

Thursday, January 31, 2008

## News Nuggets

NCLB is up for Re-Authorization: Candidates Take Pot Shots, but Don't have a Clue

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is up for re-authorization.

And, candidates of both parties have taken their pot shots at the bad law.

But, none of the candidates says anything to indicate that they have a clue about how to "fix" the law, or indicates that they know how to "fix" public education. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, President Bush hangs on to the fantasy that NCLB was a "good law." (You can't be more "out of touch" than that.)

Look what our president says about NCLB&hellip;

"President Bush urged Congress to "strengthen this good law" by increasing accountability, adding flexibility for states and districts, reducing the number of high school dropouts, and providing extra help for struggling schools. 'Six years ago, we came together to pass [NCLB], and today no one can deny its results,' Bush said in his State of the Union address Jan. 28. 'Last year, fourth and eighth graders achieved the highest math scores on record. Reading scores are on the rise. And African-American and Hispanic students posted all-time highs.'"Source:eSchool

News[http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;\\_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778](http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778)

But, not everyone agrees with this biased, political assessment of the law's success. "Instead of rushing to renew a broken law with fatal flaws, we need to first engage in a thoughtful debate about what is best for our nation's children.

While the president agrees that changes need to be made to the law, we need to overhaul—not tweak—the law to help every child succeed," said the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in a statement. 'The six years since passage of NCLB have demonstrated that neither Congress nor the president had the will to finance an expanded federal role in education. We must continually examine our public schools and make system-wide changes to ensure schools are teaching children the skills they need to compete in the rapidly changing global environment. These 21st-century skills include collaboration, ingenuity, problem solving, creativity, and more—none of which is tested under NCLB.' "The devastating effects of poverty have a significant impact on student achievement. While schools systems currently work hard to address the effects of poverty, they cannot eliminate the causes of poverty. Federal efforts to improve student achievement should coordinate with other systems, such as health care, housing and judicial systems, to alleviate the fundamental inequities that perpetuate poverty."Source:eSchool

News[http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;\\_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778](http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778)But,

though some of the candidates had a hand in NCLB, voted for NCLB, and are using public disgust for the results wrought by NCLB to foster political animosity; no candidate seems to know how to fix the law.

To fix something, you have to know&hellip;What is wrong (why it is broken)

What the real problem is

What it takes to make things right

That more of the same only results in the "same-old"

What it takes to do things right

Who knows how to do things right

How to let the people who know what to do take chargeWho Knows What to Do?Whether teachers know what to do to fix our schools is one thing. But, it is certain that our candidates and our politicians are ignorant of this objective reality.

But, our political process is polarizing, adversarial, win-lose, zero-sum&hellip;a circus.

Part of this problem is created by our political parties, not the candidates that pander to them. Our political parties polarize our country, and their zealots push their platforms (and the candidates that dance to them) to radical extremes. And the party system fabricates "candidates" who represent a caricature of what real Americans believe.

And, all too often, voting is for the "Lesser of two evils", or "Voting for the Least-Worst" candidate.

True Conservatives

Americans are really conservative, i.e., practical and sensible.

Sidebar

Our definition has nothing in common with the Republican-Democratic Polarities that battle each other from the extremes of common sense and practical action. These two sides could be more accurately described as "Reactionary and Over-Reactive.

Feel free to figure out which is which, or if the label applies to both parties at the same time.

Here is the "real" meaning of the term, conservative&hellip;Common sense first

Practical solutions based upon common sense

Decisions for the good of everyone

Sticking to our American ideals

Granting rights based upon responsibilities to everyone, equallySo, can teachers pull off repair and the management of our schools if given the chance?

Who knows until they try?

But a couple of ideas bode well in the favor of teachers. Teachers know something about education while the current crop of folks in charge know little or nothing about education

That more bureaucracy, more tests, more external meddling and micro managing solves little

That the problems are not the result of lack of funding, and teachers know that tremendous amounts of additional funding are necessary. So, since the folks in charge haven't been able to do the job, why not give teachers a "shot at cleaning up the mess?" Hidden Agenda. Of course, much of the debate from the candidates about whether multiple tests instead of a single test, or that NCLB saddled school districts with "unfunded mandates" hides the real issue.

As Classroom Toolkit has noted in many previous issues, the real intent of the law was to provide public money for church schools.

This is the reason that the system sets school districts up to "look bad."

This is also the reason that President Bush proposed a "Pell Grant for Kids," yet another attempt to funnel our money to church schools who don't deserve to get it.

Diluting the already too tiny pot of school dollars so that church schools can spend it to compete with our public schools makes as little sense as spending school dollars on tests that are designed to blame teachers for our politicians' mistakes. A Grain of Salt. So, when our candidates, and later, our nominees "cry wolf" about the "bad, old NCLB," pay no attention.

The possible recession, the mortgage crisis, and a pop star who doesn't wear underpants have occluded even the "Iraq War" and "Immigration" in the minds and worries of our voting public.

Education is not on our political radar screen, and whoever wins the election won't know enough to do anything positive with NCLB's replacement.

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

## Short Article

Befriend the Difficult Other: Feel Better about Yourself

"Difficult Others" are often our most effective teachers. Why? "Difficult Others" are like rubbing the hair on a monkey's back. If we stroke in the smooth direction, we don't find the fleas that we uncover by stroking the hair in "rubbing-in-the-wrong-way" direction.

Don't get this wrong. Those difficult others may have "fleas and blood-sucking pests" hidden underneath their facade, but the irritants that are most useful for us to discover are our own. Another analogy that describes our relationship with the "Difficult Other" is that of the "splinter." When we ram a splinter under our skin, we receive constant "signals" often escalating signals, to take action and rid ourselves of the irritation. Here again, it's easy to assume that the irritant that needs to be removed is the "Difficult Other." However, honest (often painfully honest) self-examination reveals that the splinter, irritant, foreign object that needs to be plucked out, lanced, excised is in ourselves.

It would be a mistake to apply the analogy of a grain of sand in an oyster as evidence that just coating the irritant with something slippery and smoothing over the irritant in passive coexistence is a manageable strategy.

By coating sand with a smooth substance, the oyster enters into a powerless accommodation with the irritant. And, the accommodation provides nothing of value to the oyster. The pearl only gives the grain of sand a comfy, secure new coat, and enhances its appearance. The oyster gets little positive, only some negative reinforcement (i.e., removal of aversive stimuli or punishment) and doesn't really resolve the problem until it finds itself in a stew.

Instead, we benefit when the "Difficult Other" prompts us to examine the faults and flaws that are in ourselves. These flaws and faults are the ones that the "Difficult Other" launches, sets off, detonates. Our honest, truthful insightful examination of the situation and the relationship exposes: Inaccurate self-talk that incorrectly labels the meaning of the relationship, and incorrectly labels the meaning of the impact upon our lives

The fact that our self-limiting beliefs cause us to label the impact of the "Difficult Other" as a danger of threat to us and our lives

An "Outside of Conscious Awareness" mental picture (images, feelings, sensations, memories) that are "pushed-to-the-background" painful avoidance responses to real-life experiences that we need to integrate into our psyche so that we can mature and act responsibly

Unfinished "Growing Up" and stunted wisdom that we fail to notice because we are so focused outward on the slights, scratches and bruises that we receive from the "Difficult Other"

So, use the unavoidable encounters with "Difficult Others" to further your own maturity and professionalism.

You can't avoid these encounters since "Difficult Others" are as ubiquitous as politicians at a lobbyist's free escort service.

So, if encountering "Difficult Others" is a natural occurrence, like sunburn, we might just as well take steps to protect ourselves.

And, most of those steps involve personal changes to a more rational belief system, and changes in the content of our self-talk. That means that the changes that matter most are changes that are within our control and within our sphere of influence (not dependent on others).

This is a difficult lesson, more difficult than blaming our stress, misery and frustration on our antagonist-enemy-superior-teacher, our "Difficult Special Other."

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

## Feature Article

Unlearn what you Learned in College: A Quick Way to Improve Teaching Effectiveness

You spend four years or more in college so that you can become certified to teach in your state.

These years are well spent, since you learn the jargon that is required for participating in the educational bureaucracy that employs you.

But do you learn the skills that keep your professional development on track to become a Master teacher in three years of real-world, on-the-job learning? If you remember what you learned in college, you know that you seldom focused upon real-world education.

That is because college and university education course work has little to do with the on-the-job learning that teachers need to be successful.

Higher Education Academic Disconnect

The problem with higher education is that classes there are academic in nature. This means that these classes are based upon theories, statistics, experimental research and other cognitive paradigms.

And, because these academic institutions want to be perceived as scientific, the observable, measurable, countable, replicable world of the scientific method holds sway. Sidebar Not that there is anything wrong with the scientific method, but the scientific method doesn't "cut it" in day to day classroom teacher performance. For example: What does a teacher care if improvements in observable classroom behavior are statistically significant if the model reduces the average number of verbal outbursts from 250 per hour to 125 per hour? This is statistically significant, but who wants to consider results like this to be success, even in a self-contained classroom for the Emotionally Disturbed? Besides that, what teacher is going to have the time to collect, input, analyze and evaluate experimental, scientific data. Probably the only teacher willing to do so much work (with experimental data) for so little payback is a teacher who is working on their Ph.D. degree so that they can get a promotion and get out of the classroom. Unrealistic Higher Education

Timelines Students in a college education methods class usually must develop and present a project each semester. That is, one project after six or eight weeks of the 13 week (or so) semester. (Sometimes the semester covers a longer calendar period if there is an intervening holiday such as Spring Break.)

But, what does a teacher really have to do in, say, a science class?

The answer of course is that the teacher must present a science lesson today, and then present another science lesson tomorrow&hellip;and the next day, and the next.

The comforts and luxuries of 1.) six weeks of research and 2.) multiple weekends to build the presentation, 3.) with the advantage of working with a partner&hellip;for only one lesson during that higher education semester&hellip;vaporize in face of real-world teaching requirements.

Perhaps a realistic college or university educational methods class strategy would be to require students to have a lesson ready every class period, and to have students chosen at random to present their lesson for the day to the class. This would give education majors practice in building 24 to 36 lessons during the semester, far short of the 75 or so lessons that an elementary teacher must produce in a semester, but on the right track. This minimal number of assignments is far short of the 225 lessons that a high school science teacher (teaching three grade levels) might be required to produce during one school year.

On second thought, perhaps secondary methods class should require that students bring three completed lessons to every college methods class meeting

7he four lessons for a class that meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Distracting Theory "Theory is as theory does" makes absolutely no sense.

And neither does attempting to find a "one-size-fits-all" theory of education.

The problem with studying the theories of "giants" in the education field is that most of these theories are based upon the writings of people that were not in the classroom.

How do we know that these academic book authors were not master teachers working in the classroom?

Easy. They had time to write the book and all those professional journal articles. Real teachers are engrossed with the needs of their classroom. And real teachers struggle with limited resources because of the lack of school district funding. Real teachers have families and real teachers bring their school work home with them. Master teachers and seldom squeeze out the time from their busy schedules to write books and magazine articles.

Sidebar The exception to this rule is the anthology of articles that a college or university professor publishes. These compilations are often the work of those same "one-report-and-presentation-per-semester" graduate students who were conducting the professor's research, unaware of their future contribution to the professor's tenure and book contract. Besides, master teachers interact with their students as individuals in real time, face to face, person-to-person. This professional interaction proves to master teachers that every student is unique, and that theories seldom conform to the real-live world of students except in some vague and ill-defined way.

So, master teachers dump theories and focus upon person-to-person interaction with students, "Students are as you find them, not as a theorist posits students to be."

Besides, theories filter information and understanding, real communication opens channels of perception.

The Creative Imagination Problem

Higher education academic research also struggles with the reality of Creative Imagination.

Sidebar

Creative Imagination is the process whereby intentions, images and desires are imagined as having already happened. The Creative Imagination exercise is conducted before the fact, but the master teacher focuses upon the desired outcomes as though these have already occurred.

The academic problem with Creative Imagination, or the Law of Attraction, or Psycho-Cybernetics is that academicians relegate the process to the status of Urban Legends for the Uninformed. The higher education prejudice against these personal internal processes that engage and energize hidden (unconscious) areas of the human psyche occur because these mental and psychological processes are not observable (and therefore unscientific). Higher education academicians also avoid the Creative Imagination process because the process seem to connect with spiritual personal dimensions within teachers. Separation of Church and State in Religion: "Smack Down" for Teacher Spirituality School districts and the higher education professors that train the cohorts of new teachers are conversant with the Supreme Court rulings concerning the separation of church and state.

Because of this, the capacity for teachers and students to interact and communicate on spiritual levels is down played and covered up.

Of course, ignoring the problem of irate atheist parent lawsuits (a deplorable thing), and the problem of proselytizing students (a very bad thing); creates a need for teachers to take their spirituality and their spiritual practices underground. Of course parents are sensitive to pressures for change upon the religion of their children. And of course, master teachers avoid influencing students to change their religion.

But, teachers may still&hellip;Feel compassion and reverence

Exhibit charity

Live a life of moral and ethical values

Pray for students and pray for themselves

Picture and feel the best for each of their students in the creative recesses of their mind

Center their thoughts and emotions upon a "higher power"

Think positive and loving thoughts about their students and assume that students will respond in a positive manner (on some level) to these thoughts The Wide-Open Human Psyche The theories that teachers learn in college and university education methods classes are both right and wrong.

The theories are right because people, situations, events, and processes can be found that seem to support the theory; and because there might be some predictive validity extrapolations for "what if," and "what's next" speculations.

The theories are wrong because people, situations, events, and processes can be found that seem to counterdict the theory.

This means that the theories are "part-time-right" and "more-times-wrong-than-not-wrong."

But, the bigger picture and plenty of emperical evidence suggests that the human psyche is much more plastic, pliable, resourceful, resilient and amazing than we currently theorize.

Your abilities and your students' abilities are stunning, spectacular, magnificent, creative, expansive and self-limited.

You could do more, be more, learn more, accomplish more than you realize if you didn't believe that you can't.

This is true for your students, too.

So, unlearn the theories that you learned in your higher education methods class, and let yourself and your students soar to new heights, new vistas, new dimensions.

Free yourself from the self-imposed barriers of thought, belief and action that are hemmed in and shackled by theories and indoctrination.

Open your mind and your experience to the possibility that your (and your students') abilities are just beginning to blossom.

Think of the smartest, most loving and compassionate, most talented, most successful people that ever lived as only buds" compared to the capacity that you have to flower.

You are more than an Ego, Id an Super Ego. You are more than a a theory.

Keep the theories for the faculty meetings where you have to defend your successes and allow here-and-now, real-life perception and one-to-one communication with your students to hold sway.

Your creative and intuitive potential exceeds your ability to operatonalize a theory and implement it as an instructional method. Your imagination and your personality are as important to your teaching ability as your ability to answer multiple choice questions and write college-level essays.

In your classroom, stick with what improves students' academic performance, and don't mind what the theorists say that you should believe.

Trust yourself and your abilities, and never mind what limits the theorists say you have.

## Quick Tips

### Sleep Deprivation: A Malady for Students and Teachers

Everyone gets tired from work and play. And, falling asleep quickly when retiring for the evening is normal and natural. But, forcing yourself to stay up each night because you can't grade papers until the kids go to bed, and getting up early to get the kids (and maybe your spouse) off to school and work with a good breakfast means "consuming an inordinate amount of wax from both ends of the wick."

Teachers need to take care of themselves, and getting enough sleep is crucial to physical, emotional, and mental health. Remember that the body conducts most of its repair projects during sleep, and that people burn a lot of calories when they sleep. If you are gaining weight without eating more, perhaps a lack of sufficient sleep is the culprit. What is Sleep Deprivation? Sleep deprivation is the chronic lack of sufficient sleep. Chronic means "long term."

Dragging in on the Monday after the Super Bowl because the party goers didn't leave (not everybody is sensitive to the needs of the classroom week) does not constitute sleep deprivation.

But, sleep deprivation is serious.

The list of ailment associated with the malady include:

- Aching muscles
- Blurred vision
- Cardiovascular disease
- Clinical depression
- Colorblindness
- Daytime drowsiness and naps
- Decreased mental activity and concentration
- Depersonalization/de realization
- Weakened immune system
- Dizziness
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Fainting
- General confusion
- Hallucinations (visual and aural)
- Hand tremors
- Headache
- Hernia
- Hyperactivity
- Hypertension
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Lucid dreaming (once sleep resumes)
- Memory lapses or loss
- Nausea
- Nystagmus (rapid involuntary rhythmic eye movement)
- Psychosis
- Pallor
- Slowed reaction time
- Slurred and/or nonsensical speech
- Severe yawning
- Weight loss (or gain)

Weight loss (or gain) Source: Wikipedia Sleep Deprivation [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep\\_deprivation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep_deprivation)

In addition, sleep deprivation often causes/ creates symptoms similar to 1.)

Attention deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and 2.) Alcoholic Intoxication. Source: Wikipedia Sleep

Deprivation [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep\\_deprivation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep_deprivation)

A Teacher's Worst Nightmare Some of the symptoms or diseases caused by sleep deprivation seem trivial, others are so serious that student school failure or loss of teacher employment are likely.

But in the range of midrange symptoms (where the student or teacher remains in school, the list of symptoms contains the high-stakes focused teacher's "worst nightmare."

This is because so many of these symptoms overlap, and the sleep-deprived person can experience a smorgasbord of symptoms in some closely related configuration.

This is also because many of the symptoms in this constellation of pain and misery are related to a lack of competent performance on high-stakes test day. In other words, sleep-deprived students struggle to perform well on high-stakes tests.

What to do if you are Sleep-Deprived

If you suspect that you are sleep-deprived, get help and take care of yourself.

Of course, this is easier said than done because: Sleep-deprived people lose a substantial chunk of their insight and judgment

Habits of less-than healthy living sneak quietly upon us, and we don't notice our slide into inadequate health Treatment will be easier and less costly if the problem is addressed early. Solutions will be expensive and more resistant to change if allowed to integrate into multiple areas of your life. What to do to Help Sleep-Deprived Students Students may occasionally fall asleep in class. Let them sleep if you can.

But pay attention if this happens more than once.

At a second occurrence of a student falling asleep in class, do the following: Document according to your district's or campus policies

Refer to a school counselor or social worker

Contact the student's parents

Inform your supervisor or principal This may seem like over reacting, but resolving an issue quickly means resolving the issue with less stress for everyone.

Follow-Up and Follow-Through

Remain alert and focused on the symptoms and effects of sleep deprivation.

Remember that sleep deprivation is a culprit in many illnesses.

Also remember that most causes of sleep deprivation can be treated, and that it costs very little to go to sleep.

Sweet dreams!

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

## Top Tips

Connect 1 Million Innovative Teachers: Can Microsoft Pull this Off?

Will Microsoft provide the leadership needed to do what no other group has been able to pull off? A lot of folks talk of connecting teachers, but everybody knows that most teachers still work as "independent contractors," "flying solo" in their isolated, personal, rectangular classroom domains. Most classrooms remain as much a "one-person forum" as the original "one-room schoolhouse."

Sidebar One factor preventing teachers from using the free resources of the Internet to improve education is the close reign that school district employers hold on the free expression that teachers are guaranteed under the US Constitution. This is a rights and responsibility issue on two levels.

On one level, school district administrators do not want the public to suspect the goofs, miscues and misfeasance that bureaucracy is heir to.

On the other hand, how are the waste and abuse going to be corrected unless bureaucratic fiascos see the light of day? Of course it would be logical, responsible and effective to have top level bureaucrats "just listen" to what teachers, counselors, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, students, and parents have to say. Then, logic dictates that the top level "honchos" just fix the mess for the good of everyone. (True democracy in action!) What happens instead is (Undemocratic inaction!), (Entrenching Reaction!) or (Cover up Lip Action!). For now, teachers must exercise caution with any Internet posting because of its "career-threatening" potential. But, if Microsoft's press release is correct, then the teaching profession could benefit from innovation.

So, what is required to bring the teaching profession to a level of collaboration is vision, leadership and direction? What has been tried? Coming Up Short Unfortunately, Microsoft's competitors have come up short in their quest to "upgrade education" by improving teachers with online initiatives.

Examples of these good programs that fall short are: Curriki; founded by Bill Gates' rival Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems; and Edutopia; founded by Star Wars creator, George Lucas.

What all these well-meaning projects have in common (besides failure to gain traction) is that they were conceptualized and funded by non-educators.

Of course, many programs (almost everyone under funded) that were designed, developed and administered by educators also failed to ramp up to spectacular success, so we can't be too harsh in our criticism.

But, contrast the effectiveness of these high-priced Web "spreads" to the excitement of an informal, ad hoc, social network created without cost, in a niche that most teachers don't care about, i.e., technology. That no-cost success innovation is Classroom 2.0.

Classroom 2.0 is a Web 2.0 application run with the free NING platform.

If you want a no-cost social media network presence of your own, check out NING. Beware "Geeks" Bearing Gifts The Internet Super Highway represents one huge resource with equally huge potholes.

The problem, like too much food that leaves you with indigestion and a stomach ache, is that there is too much of everything.

And too much of everything means that teachers waste too much time in sorting through and sifting out the useless before they discover the useful.

In this way, finding valuable Internet resources is similar to panning for gold. Teachers have to wash a lot of gravel before they encounter precious nuggets of content and those precious nuggets are few and far between.

At least Microsoft beat its rivals in understanding the basic problem. What innovative teaching needs least is "more of the same." This true for the Internet, too. "What the U.S. needs the least is another database of lesson plans,"

said Mary Cullinane, director of Microsoft's U.S. Partners in Learning program. "What we do need, and what we believe is of significant value, is a place for innovative teachers and educators to have access to high-quality resources, to have an area for sharing best practices in learning communities, to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, and ... to expose [educators] to a worldwide conversation." Source: eSchool

News [http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/related-top-news/?i=51777;\\_hbguid=1fc9f28d-e682-4ad7-b1b9-69b274c94ce4](http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/related-top-news/?i=51777;_hbguid=1fc9f28d-e682-4ad7-b1b9-69b274c94ce4) Classroom Toolkit advocates a common sense approach to instructional planning and classroom project management. The problem with finding lesson plans on the Internet is that it takes more time to adapt the lesson plan than it takes to create them from scratch. Classroom Toolkit recommends a modular strategy to instructional planning and a "mix and match" materials creation. Graphic Organizers provide Classroom Toolkit provides a no cost library of Graphic Organizers So, what is Microsoft's strategy?

"The ITN also might help cut down on the amount of time teachers spend searching for tips or solutions for classroom practices or problems. As educators search for information, they can become inundated with results and must spend time sorting through material and judging its appropriateness, Cullinane explained." Source: eSchool News [http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/related-top-news/?i=51777;\\_hbguid=1fc9f28d-e682-4ad7-b1b9-69b274c94ce4](http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/related-top-news/?i=51777;_hbguid=1fc9f28d-e682-4ad7-b1b9-69b274c94ce4)

Backwards Process: Misses the Boat, Misses the Target The problem with each of these great "education innovation" projects &hellip; Classroom 2.0

Curriki &#8482;

Edutopia &#8482;

Partners in Learning &#8482;

Other successors to the original innovator, Apple &#8482;'s "Classroom of Tomorrow" &hellip; is that these projects focus upon technology first. What these projects need to focus upon is improving teaching to the master teacher level, and let technology tools take the "after-thought, nice-to-have," "we'll use them when we have time" role that they are fitted for.

Of the programs, Edutopia &#8482;, founded by a film maker, comes closer to understanding the real issues of education, i.e., students with incredible abilities, and teaches with incredible skills to share. Call to Action: Join the Microsoft &#8482; Innovative Teaching Network Here are links if you decide to check out Microsoft &#8482;'s program &hellip;

Join the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Network Microsoft &#8482;'s Partners in Education Program

Let's hope that Microsoft &#8482; can be the first of the "Big Boys" to pull off a educational innovation project that really helps teachers where they need it., i.e., saving time, delivering usable (right now, no strings, no additional work, no cost) content.

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

## Teacher Resources

Flash Card Technology: A Low-Tech How-To

Drill has been discouraged for the past decade, and flash cards have lost some of their savory flavor.

But, flash cards can serve an important function in all sorts of learning that requires the memory of multiple words, phrases, formulas, functions, directions, steps, patterns, etc. And, while computer driven flash cards are possible, the on screen flash cards lack one important benefit. Portability!

The other benefit that flash cards of the 3" x 5" variety hold is economy. The note card beats the notebook computer, hands down in economy. Not your Grandmother's Flash Card! If you want to "Upgrade" your flash cards with a bit of modern technology, you can do this with a printer that accepts 3" x 5" index cards. Sidebar Some laser printers can print on 3" x 5" index cards, and some ink jet printers will also. But, be sure to use a laser printer that can print both sides at once. The reason that the laser printer must print two sides at once is that you must be careful in feeding previously copied cards of pages through a laser printer. Because a laser printer uses a hot fuser process and toner from previously printed paper can rub off and "gum up the insides" of the printer.

The same problem exists with the expensive laser printer sheets that have index cards that tear apart with "micro-perforations." Besides the expense, you should not feed these sheets through a laser printer twice. Besides, the mirror image printing doesn't work, and the heavy paper stock tends to curl as it travels through the laser printer paper path because of the rollers and the heat. And, never, ever feed photocopies through a laser printer. The toner for photocopiers fuses at much lower temperatures than the high-temperature laser printers, and the laser printer melts the photocopy's toner. But, why would you want to print the flash cards? Don't you learn the words better, faster, more quickly if you write the words out in your own handwriting?

Answer: Yes, but we are only putting lines on the flash card, making learning templates.

But, why put lines on the flash cards, aren't we just going to write a word or phrase on one side, and the information, definition, formula, or foreign vocabulary item on the other?

Answer: That is the old way. Our "upgraded method" uses more than one word on each side of the card. The lines, table cells to be exact, keep the words lined up with the correct definition.

Here are samples of what these "upgraded" flash cards look like.

The reason for the different number of spaces on the first flash card sample is provide more space to write if phrases, idioms or longer formulae are the target for learning.

One More Trick for the Modern Flash Card

You will notice that these "Upgraded" flash cards are printed in "Portrait" style, i.e., the long side is vertical. And, this is what makes the "Upgraded" flash card superior to the "Old School" flash card that is used in Landscape mode.

She secret is in the "Flip."

Instead of flipping the card right-to-left and reading left-to-right, we flip these flash cards bottom-to-top, and read normally.

Note: If you flip these cards right-to-left, the words will appear upside-down. One Other Special Feature Notice that there is a table cell between the number and the cell for the word or definition.

That cell is included in this design because you might like to mark certain words for extra attention.

For example, if you were listing the Spanish words between 20 and 30, you might use that space to mark 22, 23 and 26 because those numbers, when spelled out, require accent marks. Or, if you were listing all the days of the week in Spanish, you would mark Wednesday and Saturday as the days whose name, when spelled out, require accent marks. So, this cell serves as a "flag" to mark the word, definition or formula for special attention.

It is also possible to color code this cell if your to-be-learned list has multi-dimensional features.

Why the "Upgrade" in Flash Cards?

The first benefit of the "Upgraded" flash card is that you need a stack of cards that is substantially smaller. With this design, you could place 100 words on only ten cards instead of on 100 cards.

There is also the benefit of being able to keep categories of words together. For example: "Question words" could all be listed on one or two cards, and these would be easy to find since the words are clustered together. Clustering multiple words on one card makes it easy to find a certain category of words or ideas during review. (And reviews should be quick, frequent, daily.)

In addition, the bottom-to-top flip is more natural and easier to perform while holding a pack of cards in your left hand. With the flash card deck in your left hand, you can review

Of course, you must carry these cards everywhere you go, and use them during every spare moment if you are to take full advantage of this flash card technology. Further Technology Enhancements? But, couldn't these flash cards be developed and used with Personal Digital Assistants, such as the PalmOS; and Pocket PC? And, what about creating video flash cards for Apple's iPod or Microsoft's Zune? What about flash cards for cellular telephones?

Answer: Sure, but besides being expensive, this seems like a lot of work and there doesn't seem to be many pre-built applications. The lack of pre built study applications may be because drill and practice was deprecated over the past decade or more, so software developers didn't find a market for these products.

Or it may be that these devices were too expensive for teachers and students. A Pocket PC, for example, can cost more than a new desktop computer.

But, if you want to create a learning system for one of these products, please make your product and share it with others.

One of the benefits of merging low-tech with high-tech is that repeatable processes can be duplicated. For example: A high school Spanish teacher could create flash cards and provide them for all 180 students. And, the same files would remain usable for future classes that the teacher teaches. Note: We are indebted to Barry Farber in his book, *Hot to Learn Any Language* for these ideas. Classroom Toolkit reviewed this book during our December 2007 issue.

[Link to the Classroom Toolkit Book Review](#)

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

## Book Review

Book Title: Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar

Author: Farrell, Edith R. and Farrell, C. Fredrick

ISBN: 0071419322 Format: Hardcover/ Soft cover/ eBookPub. Date: 2003, Second Edition Publisher: McGraw-Hill

Pages: 152 Cost: \$8.95 (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$ (new) \$4.98 (used)- \$4.98 at eBay; \$3.92 The Books' Topics: This book

describes the following: Short history of English

Short history of Spanish

Summary of the Parts of Speech

Exploration of the Use of Each Part of Speech in English and Spanish

Exercises in question Pronouns and Adjectives

Exercises with "Por vs. Para" and "Ser vs. Estar" The book is systematic, and compares and contrasts the use of each

Part of Speech for both languages. The central themes of this book are: Learning Spanish or English Grammar is easier if

you build upon the similarities of the target language with your native language.

In addition, the authors focus upon Grammar essentials, i.e., those usually covered in high school Spanish, or during the first year of college Spanish

Quick access to information for use as a study reference

Quick review for study

Providing alternative ways of explaining both English and Spanish

Keywords: Native Language Grammar

Target Language Grammar

Parts of Speech

Explanations in "Standard English" and "Standard Spanish"

English Language Timeline

Spanish Language Timeline

Germanic, French, Latin Roots

Old English, Modern English

Quick Check Charts

Main Idea: Grammar consists of a complex set of rules and conventions. These rules and conventions take dedicated study.

But, you may not want to bother because the study of grammar is boring. Besides, it is possible for native speakers of a language to internalize the structure of the language's grammar without knowing how to describe the rules in academic terms.

In this way, building a repertoire of usable grammar skills is similar to riding a bicycle. In riding the bicycle, you do not need to know complicated scientific terms for what you do when you you steer, pedal, balance and apply the brakes.

However, if you were to want to build a better bicycle, you would need to know these things (engineering, physics, anatomy, kinesiology, etc.).

But, teachers need to build complex lessons that facilitate student learning. This is when a reference book like Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar becomes valuable.

In addition, Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is valuable if you are studying or teaching Spanish.

The strategy of Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is to build new learning by connecting that learning to what you already know.

With the native English speaker learning Spanish, the bottleneck to the learning process may be that the language learner doesn't know much English grammar. This is where Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar comes in. This reference outlines the grammar for both English and Spanish. Issues Addressed by the Book: Grammar has changed a bit since most "Baby Boomers" last studied it.

Gone are the strict labeling of parts of speech or the strategy of simply memorizing a list of prepositions.

In vogue now is a structural and functional interpretation of grammar, i.e., what is the way that the words and phrases are used instead of arbitrary labeling learning rules that are "made to be broken." The Book's Shortcomings: The book cannot offer redress to the fact that grammar is boring and almost entirely "Left Brain" learning material.

Aside from the histories of English and Spanish (about four pages), grammar topics are those that only a language trivia buff could love.

However, the authors' precise treatment of a boring topic (about 140 pages) lessens the pain of learning two sets of grammar (English and Spanish).

The book might also have addressed Punctuation because punctuation is so intimately associated with grammar.

The fact that language differences between English and Spanish are "findable" based upon only a marginal knowledge of the Parts of Speech is a weakness that is turned into a strength for this book. Comments: Teachers need a book like this if they are going to study another language or if they are going to teach their own native language.

And, teachers need a book like this to brush up on new insights into their own language, even if they are not English or Spanish Teachers or Language Arts specialists.

Even seasoned veteran English teachers could find information and explanations that they once knew, but long forgot (or is that "forgot long ago"?) in this book.

And for the rest of us, we might discover things about our native language that we didn't know even though we correctly use those language principles each day. Summary: Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is useful, but probably not a "must have" reference for many teachers.

The book rates high because the book is so useful. Writing the book so that it was fun, amusing, exciting, attention-riveting might have been counter productive. Teachers and students of a foreign language want to find information quickly for lesson planning, lesson content and study purposes.

This book is a great resource if you need lesson plan background material, examples of more grammar points than you will ever need in ordinary writing and grammar trivia questions.

Purchase this book as a reference. Use it. Build grammar lesson plans from it. Use the book for its "talking points" approach to language instruction.

Keep the book handy with other reference resources that you use daily such as your dictionary and thesaurus. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2  
Original - 2  
Interesting - 3

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Overall Rating - 3.2

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

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

Dealing with the Mentally Ill: Whether Students, Parents, Colleagues or Supervisors

Mental illness affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and of all personal and professional levels.

People of all ages, genders, religions, and political persuasions can exhibit mental illness.

And, mental illness crosses all educational levels, racial and ethnic group membership. No group has a monopoly on mental illness, and no group is immune. Based upon the prevalence figures and demographic distributions, we can predict that one or more mentally ill student is placed in each classroom, and that at least one mentally ill employee will be found in a staff of 30 employees. Types of Mental Illness The categories of mental illness differ from children and adults because psychologists and psychiatrists wish to avoid labeling children unless the child's school work suffers. Mental illness is different than the Special Education Label of "Emotionally Disturbed." Sidebar There are 19 subcategories of mental illness, and Wikipedia lists 48 pages of diagnostic information

Source: Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental\\_illness\\_diagnosis\\_by\\_DSM\\_and\\_ICD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental_illness_diagnosis_by_DSM_and_ICD)

Diagnoses of mental illness can include psychiatric disorders or mental health disorders, and diagnosis can only be conducted by trained professionals (not teachers).

The major categories of mental illness include: Anxiety Disorders

Cognitive disorders

Childhood psychiatric disorders

Depression and Bipolar

Eating disorders

Memory disorders

Mental disorders due to a medical condition

Mood disorders

Personality disorders

Psychosis

Sexual and gender identity disorders

Sleep disorders

Substance-related

disorders Source: Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental\\_illness\\_diagnosis\\_by\\_DSM\\_and\\_ICD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Mental_illness_diagnosis_by_DSM_and_ICD) Diagnosis and Need to Know Teachers are not qualified to diagnose mental illness in students, colleagues, parents or supervisors. And, teachers seldom learn about the diagnosis of students because they are not authorized to know these personal details.

Besides, teachers are big "lounge gossips" and too many teachers reveal confidential information to (told directly or listening in) others.

Besides, teachers earned a negative reputation for suggesting that children with attention problems, hyperactive movements, and compliance issues require medication.

So many children were taking teacher-recommended drugs that the "prescribed drug-taking" by students has been called a national epidemic. (Of course, teachers were not the only culprit, but suggesting a body-mind-life-altering course of action to parents when the teacher does not have the professional training, legal prerogative or moral right is indefensible). General Traits Since teachers are unqualified to make mental health diagnosis, fine tuning teachers' mental health labeling skills is counter indicated (a bad idea).

What teachers need to do is develop a general model of reacting to mentally ill students, colleagues and supervisors based upon human relations and communications techniques.

And, as with all human communication, the proof is in the communication results, not the theory about what should work. Because the success of a communication is in the effect, result, outcome; an encyclopedic knowledge of the symptoms and classifications of mental illness proves to be a hindrance, rather than a help for teachers.

But, here are the general guidelines for dealing with the mentally ill & hellip; Ideas fail to match observable reality

Reasonable information, requests, arguments are not accepted

Responsibility is rejected, blame cannot be accepted

The "self-promulgated rationale" of the mentally ill is always "correct," no matter how illogical, irrational, or out of touch

Reactions are often the opposite of the way that most others react

Everyone knows that "something is wrong" with the mentally ill person

Friendships are odd, strained or weird, if there any friendships at all Since such a large number of people satisfy

categorization as mentally ill, master teachers understand that in dealing with large numbers of other people; i.e., students, parents, colleagues and supervisors; teachers should expect that daily contact with mentally ill people is "just part of the job." Second-Hand Mental Illness Teachers also must be aware of the tendency of mental illness to produce second-hand mental illness in the lives of people who live in close proximity to the organic (the person with the real problem) mentally ill person.

The toxic mental environment that a mentally ill person creates is similar to the toxic physical environment surrounding a smoker.

And the mental health issue that is passed on to others in the environment that is dominated by a mentally ill person is "environmental depression."

Few people can take the stress, chaos, uncertainty, unpredictability, confusion, blame and irrationality that accompanies living with a mentally ill person without developing symptoms of their own.

Of course, if the person suffering "environmental depression" were to be removed from the toxic living environment, they would get better soon. Maybe! (This all depends upon how long, how deeply, how abused, how indoctrinated they were by the mentally ill person that captivated their life.)

The person that confides that "XXX is driving me nuts!" may be describing a basic truth in their lives. This statement might be an accurate description of the "second-hand mental health" dynamic at work in their life.

The implication for teachers of this "Second-Hand Mental Illness" paradigm is that teachers must... Take daily steps to manage stress in their lives

Take daily steps to decrease the stress in their students' lives

Find a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on and other sources of personal and professional support

Take special care of themselves, avoid overwork, eat well, sleep enough

Learn the art of positive self-talk and the art of affirmation

Learn techniques of suggestion and group dynamics that can be used to counter act the stresses that are heaped upon the living environment by the mentally ill student, parent, colleague or supervisor

General Patterns and Recommendations Teachers should be prepared to deal with mentally-ill-others since teachers will encounter these folks (young and old) on a daily basis.

And, teachers should discover "mental illness negotiation skills" that motivate, direct and influence these folks; even if these techniques seem strange and professionally suspect. (Remember, the mentally ill respond the opposite of normal, stable people. Sometimes you have to deal with them in their own world, not yours.)

Teachers should also avoid any "savior syndrome" behaviors and understand that they neither can make the mentally ill person "worse" by what they say and do; and, that they cannot make the mentally ill person better by all their acts of love, sacrifice, wisdom and professional intervention.

Teachers must also focus on their core strength, i.e., instruction. Dabbling into counseling, psychotherapy, or behavioral therapy is neither appropriate, insured with malpractice insurance, or sanctioned by the school district that employs you as a teacher. You are not qualified to provide mental health interventions; and not employed to do so, so "butt out!" Sidebar "Butt out" is not a slogan for an anti-smoking campaign, but sage advice for protecting your "behind" from firing and lawsuits.

It is fantasy for a teacher to believe that the school district that they work for will support them in even a trivial way if the teacher exceeds the boundaries of their employment position.

(Note: School districts don't even support teachers that were following orders in issues of negative community reaction or financial liability.) Finally, a teacher should understand that to be the most value to their students, the teacher must take care of themselves.

This means following all the healthy living rules, but it also means protecting yourself from the "con jobs, jive-talk, and seductive manipulations" that mentally ill people seem to have a knack for.

Watch out for yourself, because the "game that the mentally ill person sucks you into" is only theirs to "win," but only yours to "keep from losing."

Here's hoping that if you ignore these principles, that your learning encounters with mentally ill students, parents, colleagues and supervisors is of the mildly punishing kind; and that you learn these lessons quickly, with a minimum of stress, anguish and "second-hand" depression.

And at any early sign of "loosing your grip" on your thoughts, emotions, beliefs or attitudes; seek professional help.

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

## **Professional Self-Development**

Can you "Psych" your Students for Success with Neuro-Linguistic Programming?

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a form of suggestion. NLP strategies are based upon: Subliminal language, i.e., Subtle communication through channels that we usually are unaware of

Persuading though patterns of thought, i.e., Motivating folks to do what you want them to do by avoiding reactions to your message by NLP strategies launch "absent minded responses," automated thinking, or the "habits" that we are unaware of.

So, NLP uses a communication process that bypasses conscious awareness and impacts the Unconscious Thought directly. This is called "hypnotic communication".

NLP is scientific, repeatable, testable, not "hocus pocus" stage-show magic. It is not a "deep trance" or an "altered states of consciousness."

Rather, these are processes that we engage in all the time, similar to day dreaming, similar to remembering, similar to imagining.

So, teachers that use NLP simply direct their students to natural thoughts and behaviors. We are affected by NLP all the time because advertisers, politicians, coaches, counselors, clergy, charismatic orators, sales people, and master teachers move us to action and motivate us to "do it now." These folks use our own patterns of unconscious thought to persuade, sway, guide, redirect, focus, target our decision-making processes in ways that they want. Of course, master teachers use the NLP techniques only for the good of their students. We cannot generalize the same altruism for all users of the technique. Is Teacher Use of NLP Ethical? Teachers seldom teach a class in "fire walking" or conduct motivational seminars for business people, so why would they use NLP?

And if teachers had a reason for using NLP, would doing so be ethical?

Of course, we could ask the reverse question, "Is failure to motivate students sufficiently so that students learn to the best of their ability ethical?"

Some folks think that NLP is a kind of "mind control." And, some slick (and rich) marketers have lead people (especially salespeople) to believe this myth so that they could sell seminar tickets at a hefty price. Other people think that NLP is "un-democratic," and the kind of tactics used to brainwash suicide bombers.

None of this is true.

But any tool or technique can be misused, or used for less than ethical purposes.

For example, some folks claim that they use NLP to "Pick up Women".

But, just as explosives can be used to clear roadbeds, quarry stone such marble or granite, raze dangerous and obsolete buildings, or set off avalanches in a safe way; explosives also can be used to kill tourists, embassy staff, police recruits and wedding guests.

The purpose that the tool is used for determines the ethics. And, many psychologists, therapists, hypnotherapists, pastoral counselors, clergy and master teaches use the principles of NLP in their daily work. Some of these professionals were trained in NLP and understand what they are doing. Others professionals learned the communication patterns by modeling their mentors, and others just happened upon the communication strategies, and integrated them into their behavior repertoire because they found them to produce positive results for their clients, congregation members or trainees. Practical Applications The reason that teachers might wish to learn to apply some basic NLP techniques is that teachers might want to sensitize themselves to subtle levels of student and colleague communication. NLP offers many strategies for improving teachers' &hellip; Communication

Perception

Listening and relating skills

Rapport with students and colleagues

Self-confidence

Self-control

Creativity

Intuition If these possibilities feel right, look good, sound great; perhaps you could investigate NLP further, finding just the most comfortable ways that are suited for you, and best for you, as much as you might wish.

Classroom Toolkit and Neuro-Linguistic Programming

If readers of Classroom Toolkit express an interest, in learning more about NLP principles, then we will devote many future articles to the the topic.

In fact, we reserved a domain name just in case you want more information on applying NLP in your classroom. "Sign up for the Classroom Toolkit Resource Bulletin "

This month's Resource Bulletin Package contains over 27 MB of no-c©st articles and eBooks.

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

## Open Source for Education

Are Any Open Source Products Useful for Teacher Self-Development?

Open Source products are available for lots of "Techie" purposes, but are there any Open Source products available for Teacher Self-Development?

There are a lot of teacher resources for integrating technology using Open Source software, but what about teacher self-development resources that are geared to personal and psychological, intrapersonal and relationship oriented, or just plain skill development? Sidebar Here are the Google&#8482; search results for the search term, "teacher 'self-development' 'open source'". Search Google&#8482; for teacher "self-development" "open Source" The top search results include topics such as Web 2.0, "Video Papers" Open Source Portfolios and mentoring for technology. The most concise description of this externally-directed focus upon technology seems to be&hellip;"Everyone should have the

necessary skills to benefit fully from the Information Society. Therefore capacity building and ICT literacy are essential. ICTs can contribute to achieving universal education worldwide, through delivery of education and training of teachers, and offering improved conditions for lifelong learning, encompassing people that are outside the formal education process, and improving professional

skills."SourceUNESCO[http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=15922&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15922&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)Of course this should not surprise us. Computer skills (hardware, software and applications) have been the rage over the past decade or more. And in typical education fashion, the pendulum swings toward extremes instead of a realistic, balanced focus. So, how are we to approach the question of Open Source products for teacher self-development? Software Libre: Not Software Gratis In discovering if there are Open Source resources, we have to determine what the term "Open Source" means. Few teachers know what "Open Source" actually means? Open Source software is free to use and keep, but also free to change, recompile, reconfigure, change. Open Source software is also free to sell. But, teachers use the term, "Open Source" to mean free software (as in no cost). Unfortunately, the term "free" is misleading. There are a lot of "free" software products that are not Open Source. Types of free, but not Open Source software include; Freeware - Free to use. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Others are not allowed to sell this software

Banner Ware - Free to use. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Others are not allowed to sell this software, either. Shareware/ Trial Ware - Free to use for a short period of time, usually 30 days or less. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. Often teachers can get enough use of Shareware during the trial period to last the entire school year. Others are allowed to sell this software if they are affiliates of the software developer. After the sale of shareware software, the developer pays a commission to the seller. Unfortunately school district IT Departments fear Shareware/ Trial Ware and do not allow it to be installed.

The reason that school district IT Departments eschew Shareware/ Trial Ware is that after 20 or 30 days, the software must be purchased (there is no money) or uninstalled (more work for staff they don't have) Any Shareware / Trial Ware remaining on the district's computers after the trial period could be considered pirated software, and the district automatically becomes liable. Shareware / Trial Ware offers many teacher self-development and self-improvement opportunities, but these programs are not free. Ad Ware - Free to use because the software contains ads. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way. The danger associated with Ad Ware is that the software acts as a "Pop Up Magnet"; that bypasses your browser's filter. Also, anti-virus programs and anti-spyware programs may not remove the Ad Ware programs because you gave the Ad Ware developer permission to send you these Pop Up Ads when you installed the software. If you read the fine print on the Ad Ware "Terms of Service" Agreement, you will see that you pay for the privilege of installing the software without cost by allowing these intrusive ads to be sent to your computer.

Viral Ware - Free to use because the software is re-branded to carry ads. The difference from Ad Ware is that new users can pay a fee and have their ads inserted instead of other people's ads. After the ads are inserted, the software is given away. Copyright ownership retained by developer. Others are not allowed to reverse engineer (take apart), update, revise, or change the software in any way.

Spyware - A large variety of "bad" software that does "nasty" things. This category includes: Software that captures Web user data, software that contains Trojan viruses, worms, key loggers (captures and sends your user names and passwords to the developer), etc. The fact that most teachers do not possess the skills (or the time) to decompile, reverse engineer, repackage, update or re-brand Open Source software may be a clue as to the reason that teachers lump all free to use software under one term. Sidebar Open Source software is coming to be called, "Libre Ware." This means "free" as in permission to do what every you want with the software (including selling out to a big company for \$1 billion USD as MySQL just did with its sale to Sun Microsystems&#8482;). Here is a description of the difference&hellip;"Software Libre' is a name that some people have started using for 'Free Software' in order to clarify that the 'Free' in 'Free Software' has the meaning of 'Libre' rather than 'Gratis.' Open Source' is a relatively new term, denoting a particular organization's effort to market software libre and to define it in a more specific way that is friendlier to the capitalist marketplace. Source: Library Juice [http://libr.org/juice/issues/vol5/LJ\\_5.2.html](http://libr.org/juice/issues/vol5/LJ_5.2.html) So, many teachers call all "free to use" software "Open Source" when most of the "free software" is not really Open Source. There are lots of free programs that teachers use every day that are not Open Source, but commercial programs. For example: Adobe&#8482;'s Acrobat Reader, Flash Player and Shockwave Player

Apple&#8482;'s Quicktime Player

Google&#8482;'s Application Suite and Search Engine

Microsoft&#8482;'s Internet Explorer, Media Player and Live Search

Mozilla&#8482;'s Firefox

Real&#8482;'s Real Player

Sun&#8482;'s Java Package and Java Virtual Machine There is another class of Open Source programs that only a few teachers are interested in, server-based programs. Software in this category of programs includes Web Servers, Blogs, Forums, Wikis, and Learning Management Systems. The problem with these Open Source systems being used for

self-development is that they take a lot of time to develop, and are more suited for instruction than personal self-improvement. Avoiding the "Straw Man" Fallacy Our exploration of Open Source solutions for teacher self-development should avoid using a "Straw Man" argument. Sidebar A "Straw Man" fallacy is one where a position that is easily criticized (even lambasted) is set up so that it can be torn down. Here is a definition: "A straw man argument is an informal fallacy based on misrepresentation of an opponent's position. To "set up a straw man" or "set up a straw man argument" is to create a position that is easy to refute and attribute that position to the opponent. Often, the straw man is set up to deliberately overstate the opponent's position. A straw man argument can be a successful rhetorical technique (that is, it may succeed in persuading people) but it is in fact a misleading fallacy, because the opponent's actual argument has not been refuted." Source: Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straw\\_man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straw_man)

The way that this article could pose a "Straw Man" argument is to suggest that Education is about children and relationships, not about computers and technology

Computer programmers and software project volunteers are "techies" who have limited interpersonal skills and minimal success with interpersonal relationships

Computer programmers and software project volunteers wouldn't be working on Open Source projects if they had a "Life," since they wouldn't have the free time to donate to the project

Computer programmers and software project volunteers have limited psychological insight into their own issues. That's the reason that they have withdrawn into their own little, isolated world of computer programming. Of course, though these statements have face validity, i.e., on the surface the statements appear to be "true;" the generalizations are more "urban myth" than reality. These criticisms of Open Source software development are misleading. In reality, programmers and software project volunteers are followers, not leaders, and most of the projects that they work on are copies of commercial software. This is the Open Source "Rule of Copycat Knock off Software". Sidebar The one exception to this "Rule of Copycat Knock off Software" that we are aware of is Compendium. Compendium is Open Source dialog analysis software. Obtain your copy of Compendium here. Most "Copycat Knock off Software" is inferior to the commercial version that it imitates. What can you expect for free? But, is free good enough for teachers? Open Source and Education The whole issue of Open Source for Education centers upon finances and public demand that teachers integrate technology. Unfortunately, school districts have: Failed to fund basic education, let alone technology-driven education

Placed the burden of learning to integrate the technology upon teachers

Moved to force teachers to learn to use the technology without paying teachers to do so, or without providing adequate release time to do so

Limited the size of IT Departments and the technical support staff that is needed to actually use and manage the computer, servers and software that Open Source integration requires. However, these limiting and self-defeating economic forces have no bearing to the real problem, i.e., that school districts failed to discover, test, measure and promote (to the public) a direct rationale for the integration of technology with current academic learning. Sidebar Most of the arguments for integrating technology into instruction refer to job skills once students graduate. And, the few school district Open Source projects that are touted as successful consist of nothing more than high school students using Internet research access and basic word processing software on cheap computers to write reports and term papers. Of course, any teacher that has developed basic desktop productivity software skills can use either Open Source or commercial software to track, manage and maintain his or her personal self-development efforts. But, this is not using Open Source self-development, but Self-Development using Open Source tools. The problem here is that teachers can do the same, with less file compatibility issues by just using the industry leader's Office software. But, there is one Open Source software product that teachers can use for personal self-development that does not have a commercial competitor. How Compendium can be used for Teacher Self-Development? How can Compendium improve teacher self-development? The answer is by having a map of the dialog of key players, sponsors, stake-holders, and being able to sort through the forest of statements to find the crucial needs, fears, motivations, ideals and values of these groups. But, Compendium can also be used to explore your personal issues in depth if you imagine yourself to be composed of groups and committees. Appreciating that you operate (as a professional and as a person) as though you were many different, (some related, some compartmentalized, some departmentalized selves) leads to self-understanding, greater clarity of focus, and improved internal collaboration among your crucial needs, fears, motivations, ideals and values. Obtain your copy of Compendium here.

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