

Friday, February 29, 2008

News Nuggets

Why Last Resort Programs Work: Stopping the Dropout Epidemic

It is amazing how "last resorts" programs sometimes enjoy success (and pick up the pieces) that other, better funded, better designed, higher-rated, programs (that are staffed by more highly-qualified folks) flub. What can explain such success?

What can one person do?

Answer: That person can do plenty if they have vision, focus, commitment and charisma.

Idealism and credentials also help.

Case in point: Cristo Rey!

"Fr. Foley's charismatic personality and infectious energy have helped raise support and awareness for Cristo Rey not only here in the Chicago area, but also across the country. Locally, Cristo Rey partners with over 90 businesses for the school's Corporate Internship Program, has raised nearly \$30 million to provide the school with a striking new infrastructure, and sent 82% of graduates onto college. If that were not enough to keep Fr. Foley busy, he has also played a key role in opening ten Cristo Rey replications across the country.

Fr. Foley is the Chair of the Board of the Cristo Rey Network, the newly formed organization leading the effort to spread this model nationwide." Source:

Cristo Rey Newsletter http://www.cristorey.net/assets/charitable/viva_newsletter/spring04web.pdf Not bad for a program geared to help Chicago's central city (Mexican immigrants and minority students) escape from the "central city blight" & a deteriorated public school system, dropping out, gangs, drugs, teen-age pregnancies, learned hopelessness, defeat, despair, violence & even death.

Not a "Slam Dunk" on the "Court of Last Resort"

Success for the Cristo Rey program came with focus, dedication, sacrifice and hard work. Success didn't come easy. Watch the video &

Great video. Heartwarming results. Lives saved. Students working in corporate America at 14. Students graduating from high school (the first in their families, ever), and an 82% college completion rate for Cristo Rey program graduates! What the Cristo Rey program lacked in advantages became a model for turning "disadvantages into strengths." What's the secret? Corporate Sponsors Help. The Power of the Jesuit Mind and 500 years of social activism Helps. But, what is the Independent Variable that is responsible for this program's success?

Real goals, educational credentials, and a huge dose of reality help the Cristo Rey Project. But, none of these variables explain the program's success.

Even the charisma of its developer and director, the publicity on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), story publicity on National Public Radio (NPR) don't explain the success.

Time and Newsweek: Fr. Folley, or Newsweek: Daring to be Different

The real power of the program? Belief in students &

Don't Let Anyone Ever tell you that "Kids cant' Learn"

Here is the real secret to the success of Cristo Rey. The founders believed that students from the lowest strata of central city economic life can learn, can excel, can succeed, can create and can contribute to society.

The founders backed up this belief with a program that energized students and businesses.

Classroom Toolkit always promotes the belief that any school district that really educates its students enjoys sufficient monetary support to do whatever it takes to teach its students. And, this monetary support is unrelated to district wealth. The results that the Cristo Rey program points to prove this assertion.

The program takes students that amassed marginal, mediocre and dismal performance records in the "barrio-centric" central city schools of Chicago.

In those schools the plethora of ills that plague lower socioeconomic kids prevail.

In Cristo Rey, hope, safety, zero tolerance and academic success prevail.

Which teachers go home at 3:00 p.m., tired, stressed, drained, depleted, desperate? That is if they go straight home.

Maybe the "barrio boys and gals" make a pit stop to imbibe their socially acceptable drug of choice.

Which teachers go home at 6:00 p.m., or 7:00 p.m.; energized, confident, satisfied that they are making a difference in the lives of their students?

And, while money was available in partnership with local businesses. this money was not a handout to help poor, depressed, ailing, sorry immigrant kids with freebies and handouts. This money was an investment in high quality, productive, creative workers who are an asset to the company that sponsors them. This work-study program is a take-away for businesses and students, not a "give-away that enforces the expectation that "continued generations on welfare remains the fate of the central city poor."

And, count competent staff as a resource.

The \$30 Million USD in corporate support, grants and the \$2.2 million in eRate funding didn't just fall from the sky. The endless positive publicity for the program didn't just explode. Folks, competent folks, go out of their way to bring these resources into the organization.

The Real Question…The real question is, "When are our public schools going to discover that our students have unlimited, untapped potential?"

Who will bring the type of success that the Cristo Rey program enjoys to the majority of our students?

We may not know who, but we know that this person (or group) will believe in the ability of students to learn…believe in the ability of students to excel.

And that charismatic student-focused leader will demonstrate that the learning performance targets, that educators and students shoot for and reach, exceed the "minimal skills targets" of state-sponsored, high-stakes tests.

Targeting education toward "tests of minimal skills" is deadly to the long-term success of our country…stagnation from within…resulting in the under-development of our greatest resource; the brilliant, talented, inventive, creative, dynamic minds of our students.

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

Short Article

Designing our Experience: We have a Lot More Control than we "Think"

Does what you believe have a direct effect upon your life? And do your beliefs support your goals and intentions for your life? Or, is deciding what to believe a dilemma? Is it easier to skirt that dilemma and accept the patchwork of indoctrination, conformity-pressure and "should-be's" that growing up dishes out?

The tendency of our brains to focus upon the stimuli that seems to make sense of our world (and to ignore evidence to the contrary) advances and ingrains our beliefs.

Our experience of "reality" is built upon the concepts and constructs that we believe to be real. What is real may or may not be the same for everyone. Hint: it isn't.

Even witnesses to the same event relate their experiences of that event differently. And descriptions of the same event or the same item vary when speakers of different languages try to explain them. A Random, Un-Planned Process? Beliefs seem to be randomly created and randomly reinforced by events and environmental stimuli. Belief development seems to be left to chance, unless you view beliefs as a byproduct of social indoctrination that is fostered (foisted upon?) in a noble attempt to socialize our young people.

Such beliefs seem idiosyncratic and out of reach of normal change methods, or are they?

So, what role do teachers play in ensuring that the indoctrination and belief-creation process at work in our schools is effective.

And, what control can teachers exert upon the belief structure of their students, and upon their own belief structures? Are teachers ensuring that their personal and instructional reality supports positive, worthwhile, self-affirming goals and intentions?

Sidebar Fantasies are experiences that we believe are not real. We relegate these experiences to the realm of the imaginative, to dreams and to daydreams.

The question is, "What is our personal reality" since events and occurrence are filtered by our beliefs.

One concern develops when one of our beliefs conflicts with another of our beliefs. Sometimes one belief cancels out another, similar to the way that one ripple on a pond's surface cancels another ripple. At other times, our beliefs can coincide, and increase the strength of one or both. Other possibilities…beliefs in conflict that: Eliminate one belief
Eliminates both beliefs

Transforms one belief

Transforms both beliefs

Subsume one belief within another

Merge with yet another belief or set of beliefs

Beliefs are more fluid and malleable than we have been conditioned to assume.

Why Beliefs are Important to Teachers? Beliefs are important to teachers because teachers are in the business of changing thoughts, ideas, behaviors, skills and beliefs.

Of course, it may be "politically incorrect" for a teacher to admit that the primary job of a teacher is to influence change, and teachers have to step gingerly whenever the subject of religion rears its "censoring, ugly head."

Education must rely on the open-ended ability to ask questions, tough questions, hard to answer questions, questions that don't have a pat, politically correct, or status-quo stake in our educational bureaucracies.

A fair and inclusive dialog must examine our educational (and our personal) realities. Real questions must be answered. For example: How do we change, fix, repair or adjust beliefs that serve to limit our success (a disservice to ourselves and our students)?

How do we change beliefs that we don't even realize we have?

How do we separate beliefs from religion, ethics, morals and values?

How do we change the beliefs of students in an ethical and moral way, especially if students and parents state that they don't want the religion and values of these students tampered with?

Can verbal communication (the main tool that teachers have to work with in changing the behavior and beliefs of students) really change the beliefs of ourselves and others? Making the Unseen and Hidden Known A body of knowledge and skills for changing beliefs, often at an almost instant pace is available using a technology known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

This technology relies upon the fact that beliefs are moderated by sensory-mental processes, and that tampering with these processes can produce change and transformation rather quickly.

Some of the NLP magic can be worked upon ourselves, but many of the belief-transforming processes require the help of others. We often need the help of others because we experience difficulty peering through our beliefs. Otherwise, pulling off the change and transformation process is easy.

Dissecting your Sensory/ Mental Processing Framework

The skills and steps of NLP Belief change are beyond the scope of this short article, however, Classroom Toolkit will investigate this topic in upcoming articles.

In the meantime, pay attention to the mental pictures, self-talk, and internal sensations that seem to be connected in some way to your beliefs. And, focus upon your self-limiting beliefs because you have need to tamper with beliefs that are delivering success and prosperity to you and your students.

Just remember that your internal processing power was designed for success. You can make changes that transform your beliefs, and these changes can appear to be magic.

Pay attention to your limits, and you quickly encounter what "limits you."

More likely than not, that which limits you is within yourself. Don't put up with believing that your barriers to self-actualization come from outside.

Do you have the courage to take charge and design your experience?

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

Quick Tips

Teacher Time-Savers

The Classroom Toolkit Website presents a full complement of structured materials that save time and enhance classroom planning. Of course, Classroom Toolkit offers a unique focus, blending project management and automation technology to streamline teacher productivity.

Time savers for Teachers; is another online resource that offers a free eBook with 28 pages of forms that you might find useful.

Download the free eBook at: Time Savers for Teachers; free eBook Free Materials Time savers for Teachers; provides a host of free materials. Of course, these are not as extensive as the collection provides at Classroom Toolkit, but that is because Time Savers for Teachers; sells a lot of teacher materials packages.

Here is a link to the teacher materials packages that you can purchase.

Timesavers for Teachers;

But, check Classroom Toolkit before ordering because you may find most of the materials that you need at absolutely no cost.

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

Top Tips

Thinkfinity;

Lots of no-cost resources are available at Verizon's literacy, education and technology site, Thinkfinity; Sidebar "Verizon Thinkfinity is an innovative online resource for teachers, students, parents and the literacy community, which includes the program previously known as Verizon MarcoPolo and the new Thinkfinity Literacy Network. In partnership with leading educational and literacy organizations throughout the nation, Verizon Thinkfinity offers over 49,000 educational resources -- including lesson plans, student materials, interactive content and web sites -- in seven academic disciplines. A companion, comprehensive professional development program, delivered through a network of State Rollout Partners, prepares educators to effectively utilize these rich resources to improve student learning in the 21st century. All of these resources are available to users anytime, anywhere, at no cost. Thinkfinity is the cornerstone of Verizon Foundation's educational and literacy initiatives." Source: Thinkfinity MetaTag

Description Thinkfinity; Home Page MetaTag (View Source) This may seem like a lot of resources to non-teachers, but, non-teachers, politicians and the public fail to comprehend just how much work teachers do. Of course, non-teachers also underestimate just how much material teachers must develop for their classes. Sidebar Anemic: 54,000 Resources are a "drop in the bucket." Divide 54,000 by the number of teaching days in one year (approximately 170 for public school classrooms), then divide by 13 grades (counting Kindergarten). The result is just less than 25. This means that teachers will have to: Scramble for a lot more material than Thinkfinity provides. Adapt, adjust and create a lot more lessons. Spend a lot of time sifting through the Thinkfinity; site to find something that they can use. What does Thinkfinity; Offer? Thinkfinity; offers: Teacher Resources On-This-Date Calendar Student Materials Index Lesson Plan Index Educator Newsletter (Currently Suspended for Revamping) Professional Development No-Cost Training Trainer Resource Center Changing Website Thinkfinity; seems to be new and changing frequently. Links appear, then disappear, perhaps in an effort to remain current and fresh. Unfortunately, teachers need a stable and trustworthy site because planning should be yearly for the most streamlined results. Teachers expect to return to a resource site six or seven months later, and find the same materials that they bookmarked. If you find online resource materials, you can: Create "Favorites" or "Bookmarks" Build a set of nested folders with desktop shortcuts pointing to the resources Use Google; Notebook to store the links List all the links in an application such as a word processing document outline, spreadsheet, or presentation program. What Happens if the Site changes the Links? Sometimes, you are able to use the "way-back" systems on Google; or Alexa;. This strategy is worth a try if you are desperate (and didn't plan ahead). Note: You find the "Way Back Machine" after you search for a specific Website's traffic rank. A Better Research Solution A better research solution for must-have references is a Surfulator; is essential. Sites change. So, evaluate the resource material. If you must refer to the material later, then a copy on your desktop, with live links will save you hours of anguish and save you tons of stress. Here is a link to the Surfulator; program. Link to the Surfulator; site Purchase Surfulator; now

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

Teacher Resources

PBS Teacherline

PBS Teacherline® is an expensive alternative for professional development if a teacher has to pay for the courses out of their own pocket. Of course, PBS Teacherline® courses carry course credit that most school districts accept. And, many school districts sign up for prepaid training programs to allow teachers to enroll in PBS Teacherline® courses without teachers having to shoulder the cost.

Here is a link to the PBS Teacherline® Take a free course, Free Orientation Course: Practice Learning Online with TeacherLine … Register (No Cost)

Sidebar The PBS Teacherline® courses that school districts can license (even brand with their own logos) allow school district to maintain control of courses and course facilitation.

PBS courses also import directly into delivery platforms such as Blackboard; WebCT (now controlled by Blackboard;), Desire to Learn (D2L), and Moodle! (Note: If you don't know what these services and learning management systems (LMSs) are, don't worry, you probably don't have access to them.)

Note to Note: Moodle! is an Open Source, server-based software product. Moodle! is functional, but lacks to "bells and whistles" of the expensive learning management systems. The main issues affecting Moodle! are the lack of multi-user (i.e.; team-teaching capacities and the ability to import Microsoft; Active Directory student logins) Cost of PBS Teacherline® Courses These PBS Teacherline® course are 10, 12, 15, 30 and 45 hour courses; and costs are related to which college or university offers graduate credit. Course Categories

Instructional Strategy

Instructional Technology

Math

Reading/Language Arts

Science

Grade Level Categories

PreK

K-2

3-5

6-8

9-12

Complete Course Catalog

Check out PBS Teacherline® if you have money to spare and need the professional development credits.

The course materials are worth your while, but you will pay a premium for the credit hours.

Some day, school districts will discover that hands-on, on-the-job performance is more important to assigning teacher pay scales than college course credit and in-service seat time.

Until that time, take course work such as PBS Teacherline® to build your on-paper skills, and work quietly to build the real skills that count, the in-class skills that increase your ability to teach students.

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

Teacher Survival Strategies

Turn the "Winter Blues" into a "Rainbow of Delight"

Your mental outlook affects your feeling of well being. And, this is more important during the winter months at temperate latitudes because the absence of sunlight is known to affect mood. There are physical and chemical explanations for this "depressing" phenomena. (No pun intended… We didn't coin this term or acronym.)

The official term for the "Wintertime Blues" is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) (No pun intended).

"Feeling blue and depressed during the dark, cold winter months? According to a study published in the British medical journal, The Lancet (December 7, 2002; 360:1840-1842), this dip in mood may be caused by lowered levels of serotonin, a chemical in the brain. Serotonin levels are low in people with depression and also in healthy people during the winter (SAD)." Source: Tan Plus for Health <http://www.tanplusforhealth.com/news/january/blues.htm> Of course, Classroom Toolkit isn't promoting tanning salons. We are taking a professional spin on the topic. However, increasing exposure to winter light, by being outside, maybe removing your sunglasses, going outside (even in the cold) can help. "SAD is thought to be caused by decreased exposure to sunlight and causes symptoms identical to those of major depression from other causes. They include low mood, tearfulness, inability to concentrate, impaired sleep patterns, weight gain, irritability and even thoughts of suicide. In Alaska, over eight percent of the population is thought to suffer from SAD. Many other states have rates of three or four or five percent. Think about that: We may be talking about over ten million Americans." Source: Dr. Rock Positano The Huffington

Post http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw_b_85066.html Could the SAD epidemic be affecting you, someone in your family, or one or more of your students? Probably!

So, what are you to do?

Bright light therapy seems to help, i.e., exposure each day to a high-intensity light.

So, why don't school districts install these lights in each classroom?

After all, concentration and the ability to work; especially the ability to work with others in a pleasant environment, with an agreeable mood is crucial for maximizing everyone's learning and performance.

Besides, many states schedule high-stakes tests during the late winter, a time when the long-term effects of sunlight deprivation are most felt.

Answer: There is no panacea. Bright light therapy can have its pitfalls.

Sidebar There are drawbacks to high intensity light therapy: i.e., skin problems and triggering more energy in bipolar folks. "Bright light therapy isn't to be used by certain folks with eye conditions or skin conditions that prohibit exposure to high intensity light. They can also rarely cause someone vulnerable to bipolar disorder to experience too much energy and even manic symptoms." Source: Dr. Rock Positano The Huffington

Post http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rock-positano/winter-depression-otherw_b_85066.html

So, school districts won't install bright light hotspots, even though these lights could improve the lives (and the performance) of between three and eight percent of teacher and student population. This is because of the threat of lawsuits.

What about the rare case of making people with eye or skin problems worse. What about the rare case of launching a bipolar student, teacher or administrator into a fit of energy?

Even though these lights could mean the difference between a school district making "Adequate Yearly Progress" on the high-stakes tests mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), "the fear of the few or the none" (to paraphrase a certain television and big-screen alien of the pointed-ears-kind) prevents our schools from taking definitive action.

High Intensity Solutions

Since the SAD problem is probably a symptom caused by a lack of serotonin in the brains of those people that are affected. are their other wayst to increase this brain chemical without providing additional exposure to high intensity light?

In particular, what about self-hypnosis, visualization, positive suggestion?

What about movement and dance therapy?

For a great online course, see…An Introduction To Medical Dance/Movement Therapy: Health Care In Motion"Book Review<http://tinyurl.com/2tx4jylts> a Continuum, Grumpy!Whatever solution that you decide to implement, the first step is your awareness that SAD is a real problem that affects you and your teaching.

You (or your students) don't have to cross over the line to "sub-clinical depression" to feel the effects of minimal sunlight during the winter months.

If you know that students, teachers, administrators, parents (even yourself) tend toward the grouchy-grumpy side of the "Irritability Scale" by winter's end; you can take steps (no pun intended) to help everyone keep their distance from one another.

Individual projects (rather than group work) might be in order.

Also, help students by "providing less time when their teacher drones on;" i.e., talk less, give short instructions, and make allowance for everyone's lower frustration tolerance.

In addition, decrease stressors, limit test-taking practice.

Offer positive suggestions for comfort, friendliness, calm. Make life easier on everyone.

Remember: Even though three to eight percent of your campus population may be experiencing symptoms of SAD that reach clinical levels, almost everyone is affected.

SidebarThere isn't a classroom that won't be effected by even one clinically depressed student or teacher.

This is because of 1.) a process called entrainment, and 2.) because the chaos of the depressed person's thoughts and moods drives everyone else a little bit "crazy," too.

Since you know that the SAD "epidemic" strikes every year, and that the symptoms Peak during high-stakes testing time; develop strategies to compensate.

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

Professional Self-Development

Let Google™ Manage Personal and Professional Briefings for You

Researching background information to spice up the dull and bland content of most textbook…to add human interest to an otherwise flat course…eats your time in "big gulps."SidebarEmpirical experience is the reason that Colleges and Universities calculate two hours of preparation time for each hour of face-to-face instruction that instructors and professors. Much of this time is spent in research.

If public school teachers were treated as professionals, then public school teachers would teach far fewer hours, and receive more than one 45 minute "conference/ planning" period per day.Of course, many public school teachers teach 5 1/2 hours and spend another four, five or more hours in uncompensated class preparation. But, much of this amounts to scoring papers, evaluating work assignments and calculating grades.

But, what "flight plan" can the over-booked teacher follow? Maybe library visits the entire weekend, plowing through books and journals is unrealistic. Why not take a cue from professional pilots, and put your research on "autopilot?" Internet surfing, even at broadband speeds, only saves commute time. Individual topic searches (especially for relevant information that enlivens course content or current events) still wipes out teacher free time.

So, hire Google" as your personal "color-commentary coach." Or, rather, Google™ and friends.

Let these "research big guns" do much of the leg work for your research.Coaching and "Gophering:" Not your Basic SearchBut, don't plan on searching for what you want using the Google™ search engine. This type of searching takes far too long to sift through each individual topic. Culling junk from a search that returns 85,000,000+ Web pages cannot result in a time savings.

Instead, you need to avail yourself to a number of free services.

Here are the tools:Google™ Alerts

Google™ Advanced Search

Google™ Scholarly Information

Soople™

The Ultimate Google™ Interface (Fagan Finder)

Google™ Weather

Google™ Glossary

Desktop Shortcuts

A Plethora of other Google™ Specialized Info ResourcesWhat Soople™ and the Ultimate Google™ Interface do is simplify Google™'s Advanced search with a streamlined interface. By using either of these interfaces, you avoid needing to remember the advanced Google™ search syntax.What these Specialized Searches Do for YouGoogle™ Alerts:

Google™ Alerts is a service that delivers search results to your E-mail inbox.

The kinds of information that Google™ will deliver to your E-mail inbox, on schedule< include:News Alerts: Provides headlines from Google™ News

Web Alerts: Provides links to new Web pages that meet search criteria

News and Web Alerts: Combines both types of search results

Groups Alerts: Provides links to new messages that are posted in Google Groups

There are multiple schedules that you can set up for receiving these free Google Alerts. These include: As it happens

Once a Day

Once a week The frequency that you select depends upon your needs.

For example, News alerts provide only the top ten results while Web Alerts provide only the top twenty search results.

If you need more results than these, the "As it happens" is the most appropriate Google Alerts query.

The most useful way to use this service is in conjunction with a free Gmail account, also from

Google. Automated Search There are two approaches to automating search: Save searches as "bookmarks" or "favorites"

Create desktop shortcuts

Stored searches are ways to return to search results within one or two clicks.

The benefit of using "bookmarks" or "favorites" is that this strategy enables you to store searches in a outline or hierarchy

Of course, this hierarchy structure can be developed with desktop shortcuts that launch specific searches, too. However, nested desktop shortcuts require multiple "clicks" to sift through the hierarchy.

The benefit of nested shortcuts is that these shortcuts can be stored on a USB drive (or other removable device).

Other strategies include creating a free Blogger or WordPress; and storing search results as links within the Blog.

Google also offers other services including Google Notebook. Classroom Toolkit

cannot recommend the Google notebook because of our aversion to installing toolbars that record our Web activities. If you already have the Google toolbar installed, then you can add Google Notebook to this

toolbar. The Google Notebook will save notes as you search the Web. Smarter Research Here are some

resources for automating a smarter search system; Ten Tips for Smarter Google Searching

Google Search Operator Guide

Using Google for research (From the University of North Carolina - Asheville)

A Scholarly Guide to Google; (From Harvard)

Googling to the Max (From UC Berkeley)

Google Scholar Help (From Google)

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

Open Source for Education

Pachyderm: Open Source Multimedia Authoring

Teachers need a true "Open Source" multimedia authoring program. And, Pachyderm might fill that need. Of course, Open Source zealots might not like the fact that Pachyderm is operating source independent and really is "Open Source" in the original sense of the term.

Sidebar Many of the Open Source zealots seem motivated by a hatred and aversion to the success of Microsoft. Of course hatred and prejudice are just as inappropriate in the corporate or software worlds as they are in the personal or professional worlds of teaching and living.

No lasting good comes from hatred, bigotry or animosity, and the negative attitude (that is contrary to the laws of success) that motivates some of these zealots is a limiting factor in the success of Open Source Movement. Real "Open Source" How So? Pachyderm is real Open Source because; It is usable from any Web browser

It is freely available (at zero cost)

It is licensed under the Apache-Open-Source License

Development was funded by grant money

You can obtain a copy of the software for yourself, today

Pachyderm differs from some "Open Source" projects in that... It was developed by an organization to solve a specific need

The developing organization controls development, i.e., development is not left to a loose confederation of volunteers who do their own thing

The features of the product are specific and focused upon specific needs. Setting needs and building a project with a unified focus is atypical of the "Open Source Movement."

Open Source projects are most often group-developed "knock offs" of effective commercial software.

Open Source project developers allow the commercial developers to spend the Research and Development (R&D)

funds to develop a product. Then, the Open Source folks step in and copy (or imitate) the commercial product.

Of course, imitation products often fall short of the capacities and features of original, commercial products. The excuse provided for delivering a less-than-stellar product is that "the Open Source product is free."

People that pay nothing have little to complain about, and people that pay nothing lack leverage (except for their ability

to employ the delete key in dealing with products that fail to meet their needs). What teachers and students need are high-quality programs that interface with every other program. These high-quality programs should interchange data with (and interoperate with) every other program. Teachers and students need programs that allow the file formats of every other program to be used. Of course, commercial programs have not risen to this level of compatibility, yet, either. But this interoperability is partially responsible for the mass appeal of Microsoft's Windows and Apple's Macintosh computers. High-end commercial programs interface with and interoperate with other high-end programs. Commercial programs enjoy this advantage, most Open Source programs don't. Pachyderm is Free, So, What's the Catch? Pachyderm is a server-based software application. This means that you need a server to be able to use this software, so you can't easily install the program to your desktop computer.

So, even though the software is available at zero cost, knowledge of server and database administration is required if you want to use the program. What if you Can't Configure a Server? Unfortunately, Classroom Toolkit was not able to test Pachyderm because the server requirements were too time consuming to implement on our server (Microsoft Server 2003), and the amount of work required to test the software would exceed the time available to research this article. Sidebar Here is a sample of the instructions for installing Pachyderm. (Note: If you feel that these instructions are unintelligible, just refer them to your school district's IT Server Operators or Network Administrators.)

"Installationa. General

Before setting up Pachyderm 2.0.x on any machine, you have to make sure you have several things installed first: Java Runtime Environment 1.5. Sun's JRE is recommended. Available from: <http://java.sun.com/j2se/downloads/> Web Server with proxy support. Apache is recommended. Available from: <http://httpd.apache.org/> Relational Database Management Server. MySql is suggested. Available at: <http://dev.mysql.com/downloads/> ImageMagick. Available from:

<http://www.imagemagick.org/script/download.php> Note: The Mac OS X Server is by far the easiest install for Pachyderm, because there's no need to install WebObjects or worry about the WebObjects frameworks. First thing you need to do is copy the appropriate directories to the appropriate location on the server: Copy Pachyderm2.woa into /Library/WebObjects/Applications

Copy the contents of Frameworks/Pachyderm into /Library/Frameworks

Copy the contents of XML into /Library/Application Support/Pachyderm

Copy the contents of wwwroot into /Library/WebServer/Documents/pachyderm Once you've done this, create a database 'pachyderm', and create a user (default is username:'pachyderm', password:'pach=derm') and give that user full privileges on the pachyderm database. Run the following scripts against the database: pachyderm_create_tables.sql load_data_admin_user.sql

load_data_compdescription.sql" Source: Pachyderm Installation Instructions If this set of installation instructions is incomprehensible to you, you are experiencing firsthand the reason that Open Source software has not made noticeable inroads in its use in our school districts.

Commercial software is easier to install, and commercial software developers include all the helping applications in their installation packages. Commercial software developers do this by licensing the software components, and passing on the cost to purchasers.

Of course this suits everyone because the licensing costs are smaller for large developers (they buy in bulk), and because the installation process is automated.

The typical commercial program installation routine (even for servers) consist mostly of clicking on the "next" button. Pachyderm is a great Open Source program, but unless teachers work for a school district with an IT Department that is willing to experiment with non-commercial products and trouble shoot how to make these products work, teachers will probably find that paying the \$99 per year for the Pachyderm hosted product is the path to success; a path that avoids the high-stress of entering the technology "Twilight Zone" of difficult-to-deploy, free software.

Pachyderm allows the use of its software on its servers if you purchase a yearly account license. This way, a teacher (and students) can access their Pachyderm presentations online.

The range of access runs from use of the software (basic account \$99 USD per year) to use of the server and software (for 5,000 users at \$7,500 USD per year - members or \$10,000 USD per year - non-members).

Use of the server allows either downloading the multimedia presentations, or allows leaving the creations on the Pachyderm server and linking to the Flash-formated files.

Pachyderm can also be hosted on a dedicated server for large numbers of users for only \$5 USD per user per year.

This may seem like a subversion of Open Source; i.e., providing free software to teachers, but charging to use the software. But, Pachyderm was developed for museums to allow them to provide online presentations related to the museum's collection.

Pachyderm also partnered with many big university systems that have no difficulty paying for servers of their own, universities that have no difficulty finding the technical talent to install and manage those servers. How does the Pachyderm Program Work? All that is required to create Web-accessible multimedia presentations with

Pachyderm is a Web browser.

With a Web browser you or your students can upload media Audio - MP3

Images - JPG and GIF

Movies - MOV and FLV

Link the templates

Publish the presentation

Website

CD or DVD Who uses Pachyderm? Pachyderm is used by schools and museums of all sizes.

This is because the Pachyderm software is so easy to use.

The software and hosting is also cost effective.

And, educators know that multimedia presentations increase students' memory and recall, especially when students create the presentations themselves; or, when students collaborate on their presentation projects. Real Educational Use The members of the Pachyderm Project read like a "Who's who" of museums and universities.

Here are some helpful links to Pachyderm; Partners;

Pachyderm; Partner List

Pachyderm; Museum Members Sidebar Link to other Pachyderm resources; Training Timeline from the Maricopa Community College

Link to a Description of the Pachyderm software's design

Link to the Pachyderm; Developers' Site

What this Open Source Project Means to Teachers Teachers should feel frustrated that this great online multimedia presentation software resource is so close that they can hear it breathing through its long trunk, so close that they can smell peanuts on its breath; yet so out of reach for themselves and their students.

Teachers who don't have access to district servers, and teachers who work for school districts with IT Departments that are selective about what applications they support will remain frustrated.

But, there are no viable alternatives.

Tinkering with servers, and installing programs such as Pachyderm; is not something that many teachers can try at home unless they invest in server and network resources.

While many teachers could learn the process, few have the spare time to meander through the IT World; the call of the "wild and woolly" high-stakes test keeps teachers' discretionary activities in check.

One benefit: Since the developer of Pachyderm; is a non-profit organization, teachers should have little trouble getting a purchase order for the Pachyderm' service processed through their school district's bureaucracy.

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