a great deal of time, energy and money in their effort to block the learning potential for so many of our children.

This article examines what kind of business our schools' critics are referring to. Entrepreneurship. People automatically think of "large-scale corporations" when they hear the complaint that "schools should operate more like businesses." But, most people don't realize that the economic powerhouse of our economy resides in "Small Businesses" rather than large corporations. Large corporations have operating capital, but they employ only a fraction of the workforce. The engine that creates jobs in our country is "Small Business." It is the spirit of the small business, the "Entrepreneurial Spirit" that school critics overlook. What make Entrepreneurs Different? Entrepreneurs seem to possess a number of traits that differentiate the businesses that they run from the businesses that corporations run.

And, these traits may be just what school system critics wish that our schools would demonstrate in day-to-day operation. Here are a few of these traits:

Commitment: Entrepreneurs keep at their business until it pays off

Investment: Entrepreneurs invest in their business, and do not spend money on anything that does not result in profit

Consistent: Entrepreneurs keep on keeping on

Confident: Entrepreneurs are sure that what they are doing is right, and they exude that confidence

Patient: Entrepreneurs are willing to "bet the farm" and wait for the payoff

Flexible: Entrepreneurs build multiple skills and apply different strategies for different conditions

Accommodating: Entrepreneurs make things easy and comfortable for their clients and customers

Processes and Systems: Entrepreneurs develop processes and systems that they can replicate

Continuous Improvement: Entrepreneurs keep improving their business

Cloning Success by Training: Entrepreneurs package a "success skill set" and train every employee in

Measurement: Entrepreneurs know what is happening to every component of their businesses. And Entrepreneurs put streamlined measurement practices in place to keep in constant touch with the "pulse of their business"

Marketing: Entrepreneurs focus every effort, every message, every process and procedure on communicating the value of their business to the clients and customers

Delivering Benefits: Entrepreneurs deliver benefits to their clients and customers. These traits might sound strange to an educator when framed around making money. But, these traits shouldn't sound strange when focused upon teaching children, serving their needs and improving the instructional process.

Entrepreneurs' Traits Reframed for Education

Here is what the entrepreneurs' traits would sound like if we rephrased them to match the "mission critical" processes of education:

Commitment: Means that we discover what methods are needed to teach every student, and that we keep working until every student is progressing and blossoming.

Investment: Means that Educators spend funds only on what is crucial to deliver our "mission critical, core functions" and we avoid spending any resources (time, energy, money, talent, training) on anything that does not add to our students' learning (our bottom line).

Consistent: Educators deliver top-quality services to students every hour of every school day, and the quality of the preparation time and training matches our highest standards.

Patient: Educators know what works for their particular students, and are willing to continue doing what pays off in increased student learning until students learn to their capacity.

Flexible: Educators build perfect multiple skills and apply different strategies for different types of students.

Accommodating: Educators adjust and adapt to the interests and needs of their students, and make learning as easy, fun, exciting and comfortable for students as we can.

Processes and Systems: Educators develop processes and systems that they can replicate, generally by the use of technology; but also with quality training and mentoring programs. All new Educators are provided with as much help as they need so that they perfect their skills. This training is seen as an investment, rather than an overhead expense.

Continuous Improvement: Educators keep improving their business

Cloning Success by Training: Educators package a "success skill set" and train every employee in its application. The progress in improving is measured for every employee, and support for improvement is provided as a job "perk."

Measurement: Educators know what is happening to every component of their businesses. And Educators put streamlined measurement practices in place to keep in constant touch with the "pulse of their business"

Marketing: Educators focus every effort, every message, every process and procedure on communicating the value of their business to the clients and customers

Delivering Benefits: Educators deliver benefits to their clients and customers. Implications for our Critics: It may be difficult for the "corporate-minded," "chain-of-command-oriented" managers of our schools to convert from a minimally effective outlook to a "success-oriented, entrepreneurs' mind set."

Frustration and stagnation may have become institutionalized and solidified within the governance structure of some school districts. And, there seems to be little relief from the politicians that impede progress by "layering" multiple, costly, non-productive policies and restrictions upon the management of our schools.

However, whenever the critics chant the; "Schools should be run as a business" mantra; we can deliver a "hot-air-deflating" retort by agreeing that this statement is true; if and only if the business model that schools use is an entrepreneur-type business model. Final Word: And, to get in the last word, teachers can point out that, although the school district operates as a "bloated-budget, top-heavy, bureaucracy" (as Charter Schools often prove); I, as a teacher, operate as an entrepreneur within the system in delivering instructional service to my students.

Whatever the outcome of the total system, each teacher can run their own classrooms as an entrepreneur. This is the best method for assuring each student's success.

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

Feature Article

Do you Really Expect your Students to be "Motivated to Learn if you Fail to Market your Course-of-Study?"

Did you ever hear this kind of teacher lounge chatter? "Students are lazy, but this year's batch is lazier than ever." "Yea, if initiative were dynamite, they couldn't collect enough between them to blow one of their noses." "They don't do their homework, they don't bring their books to class, they secretly send text messages from cell phones hidden under their desks, and they play video games on our classroom computer every time my back is turned." "I think that the only secret to making these kids work is a cattle prod. The Supreme Court that outlawed paddling took away the last motivational tool that we had. The teacher is helpless." "Blah, yak, groan, grumble, etc." **Marketing Hype** The days when students eagerly await the wafting "words of wisdom" from the teacher's lips like flower petals at the feet of a bride, and the days of students scrambling to please the teacher with adoration (and with demonstrations of knowledge mastery through avid and fervent study for exams) never were.

Sure there were a few bright and compliant students that rocketed past their complacent peers, skewing the grading

curve (during the unenlightened days of "bell-shaped" grading); but for the most part, motivation was relegated to "forced compliance" techniques.

In the main, students never liked to study. Students never lacked diversions from their studies, either. However, today's diversions are more technical; i.e., video games, TV, portable music players; in addition to the ever popular sex, drugs and drinking.

But what happens when children with insatiable, unquenchable curiosity and an boundless thirst for self-mastery and achievement run headlong into the barriers, barricades and dead-end streets of our school systems? What happens to our students unique skills, their creativity, artistry, and self-expression? What transformation "morphs" our students dynamic attitudes, wide-ranging interests and eagerness to learn (that they had when they arrived on the doorsteps of our schools?)

Answer: We bore the excitement out of our students.

Imagine a marriage where the husband is forced to attend the ballet or the opera when he wanted to go to the football game with his friends, or wanted to watch the basketball game on TV.

Imagine a wife who is coerced to go on a fishing trip, or to go backpacking in the mountains when she really longs to go shopping for lingerie and new dresses.

Imagine the child who wants to learn about countless wonders who is forced to read the next section of the textbook and write out the "best-guess" answers to the questions at the end of the chapter. [Note: The answers are "best-guess" because these are the answers that the teacher (and the textbook authorities) believe to be "correct." "Correct" answers are accepted, while answers that rub the "wrong way" are punished. Teachers' Marketing Errors Teachers (as ineffective marketers) assume that their course-of-study is "in demand" and wonder why their "content product" leaves their students cold. Here are teachers' major marketing errors: Teaching to "needs instead of wants." Marketers know that what people need seldom sells, and that products must be what people want. So, teachers must embed required course content in stories and information that students want to know about

Pretending that "One Size Fits All." Marketers know that products must be individualized, personalized, tailor-made, even custom-made or customized to obtain high market demand. So, teachers must personalize and customize course materials to current student interests

Expecting student motivation to be equal. Marketers know that every person (student) has different motivations for buying (or learning). So, teachers must use a huge bag of motivational tactics to engage students

Failing to perform market research. Marketers survey their market, and structure their sales presentations appropriately. So, teachers must listen to students and act upon what students tell them

Failing to test, test, test. Marketers test to see if their message resonates with their customers, clients and prospects.

This is a test to determine how well the teacher is delivering information that is "spun" and customized to account for students interests, not a test for "how much content students are retaining. So, teachers must keep asking questions to uncover any blanks or gaps that students have in the course-of-study learning and thinking that the students have accomplished Control what you Can Control Some areas of course content are outside a teacher's control. For example, a teacher cannot control… State Standards

Grade-Level Curriculum

The Prescribed Textbook

The Students that are Assigned to Class

The Philosophy of School Administrators Some things that teachers can control include: Integrating math, health, mental health and technology into stories related to every content area objective

Prizing students for their unique, personal, creative perspectives on the content area material

Directing the interpersonal and peer group towards caring and a healthy inclusion of all students

Focusing on higher-order thinking, Multiple Intelligences and the creative process instead of rote drill Turning "Dull Content" into "Bling" Teachers that understand that passion and excitement translate into learning that "sticks" market their course-of-study.

The teacher's personality dictates whether the course is "hyped" with fanfare, spotlights and an inflatable gorilla (like a used car salesperson); or on the quite side, like a camp counselor who is telling stories around the fire.

No matter how much introversion or extroversion that marketing methods take, consistent and skillful marketing will include the following: Teachers will adjust the content to what students are interested in. And, teachers will communicate in ways that pique students' interest. Teachers market the course-of-study by getting students' attention

Teachers will show students how unique the content that they are learning is. (Marketers label this "a unique value proposition." This means that students come to believe that they can't get this knowledge, in this way, anywhere else.

Students come to believe that they are privy to something special, and privileged to be part of this teacher's inner circle Teachers make motivational and compliance easy, one-step-at-a-time. This means that teacher train students to comply by asking them to choose between only one option at a time, then create small "yes" steps to the big "yes." Teachers lead students from one step to the next

Teachers reduce risk for students. This is done by providing peer group supported reasons for learning (so that the peer group doesn't sabotage the learning), and by providing a guarantee for reward (without a threat of loss) for each assignment

Teachers provide testimonials (from former students, from successful students) to demonstrate that the course-of-study

is fun, exciting, important, doable, beneficial, interesting, worth doing

Teachers include a "Call to Action" that motivates students to respond, now, with the desired action step. Master Teaching Master teachers have used marketing techniques to promote student learning for millennia. They have just used other terms (educational jargon) to describe the process that they were using. The words describing the motivational process include: Grabbing attention, stimulating a desire to learn, moving student to learn, boosting interest, etc.

Master teachers also "reframe" the learning process so that their descriptions coincide with what students are interested in. For example, assumptions can be examined as "myths," issues can be embedded in human interest (even salacious and scandalous) stories (true or not), and concepts can be applied to any personal or professional experience. For example, a student's interest in auto mechanics or fashion design can be used to describe math concepts, health issues, science principles, politics, etc.

The connections between the course-of-study and each student's interests are limited only by the teacher's creativity and imagination; and it is just that creativity and imagination that teachers need to "set off" in students.

Master teachers also perfected marketing's "bonus offer." Here "extra credit" has allowed teachers to use talents and skills from students' various Multiple Intelligences to compensate for less than stellar abilities in the "Verbal-Linguistic" and "Mathematical-Logical" areas that lesser teachers fixate upon.

Master teachers also negotiate the means and methods that will be used during class to increase the knowledge and skills that the students acquire. Less masterful teachers fixate on a "one-method-teachers-all" strategy with "quiz and test with points off" de-motivators. These same "dim stars of the education stage" often link the "point-off" strategy to "motivating" students to complete their homework.

Unfortunately, what this process succeeds in doing is to teach students to dislike and mistrust their teacher. The Magic of Marketing: Same as Masterful Teaching A master teachers know that marketing a course-of-study is less about scattering a our message to the wild-open world of students as the psychologists, professors and theorists imagine them to be; but more about pinpointing a specific message to each specific student.

Think more like a (scum of the Earth) telemarketer on the phone with you during your dinnertime, one to one; instead of the radio that plays in the background.

What's the difference?

Answer: You hear one, but no one hears the other.

Which results do you want your course-of-study teaching to emulate?

And remember the slick marketer's most guarded secret, i.e., that "People buy from people that they like."

The foundation of your marketing your course-of-study to your students is to earn their trust, deserve their respect, and treat them kindly and well; to be seen as the kind of person that they would like to learn from.

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

Quick Tips

Translation Technology: Ready for Prime Time?

Translation software and online translation services abound. But, are any of them good enough for "prime time," i.e., good enough for use in your classroom. Of course, if you need to communicate, even a poor translation that gets your point across; or helps you understand what the parents or student is trying to say, is beneficial.

As a "down and dirty, quick fix," it is hard to fault free translation software and free translation services.

But, what is the catch? Language plus Culture = Communication The first issue is that "word for word" translations seldom communicate the precise meaning. So, if the communication is super important (maybe even legal) such as Special Education Students' Individual Education Plans, grievance forms, failure notices, anything that can come back to bite you; get a professional person to translate for you.

For other stuff, decide if the trade off of "quick vs. quality translating" is worthwhile. Online Translation Services BabelFish (at Altavista;)

Google; Translator (at Google;)

Translate (at Paralink;)

Translator (at WorldLingo;)

Translator (at Dictionary.Com;)

Multiple Translator (at Omniglot;)

Of course, if you have time to burn, you can examine each any of the 9.9 million search result links for "online translation" …

Google; Search for "Online Translation" Of course, you get what you pay for, and this stuff is "free."

Also note that if you search using Google; and you find a resource that is written in another language, Google;'s search listing offers to translate the page (or resource) for you. Good luck if you demand accuracy, though. Translation Software Translation Software is not much better than online translation software.

However, there is one exception.

The one program that does a "noble" if less than precise job is the program, SEER;.

But, SEER™ is different because it requires user input to identify the part of speech and the usage that need to be translated.

But, this requires "human intervention" that takes thought and time." Of course, "thought and time are what you pay a professional translator to do.

And, SEER™ is pricey, at about \$300 USD. The product is also available for an annual subscription of about \$100 USD.

And, SEER™ recommends that you employ a professional translator, or at least a native speaker of the language that you want to translate to (the target language).

SEER™ offers a free download, but you might be better off purchasing the trial CD since the trial CD gives you 70 days of use before it stops translating for you. If you use the trial CD and then purchase the SEER™ product, all your translation work will remain available and usable!Link to the SEER™ Site

Link to the SEER™ Download Page

Link to the SEER™ CD Order Page

Remember that Culture is Crucial For Translation

Word analysis (vocabulary) is important, as is grammar, syntax and spelling. But, the culture that the language is embedded in is also important to the translation process.

In addition, native English speakers are generally unaware of just how difficult English is to translate.

While the sentence structure and grammar rules of English are easy, English…Spelling, synonyms, homonyms and exceptions are horrendous

Has more words than other languages, over 900,000

Co opts words from other languages at a frantic pace

Uses slang and idioms (also at a frantic pace) in lieu of structured conventions

Modifies daily with expressions that are gleaned form the broadcast and film mediaPhrases that didn't exist yesterday can come to prominence in a short time, and be listed in the Oxford Dictionary to the surprise of everybody.SidebarLink to a description of how words are added to the Oxford Dictionary

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

Top Tips

Classroom Toolkit Presentations

This article provides links to several of professional presentations available online from Classroom Toolkit.As the year finishes, and Volume 3 of Classroom Toolkit comes to a close, our plan is to focus our newsletter in new directions. Directions that match more of our personal interest in teacher self-development and teacher self-actualization. This plan calls for more coaching and counseling-related articles, and less about technology issues and the failing of our bureaucratic school systems.

These links will make it easy for Classroom Toolkit readers to find our presentations.Presentation ListNote: Some of these resources contain nested (i.e., presentations linked within presentations) presentations.Teacher Time Saver Resources

Graphic Organizers Resources

Graphic Organizers eBook

Graphic Organizers Story Board

Technology Integration

No Teacher Left Behind (Technology Integration)

Visual Communication

Follow-Up for Training and Professional Development

Coaching for Test Taking

Designing Online Courses with Free Software

Open Source Software Marketing for Schools Checklist

here are enough presentations to keep you busy.

Here's to your continued success in the New Year.

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

Teacher Resources

Technology Skills every Teacher Needs

In the old days, before computers and the Internet, skills in basic office duplication were enough for most teachers.This is not true, now, and teachers are being "cajoled, driven, herded, forced and pushed" to build, upgrade and enhance their technology skills.

Of course, there are many technology skills, from basic word processing, to spreadsheet and database management, to

HTML and Web Design, to programming in a variety of languages (dozens are popular)

Then, of course, are all the software applications including attendance, grade keeping, instructional and tutorial software, probeware, simulation software, and the ubiquitous textbook auxiliary CDS.

Besides this, hundreds of free Open Source software products, Freeware, Bannerware, and Trialware beckon, just a mouse click away.

What is the busy teacher to do?

Surely all this stuff can't be useful. How does a teacher decide what is important?

Focus on Skill (not Technology) to Make Sense of the Technology

Since there is no time to dabble in all these technology marvels, a teacher must focus upon what will improve instruction, save time, and increase measurable students' achievement. Anything else is "jogging with technology gorilla on your back" … it just weighs you down and holds down your progress.

So, focus upon usable skills, rather than the technology.

Here is a list of possible skills that you might find useful. Unfortunately, the list is excessively long. Fortunately, some of people behind these resources have done the research for you. You might need skills in …

Word Processing

Spreadsheets

Electronic Presentation

E-Mail Management

Database

Web Navigation

Anti-Virus, Password and Security

Computer, Computer Accessories, Components and Peripherals Operation

File Download and Management

Network Operation (Home Directories, Storage Locations, Virtual Private Networks)

Digital Cameras

Scanners

Personal Digital Assistants (PDA's)

Website Design

Videoconferencing

Educational Copyright Knowledge

Online Training (WebCT, Blackboard, or Moodle)

Computer Programming Unfortunately, the searching, finding and learning of all these technology marvels just takes too long for today's busy teacher.

Here are some links to the basic technology skills information

Twenty Basic Skills that Every Educator should Know (The Journal ™ Online)

Twenty Basic Skills (DOC format)

Twenty Basic Skills (PDF format)

What Every Teacher should Know about Technology

78 Websites Every EFL Teacher Should Know Classroom Toolkit is Different Of course, Classroom Toolkit is a site that helps teachers save time and reduce stress.

And while the list above may lead teachers to many directions and provide many avenues for additional "branching off into new skill areas," the basic Classroom Toolkit strategy is to "learn as you go" and implement only what is useful at the moment to improve your teaching and to improve your students' learning.

The "acid test, litmus test" is whether student achievement improves by your investment in time and energy.

If technology doesn't seem to do that for you, do not feel guilty. Perhaps you can learn the language and culture of your Hispanic students instead.

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

Book Review

Book Title: How to Learn any Language

Author: Farber, Barry ISBN: 1-56731-543-7 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1991 Publisher: NY: Barnes and Noble Books

Pages: 172 Cost: \$ (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$7.00 new, 2002 edition) \$2.94 (used) - \$1.24 at eBay ™

(as an eBook) Subtitle: Quickly, easily and On your Own! The Books' Topics: This book describes the following: How the

author came to be fluent in 18 languages

The system that the author uses to learn languages The author also describes the relationships and quirks of many languages in the world, and provides an abbreviated grammar primer. The central themes of this book are: The traditional high school and college approaches to learning language are ineffective

A systematic, multi-pronged approach to learning languages is effective

Practicing a target language in every spare moment brings language mastery Keywords: Language Learning

Multiple-Track Attack

Hidden Moments for Review and Reinforcement

Magic Memory Aids
Main Idea: The author describes a system that pieces together a textbook, grammar book, phrase book, dictionary, cassette program, flashcards and a newspaper to develop a sustained focus for learning a language. The author points out that the study of a language needs consistency, and resolve; plus the ingenuity to fill every spare moment with study.

The author downplays the need to learn (boring) grammar before diving into the study of a language, and he provides a short summary of all the grammar that a language learner needs to get well along on the path to mastering a foreign language. Quotes: "Common sense also tells us…that we can't enjoy communicating in a foreign language until we learn it. This means years of brain-benumbing conjugations, declensions, idioms, exceptions, subjunctives, and irregular verbs. And here common sense is wrong, completely wrong. When it comes to learning foreign languages, we can start with the dessert and then use its sweetness to inspire us to back up and devour the main course."(p. - 5)

"Up to now, grammar has been used by our language educators to anesthetize us against progress. If it's grammar versus fun, we're going to minimize grammar and maximize fun. We're going to find more pleasant ways to absorb grammar."(p. - 5)

"All of us 'spill' enough minutes every day to learn a whole new language a year! Just as the Dutch steal land from the sea, you will learn to steal language-learning time, even from a life that seems completely filled or overflowing. What do you do, for example, while you're waiting for an elevator, standing in line at the bank, waiting for the person you're calling to answer the phone, holding the line, getting gas, waiting to be ushered from the waiting room into somebody's office, waiting for your date to arrive, waiting for anything at any time."(p. - 6)

"Expertise is a narcotic. As knowledge grows, it throws off pleasures to its possessor, much like an interest-bearing account throws off money."(p. - 22)

Myths:

"I'll put on my language cassettes while I work around the house and learn the language as easily as I learn lyrics to popular songs."(p. - 38)

"Since I'm not in school anymore, time isn't important. I'll take my time, skip a day, skip two days; the language will still be there when I get back to it."(p. - 38)

"I'm never going to pose as a native speaker of the language, and I'd never be able to pull it off if I tried so why bother to develop the right accent?"(p. - 39)

"Americans have grown up believing learning languages is hard. It is not hard! It merely seems hard because language instruction in American schools and colleges has until lately been so exasperatingly dull and unrewarding."(p. - 42)

"I've long entertained the fantasy of putting the old orthodox grammarians on trial for war crimes, the specific charge being assassination of the fun that flows from gaining command of another language. Their defense will be predictably be 'Bah humbug. You can't immerse, converse, rehearse, or even play around with a foreign language without a good foundation in grammar!'"(p. - 43)

"Grammar is an edifice that you build on your property. But it doesn't have to be done all at once."(p. - 44)

"It may be strange to some (and wildly objectionable to others) to recommend do-it-yourself language cassettes starring you in the language you are trying to learn. Orthodox language teachers are likely to consider this something akin to doing your own eye surgery."(p. - 57)

"It's better to know the word—its meaning, its spelling, its use in sentences—even if you have to listen to it in your unskilled accent, then not to know the word at all."(p. - 58)

"The language student should reach for a fresh stack of flash cards before he leaves home in the morning as instinctively as a policeman reaches for his badge. The flash card, more than any other tool, can help the student take advantage of the day's 'hidden moments,' the secret weapon upon which the promise and premise of this method is based."(p. - 58)

"We have some magic, all right, tricks and tactics that literally shovel the language into your head, as opposed to your high-school Spanish class that tea spooned in in or didn't bother getting it in at all. The system, however, won't work unless you do. There's going to be pain, but you will have something—plenty—to show for it…The promise here is not gain without pain. It's the most gain for the least pain."(p. - 60)

"Attempting to master a language with a grammar book alone is too boring;" with a phrase book alone, too superficial; with cassettes alone, too fruitless (except with Pimsleur!); and with dictionary and newspaper alone, impossible. The multiple track attack makes your work pay off(p. - 61 & 62)

"Tradition-bound teachers would have problems with that kind of 'ice plunge,' a naked leap into a foreign language newspaper after only five lessons of grammar with nothing for help but a dictionary, which in many cases can't help because you won't know the various disguises (changing forms) of many of the words."(p. - 68)

"America is a nation of people who make straight A's in intermediate French and then get to Paris and realize they don't speak intermediate French!"(p. - 68)

"Are you presently armed with the right cassette course?…Unless your cassette was mislabeled and carries lessons in a language other than the one you'd like to learn, it's a good learning aid. It may not be the best. It may be far behind the best, but so what? It will offer you words and phrases in your target language with native accuracy in pronunciation."(p. - 71)

"Harnessing your hidden moments, those otherwise meaningless scraps of time you'd never normally think of putting to any practical use, and using them for language study; even if it's no more than fifteen, ten, or five seconds at a time; can turn you into a triumphant tortoise." (p. - 74)

"Hidden moments will heal your deficiencies soon enough, but first let's talk about the unhidden moments", the study time that you've arranged to commit to your endeavor; Successful self-teaching is our objective. If you can take a whole hour every day and devote it to your studies, you're in an excellent position to make satisfying, even dramatic, progress. If you can devote a half hour a day, you're still poised for success; If you can't commit a regular block of time, if the best you can do is an hour here, a half hour there, and maybe a three hour block of time over the weekend, that's satisfactory, provided you keep it up and maintain momentum. Gardens unattended [sic] go to weed. Apples bitten into and abandoned turn brown. Likewise, your collection of language data; words, phrases, rules, and idioms; will dissolve into a worthless mass if not kept up. Apportion as much time as you reasonably can and as regularly as you can, and then enjoy the magic as the hidden moments kick in. (p. - 75)

"Arrange your life so you will never be caught without something to study in your target language." (p. - 77)

"When you encounter a native speaker of your target language, and when you start a conversation in that language, three things are certain. You will be stuck for words you need but don't know. He will use words you don't understand. And you will make mistakes. Get in the habit of exploiting these moments to the hilt." (p. - 103)

"Native English speakers have more to gain from studying other languages than everybody else. Honor, love, cooperation, respect, advantage; they all shower on people in inverse proportion to their need to learn a language." (p. - 110)

"Two, four, six, eight years of high-school and college study in a foreign language, and still our American graduates can't tell whether the man on the radio speaking the language they 'learned' is declaring war or recommending a restaurant." (p. - 114) Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the problems with language learning that are encountered in high school and college classes, i.e., the approach is slow, boring and doesn't work.

Instead, the author proposes a system of self study that uses many tools and learning aids, especially the ones that the person already has, to develop a review and reinforcement system.

The most important issue is whether readers are sufficiently motivated to set up a system for learning a language, and then going through the expense of purchasing all the learning tools that the author recommends. The Book's Shortcomings: The author clearly knows what it takes to study and master a language. But, he doesn't say what a language teacher needs to do to help a classroom full of recalcitrant students.

Of course, the book is written for people who don't have the time or money to take a college or community education class. But, the book could have addressed how a language teacher might approach teaching language skills in the framework of our public school system.

In addition, the book could have addressed issues concerning how we should talk to children who speak a foreign language, rather than just how to talk to adults. This is important as many teachers now find children that speak languages other than English in their classrooms.

The last missing element in this book is a focus upon knowing the culture of the target language.

The author's focus upon the vocabulary and mechanics of language learning keeps us too busy to study the culture that adds richness, depth and meaning to that language. Comments: The "all out assault" on the learning of a language that the author recommends is probably beyond the motivation of most people.

Still, the concept of a multiple-track attack on the study of any subject is something that

And, if teachers promoted the multiple-track attack to all students so that students could pick their preferred learning styles, many students would learn a lot more.

Although this edition of the book is outdated in terms of the technology, the basic principles of language learning remain valid and reliable.

The only things that might have changed are: The Internet provides all types of language resources

The computer can be used to record language pronunciation practice

CDs and MP3 players have replaced cassette programs

Digital Voice Recorders work better than tape recorders

But, despite technological advances, personal commitment, personal daily practice, and personal motivation remain the prime factors in learning a language. Summary: The author demonstrates a passion for learning languages that inspires learners of any content area. The author's philosophy of 1.) using every method and modality of learning, 2.) finding connections between what is already known, 3.) using every spare moment for learning and 4.) measuring progress provide a model for all types of learning.

Teachers that show their students how to make use of the personal learning styles for learning practice will provide their students with a life-long learning skill.

Barry Farber also lets his passion for languages show, and his passion is contagious. This is also the type of contagion that teachers need to infect their students with. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2
Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.2

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

Professional Self-Development

Communicating with Hispanic and Minority Students: You can get by with Limited Language Skills, but Learn the Culture
Communicating with students is the most important professional development skill that teachers can improve.

Communicating in ways that build positive and trusting relationships is an independent variable influencing a teacher's success. Learning theory, discipline theory, management theory, and skill at using technology are OK; but theories and gadgets don't motivate students to learn to their potential.

What motivates students is a meaningful relationship with their teacher…a relationship based upon trust, confidence and communication.

But, what happens when teachers and students speak different languages. Languages are "Vocabulary Shallow" and "Culture Deep" The vocabulary of a different language draws attention to itself (in the same way that a cat draws attention to itself at a dog show). It is "up front and apparent."

But, vocabulary is only the surface level of a language, and like an iceberg, most of the mass (the culture) rides below the surface.

And, although learning the language of your students is a first step, the real relationship building starts when their teacher learns each student's culture. Sidebar Of course, when teacher and students use the same language, i.e., English, it is easy to assume that communication will occur naturally. But, as any teacher of African-American students can verify, the languages use the same vocabulary: but the cultures use different assumptions and meanings. Actually, there are really two (or more) different dictionaries; and therefore, the similar sounding words represent different vocabularies. A teacher's job is to teach the vocabulary of each content area subject. But, the road to increasing the content area vocabularies of students is paved with the culture of the language that students bring to school.

In fact, it is easier for a teacher to make the mistake of believing that he or she is communicating to students when the students use the same language and vocabulary, than when the teacher and students speak different Native Languages.

If the teacher speaks only English, and the student is a native Spanish speaker, it is easier for the teacher to recognize a communications gap than when both the "Middle-Class-English-speaking" teacher encounters a "Ghetto-Speaking" African-American student.

Whatever the native language or languages of the teacher and student, teachers must "get a grip" on the culture of each student, because culture is more important than language in building a trusting personal relationships between a teacher and his or her students. Study Students of Different Cultures by Listening Unfortunately, teachers cannot launch a Website or check out a library book and learn the principles of culture that will enable them to direct and motivate their students.

This kind of learning is "face-to-face, heart-to-heart," and listening to students is the ticket to the "trusting relationship game." Of course, the more the teacher knows about each student's native language, the more the teacher is able to comprehend the culture of each student. But this relationship building is more about interaction and mutual respect than it is about developing knowledge and theories. Socio-Economic Strata and Communication It would be nice (but shortsighted) to think that all students that speak the same language grow up in the same culture.

Take Spanish, for instance. There are 21 countries where Spanish is spoken as the primary language, and the United States just happens to be the country with the third-largest Spanish speaking population (soon to overtake Spain for second place) in the world. Spanish is the third most used language on the Internet (after English and Chinese); and Spanish is the third most influential language in the world (after English and French).

To assume that Puerto Rican culture (remember that Puerto Ricans are American citizens by birth and that Puerto Rico is an American Territory) and a Mexican American or Mexican immigrant all come from the same culture because they speak the same native language is to be "self-deceived."

However, some patterns of students' belief and behavior seem to transcend culture, e.g., students from the lower socio-economic groups demonstrate some similar characteristics.

Sidebar For example: Students from the lower socio-economic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Native American) seem to exhibit similar school-motivation characteristics. These similar patterns of belief and behavior seem to include: A desire and preference for more immediate reinforcement and gratification

A desire and preference for tangible rewards

A lot of anger when punishment is delivered by anyone, especially from teachers who come from outside the native culture

A distrust for intrinsic motivation and a distrust for waiting to receive future rewards Teachers who listen to students "with an ear for language and a heart for culture" begin to understand their students on a level that builds a relationship of

mutual respect. Brain Matters: Ditch the Theories When teachers bother to learn the culture of each of their students, a pattern of understanding and mutual trust evolves from the relationship.

This is a "learn as you go" type of on-the-job training that cannot be pieced together ahead of time. The cultural understanding that is based upon face-to-face and heart-to-heart interaction is idiosyncratic and does not fit into neat, theoretical packages.

This relationship building develops a "Higher-order Interaction Process" with a message-by-message (deductive rather than inductive) level of cultural communication.

The reason that this relationship process cannot be inductive (general knowledge, i.e., from theory to the particular) is that every student is unique.

It is only after gaining experience that is built from personal and individual interaction with students that a teacher earns the right to generalize cultural knowledge and form "compare and contrast" working hunches.

When teachers listen "person-to-person and heart-to-heart," and when teachers focus upon "higher-order understanding" of each student's culture during this relationship building, teaching takes on a "whole new" timbre, texture and twinkle that is impossible with theoretical analysis.

Take the time to learn the culture of each of your students. The tapestry of your teaching will become richer and more luxurious. Language Learning Resources Transparent Language Free Before You Know It™ Software Download Rosetta Stone Rosetta Stone Spanish (Latin America): Language Learning Software.

Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program

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

Open Source for Education

Lack of Educational Intelligence: The Major Problem with Open Source Software

On the face of it, license-free software seems like a "better-than-the-proverbial-sliced-bread" idea. We can download gigabytes of tools to drive our instructional delivery and instructional management. We can install hundreds of learning-aid tools that propel student learning to "high-stakes-test-scoring" heights. We expect that this license-free stuff will: Make students learn better, faster, easier, more…

Reinforce the concepts that we meticulously lectured about

Solidify cognitive connotations between (and among) ideas and intellectual constructs that have become anchored in our students' idea repertoires

Launch the "knowledge-cognition-analysis-application-synthesis-evaluation" higher-order thinking skills paradigm to nose-bleed-producing heights Sidebar Open Source software is not the only free stuff available for teachers to use for personal productivity or student learning. Other categories of free tools include: Freeware: (Free software, but you can't alter the source code)

Trialware: (Free to use for a trial period, often 30 days. Sometimes, this is more than enough)

AdWare: (Free to use software or services that are paid for by the ads that are flashed in front of you)

Commercial No-Cost Products: (Software tools that are no-cost that are used to sell expensive products. For example, Adobe's Acrobat Reader is the software that reads all those "PDF" files that you find on the Internet.

Adobe gives this reader away so that people who want to share printable documents are influenced to purchase the expensive Acrobat's (PDF creator) software. Unfortunately, reality seldom bends or contorts itself to the will of our fantasy and wishful thinking.

Why no Educational Intelligence

Open Source software (freeware and other no-cost tools) are not created with teachers in mind.

In fact, teachers have to scramble and strategize to make use of most software, even the "educational type."

Although talented and top-notch programmers earn three to four times as much as expert and "long-term seniority-level" teachers, programmers do not understand the job of teaching (They don't have a clue)

Could not step into your classroom and keep order, let alone get your students to complete the assignments

Believe that teaching is easy and that clear explanations (embodying the logic used in programming) are all that are needed to prompt students to learn

Could not bring your students anywhere close to the performance that you will bring them on the high-stakes test In

addition, Open Source projects are: Programmer Community Driven: A loose (sometimes, ad hoc, committee of volunteers decides on a project idea, and volunteers contribute to the overall code devotement

The programs are often "knock offs," i.e., "copy-cat ideas" of commercial programs, especially of Apple's ideas, but also of Microsoft's and Adobe's ideas. Due to the distributed nature of the Open Source

development, the software does not fit together Sidebar The exception to this scenario is Novel's. Novel has developed an Enterprise Level solution of Open Source software that is tailor-made for school districts. Of course, the design, engineering and testing of Enterprise-level software is expensive. Therefore, Novel's solution is not "free."

In addition, Novel's solution is also compliant with the Schools interoperability Framework (SIF) Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) Most Open Source software does not focus upon integration with other software that is found in school districts.

However, commercial software vendors see the wisdom of this strategy, and the major players have joined the SIF Association.

Who are the major players? Here is a partial list of companies that teachers might be familiar with:

Apple;
CampusWare;
Chancery Software;
Compass Learning;
Curriculum Associates;
Curriki;
IBM;
Microsoft;
Novel;
Pearson;
Plato;
Renaissance Learning;
Scholastic;

Visual Software; For a complete list, visit the SIF Association site:

Membership in the SIF Association by school districts ranges from entire states with vision, including: Alaska
Pennsylvania

South Carolina

Virginia

Wyoming Or, State Departments of Education and a few school districts in the following states:

Arizona
Connecticut

Florida

Hawaii

Indiana

Kansas

Kentucky

Minnesota

New Hampshire

New Jersey

New York

North Carolina

Ohio

Oklahoma

Oregon

Texas

Wisconsin

Wyoming Why aren't the rest of the states alert enough to provide the vision and commitment, plus the funding to become compliant with a software standard that would provide the following benefits?

Access to better quality data
Spending more time on instruction and less on paperwork

Money savings; and not just on software purchase, software management; but also on the work that teacher, librarians, counselors and campus administrators must perform

Reduced support costs

Access to SIF implementation tools and support

Network with a wide variety of local, state and federal education decision-makers -- as well as software developers and vendors

If joining the SIF Association seems like a "no brainer," and you don't see your school district or your state Department of Education on the SIF Association membership list, then check around to find out the reason that your school district or state is lagging behind. One possible reason is that other states would like the few states with vision to pay for early development. Then, they can join in later without supporting the organization in its development. Another reason could be that the state is grappling with the effects of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and is too busy propping up test scores to care about the extra work that teachers and school district staff have to perform; due to the fact that productivity and learning management software fail to work together.

A third scenario, like happened in Texas, is that the State Department of Education doesn't have the staff to promote an initiative that is useful for schools. In the Texas case, the Texas Education Agency fired all the "Ed Tech" folks several years ago, and has taken years to rebuild its technical expert staff.

Note: This sort of mismanagement creates what we call in Texas the "TwoFer Effect." The "TwoFer Effect" means that you get two for one, i.e., for each year that the fired staff is not rehired or replaced, the state lags behind by two years.

For example, if the Ed Tech staff is not rehired for five years, then five years of progress are lost; then, it takes two or three years for the staff to ramp up the program that was allowed to languish. So, the reconstituted staff starts with a seven or eight year lag before they can begin making up the five years that were lost. The lost progress is easily a decade or a decade and a half if the project languishes for just five years.

Teachers focus their attention and life energy upon instruction. Teachers are "single-minded" about this.

In addition, teachers are often "swamped and overwhelmed" by lots of paperwork and "rinky-dink" non-instructional (non-payoff) tasks that flush upon them from the chain-of-command bureaucracy. Information flow is the crux of "Educational Intelligence." The product of applied intelligence is called "wisdom."

In most work sites, teacher wisdom flows one way, i.e., from teacher to teacher; or, from teacher to students.

Wisdom seldom flows two ways, i.e., from teacher to principal; or, teacher to superintendent; and from teacher to student.

One way information flow, is the rule in a "chain-of-command" organization. But, if educational intelligence cannot come from the "top" (because it doesn't reside there); and if educational intelligence is squelched from the bottom (because the bureaucratic, chain-of-command, control valves block the upward flow) then how can Open Source solutions gain a foothold in education.

If educational intelligence doesn't drive instructional management and instructional delivery, how does software that was not developed with clear educational principles stand a chance of success?

The Reason that Educational Intelligence won't go "Open Source" Educational Intelligence, the ability to collect data and create decision-supporting "Dashboards" that collect, interpret and deliver meaningful data in real time, will not enter the Open Source arena.

These programs are complicated, and the programs rely on a solid understanding of the thought infrastructure and underlying principles behind those decisions.

Developing educational intelligence would require that we: Dump our educational theories and base our strategies and instructional practices on "the facts of observable and measurable observation"

Evaluate the past decisions of bureaucratic decision-makers, and expose the wisdom (or lack thereof) of all those "magic-bullet" innovations that failed to bare fruit

Pay some really high-priced technical talent to custom-build the system (by extremely high-priced, we are talking about \$250 to \$300 USD per hour and multiple years of billable time)

Pay for some really high-priced hardware, software, support contracts and technical training School districts that balk at paying \$150 to \$175 per hour for technical help just crumple when they find that these Business Intelligence folks command payment in the \$250 to \$300 dollars per hour range.

Can't you see our school district folks responding like whimpering dogs that have just taken a "big-stick beating" when they learn what such a system would cost? And, that does not factor in the lead time that it will take while the technical folks get "up to speed" (climb the learning curve) concerning the underlying processes and educational intelligence strategies.

If you are going to measure strategic processes, you better know how the measurable activities, benchmarks, and underlying systems work. Therefore, the project will amass a huge cost before the first bit of helpful technology is created.

One reason that Educational Intelligence will not go "Open Source" is that there is so much money to be made for the people that can develop this type of application. For example, recent news reports show that major software players went on a Business Intelligence "shopping spree." For example: SAP AG purchased Business Objects SA for \$7 billion USD

IBM purchased Cognos for \$5 billion USD

Oracle purchased Hyperion Solutions Corp. for \$3.3 billion USD Of course, these cash-rich, high tech companies know something that school district personal don't know, i.e., that streamlining the decision-making process to enable front-line, operational employees to make real-time, on the spot decisions increases customer satisfaction and profits.

An analogy for school districts would be allow teachers to make on-the-spot spending, discipline and scheduling decisions without having to obtain prior approval. For example, Federal Express provides a budget and authorizes supervisors to make \$100, "no questions asked" refunds for any shipment that was delayed.

Fed Ex has the wisdom to know that customer satisfaction is crucial for repeat business in their competitive industry. Sure, this is an expensive strategy, but Federal Express understands the business intelligence enough to know that losing angry, unsatisfied customers costs immensely more. Anyone that has seen the endless delays in getting school district decisions made

Tricks of giving credit for good ideas to supervisors, even after they did everything possible to sabotage the idea

Squelching of initiative and great ideas by campus leadership because it wasn't their idea

"Protect your tail feathers" hesitancy in trying something new by staff at all levels of the school district's organization

"Don't do anything controversial" and "avoid complaints at all cost" mentality that paralyzes basic, common sense

action knows that "bureaucratic nonsense," rather than "educational intelligence" often operates with impunity in our school systems

If Open Source solutions were developed with "educational intelligence," the entire bureaucratic structure (and all its foibles and inefficiencies) would stand exposed. (Talk about an emperor without clothes!) Of course, school district officials should welcome "full, frontal" exposure to all aspects and operations of their system because they hold these assets and responsibilities in public trust.

If Open Source could build on "educational intelligence," then all school district operations would become transparent, i.e., open.

Worst PracticesThe top four worst practices for integrating educational intelligence are: Assuming the average teacher has the time, expertise, desire and technology resources to use educational intelligence tools

Expecting Microsoft® Excel to become the default educational intelligence platform, and failing to provide the professional development to enable teachers to use a robust database management system; i.e., Microsoft® Access, FileMaker® Pro

Selecting technology and educational intelligence tools without identifying, measuring and benchmarking a specific instructional need

Assuming that a technological system will solve all information access and delivery needs if the decision-makers at the top keep sole access to the decision-making controls If school districts were to adopt educational intelligence-based Open Source solutions, the decision-making power structure would fall "like a house of red tape."

So, few school district executives are going to fund the development of a system that spotlights their decisions. More importantly, even fewer school district decision-makers will fund a system that launches instruction to new heights of efficiency and effectiveness if that technology means that underlings (i.e., teachers) will be able to make decisions.

Educational intelligence is a "two-edged sword," (i.e., transparency and accountability). Top-level school district bureaucrats' authority stands to be cut from under them, their of invincibility stands to be maimed, and their jobs stand to be slashed.

Best Educational intelligence PracticesFor Open Source solutions to become viable in our schools, research-based, tested and verifiable applications must target the progress of measurable student achievement. Then, Open Source solutions could; Make sense out of the complex data that floods teachers, but provides little direction for instruction

Engage teachers as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and build solutions based upon patterns and best practices for instruction

Provide enough professional development in database design, administration and use so that teachers upgrade their skills from an Excel®-only strategy to a true database strategy for information processing

Put data collection, data management and data-driven decision-making in the context of instruction, i.e., Educational intelligence, where teachers' higher-order understanding of the instructional process predominates in district budget and policy making

Identify specific instructional needs, then deliver information that targets those instructional goals

Hire support staff so that teachers can "off load" bureaucratic busy work" in favor of focusing teacher time on instructional delivery and instructional management When an Open Source solution is developed that is based upon Educational intelligence, school districts will become empowered to root out teacher and administrator worst practices, and prevent new waste and bureaucratic abuse. The key points to remember when launching a Educational intelligence-based technologies are:

Only embark on an Educational intelligence project for a specific instructional target
Identify needed data, then establish a cost-effective integration strategy

Identify procedures and methods for infusing that data into the hour-by-hour activities of teachers in ways that decrease the amount of work that teachers have to do, i.e, make teachers' work easier

Create "always-on dashboards" that feed live (real-time) data to teachers, and summary data to administrators

Create "What-If dashboards" that project trends so that teachers and administrators can make real-time course corrections in instructional management and instructional delivery Include teachers in all levels of the development and in all levels of the decision-making process (This step is crucial.)

Include teachers on the design, development and management teams that build a Educational intelligence-based process

Ensure that the Educational intelligence-based solutions; Directly deliver measurable increases in student achievement

Make work easier for teachers and support staff

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