

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

## News Nuggets

"Fail to the Chief": Neither Candidate gets NCLB

After eight years of failed education policy, two candidates vie for the title as "Your Education President for Change." But neither candidate understands education, and neither candidate realizes what a negative impact that the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) perpetrated upon American education.

"Clueless" might be a word that describes both candidates' acumen in the education arena. It's not Education this Election Year. Money and War (also a topic about money) are the issues that predominate in "water cooler and back fence" discussions during this election year.

Health care really is a discussion of what is affordable because no one believes that millions of folks without access to health care is desirable.

In a way, the discussion about education issues is like the health care debate; i.e., everyone agrees that quality education is important and desirable. But, beliefs "head-but" when discussions focus upon how to deliver quality education in a way that meets needs and solves problems as cheaply as possible. NCLB Uniformity Teachers, and the students they foster, suffered under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB); and neither candidate has a "plan" (or a pledge) to end that misery and pain.

The prospect is for continued despair and doom because this sad political meddling in the affairs of education. This occurs because education concerns fail to rise to the level of importance that this cornerstone of our nation's future deserves. What's More Important than the Education of our Children? The "Economy" and a two-fronts war are on the minds of voters during this election season.

Gas pump sticker shock, "Pain at the Pump", keeps this issue in the face of both the voters and the politically disaffected.

Every stop at the grocery store produces a teeth-clenched, tooth-grinding reaction to the tag price on basic food staples. The paradox is that the same pocketbook pain that families feel impacts schools at an accelerated level. If parents find it difficult to afford two children, imagine the issues involved in providing services and caring for 20,000 children. You're Invited to a Party, but no Need to Celebrate Party politics outranks common sense, good judgment and the common good when presidential politics roll around. (No pun intended. No one is rolling around on the floor because of laughter.) Rabid party loyalty skews the normal sound judgment and cautious optimism of our citizens into "howling at the moon", radical platform-following zealots. Only the rush to grab their "imagined share of inheritance money" makes some people more crazy than a presidential election. Catch Phrase Change, but "Business as Usual" And as usual, "teachers and students get the business."

Obama is apt to come up with a more creative name for the NCLB than McCain, but a new catch phrase is only rhetorical slight of hand.

"Slogans do not an improved education make!" "Platform Nuances a Difference Don't Make" Minor variations on a theme amount to dressing the political wolf in "off the shelf" discount store suits.

Here are some of the differences in the political stance of the candidates.

Note: The positions are left scrambled so that you can guess who is in favor of what "innovation and change" (Sarcasm intended).

One candidate thinks that NCLB was a major breakthrough and would like new rules for testing non-English-speaking and Special Ed. students while the other thinks that NCLB was a good first effort that should be revised, not dismantled. One candidate believes that technology funding and technology access should be increased and that low-wealth school districts should have more technology while the other candidate thinks that local choices for technology programs are more important.

One candidate supports summer learning programs while the other supports after-school programs.

Both candidates support an increased math and science curriculum, both would boost funding for Head Start programs and both support some version of "Merit Pay" for teachers.

Describing these differences in the candidates is like comparing and contrasting the difference between Tina Fey (portraying Sarah Palin on Saturday Night Live) and Sarah Palin (playing a candidate) on Good Morning America.

These differences are not like the Danny DiVito and Arnold Swartzeneger style of twins, but more like the difference between two pieces of pork that are turning rancid in the same barrel. The Real Difference between Candidates:

Slashing Cows in the Amazon In the Amazon, cattle herders have to drive livestock across piranha-infested streams to get to market. This operation can create mayhem for the farmer's investment and diminish the overall market value of the herd.

What to do?

So, these enterprising Amazon ranchers take a sickly, puny cow upstream of the ford site, slash the animal and drive it into the river. The bleeding cow attracts the school of piranhas to the feeding-frenzy party; and the healthy cattle ford the

stream in temporary window of safety&hellip;downstream from the distracted piranhas.

Sacrificing one cow for the sake of the herd, and for the sake of overall profits makes economic sense.

NCLB operates on the same principle, although in operation the process is more bruising than bloody.

The intent of NCLB is to sacrifice our public school systems so that some folks can get public money to send their children to church schools.

Of course, this financial maneuvering is illegal, but not if the public schools can be shown to be incompetent and harmful to our students.

So, like the puny cow that is sacrificed to the piranhas for the sake of all, some school districts need to be sacrificed so that voucher-based schemes can be marketed.

Support for public schools vs. support for a voucher system for dismantling our public schools is the one educational policy area that separates the candidates.

The corollary of the NCLB attack on public school teachers, the support for standardized testing, also differentiates the candidates.

One candidate favors continued focus upon standardized testing to hold teachers accountable, while the other candidate only notices that teachers are "teaching to the test." (Imagine that?)

But, in this time of financial turmoil, few people are focused enough upon educational issues to notice.

In fact, school districts are so focused upon financial challenges that there isn't enough energy to raise a national conversation about this political dirty-double-dealing.

Neither candidate is taking the leadership in exposing this double-crossing of our public school system by the political leaders that demand our trust.

During this election cycle, incumbents of both parties are apt to be turned out in record numbers. Unfortunately, it will be for economic issues, not their lack of vision and support for public education.

For voters who are looking for a clear choice in presidential leadership based upon a vision and focus for education and the future of our children; wait four years, and see what the political machine has to offer at that time.

Neither candidate has an education program to offer this time around because neither candidate understands how detrimental the NCLB is for education.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

## Short Article

How to Talk to the IT "Guy or Gal": Pay Exquisite Attention to Detail

Most modern teachers have to talk to the IT Guy or Gal to get equipment repaired, to get software installed or configured, or to get network resources connected. But, the stress and frustration of translating real-world needs (yours) into the unreal language of the Techie (not yours) can be avoided.

How?

Learn to pay attention!

And, accept that the miscommunication that often ensues is "your fault." At least, you will be able to make corrections to what you say, while the Techie is unable to adapt. Sidebartl is possible that the Urban Myth of the IT Professional entering into the world of servers, networks and Desktop Operating Systems was to compensate for a lack of people skills.

Equally likely is the possibility that a teacher's Intrapersonal Intelligences are more than adequate to bridge the gap across any of these alleged "people skills" shortcomings.

But, these Teacher-IT contacts are too infrequent (you only wish that these folks were around more so the technology stuff stayed working) for teachers to figure out the code that makes sense of the Techie's mind set. The Hidden Little Secret The secret to communicating with a Techie is to get painfully specific.

That's all there is to it.

But, when you think that you are being specific, you are not. Period. End of Discussion!

But, you protest&hellip;

Here are some examples:

A teacher says that she "Can't log in to the computer."

This means nothing to the Techie. These are empty sounds without meaning. The Techie then proceeds to extract the missing information from the teacher's message before he or she can provide assistance.

What missing information? Log in to what computer

Using what user account

To what domain

With what "User's Rights"

Associated with what "Error Message" Another example: "I can't access my files."

Information missing from the statement&hellip; Where are the files? On a USB Drive

On the Desktop

On the Hard Drive

In a Home Directory

On a Burned CD / DVD

In some Online Storage Location

What error messages were noticed?

Are the files visible, or missing?

What application created the files?

Would the file just not open, or if the files opened, was the result "rubbish"

Were there any AntiVirus messages? (The files could have been infected and quarantined or deleted.)

Do you have backup files? (Of course not!)

Etc. Learn the Correct Vocabulary The Techie knows that names of those "network thingies" and that "on-screen listie doohickey," but you don't.

This is time for a vocabulary lesson.

That network "thingie" could be &hellip; A network drop

A wall jack

A patch cord

A CAT 5, CAT 5e or CAT 6 cable

A computer network card

A NIC (pronounced "nick")

Trick question: Which of the above pairs refer to the same thing?

Answer:

A "patch cord" is the same thing as a CAT 5, CAT 5e or CAT 6 cable, although those numbers refer to different standard cable types.

A computer "network card" is a "NIC," or, Network Interface Card.

Here is what these items refer to:

The network drop is the part of the network that you see, or don't see. The drop comes from the ceiling or from overhead and drops down the wall in a visible "raceway" that protects it, or it comes down from the overhead through the hollow part of a wall.

The "Wall Jack" is what you plug the network patch cord (whatever it's category) into on the wall.

The NIC is what you plug the cable into on the computer. And when you plug that cable into the back of the computer, most often you should see light. This is a "link light."

A drop is "hot" if it works (generally turns on a light on the computer's network card on the back of the computer. (A "hot drop" is not warm to the touch.)

Once you know that terminology, you can talk to the Techie without frustration.

And listen carefully because the Techie will use the correct terminology, and will be specific. Accept Responsibility for the Broken Communication Every issues affecting the miscommunication with the IT Guy or Gal is your responsibility. Accept it.

Why?

Because you are the communications professional, and because you are the person that needs help to get back to work &hellip; or, to get your students' learning tools back in operation.

You also want to speed that help on its way. This means describing the "issues" as precisely as you possibly can. Make the effort. Poorly Communicated Service Requests equal Resolution Delays If the Work Order or Service Request contains errors, resolution can be delayed.

Examples: Technical support staff with the wrong specialties are sent to resolve the issue

Some issues can be resolved remotely, i.e., from the IT Office, and waiting for the Techie to arrive tomorrow is unnecessary

Some issues will take a long time to resolve, and you might need the Techie to bring a "Loaner" piece of equipment when they come

You are embarrassed because you caused the problem, but don't want to admit what you did

Some issues involve the loss of data, and you failed to back up that data. This requires time-consuming and expensive methods to attempt to retrieve files from the hard drive of a broken computers

Whatever the issue, copy the exact words of any error messages. This is important. How to Support the Technical Support Process Without Becoming a Techie Careful observation, patience, and recording everything pertaining to the service request are tasks that will speed up the resolution of technical issues.

And explain to the Techie that you don't know the technical terms, but want to learn them so that you can streamline the Service Request/ Work Order process in the future.

Admit that understanding the technical vocabulary is difficult for you, and ask the Techie to describe his or her thinking process as he or she goes about the troubleshooting and repair tasks.

And be grateful, thankful and express your appreciation. Express empathy for the "almost thankless position" that Techies face, hour-by-hour as frustrated users and folks that don't understand the stresses of IT Service unload irritation, rage, indignation or venom upon IT Staff &hellip; folks that are just doing the best job that they can. Sidebar Want to vent your frustration?

Focus your consternation, anger, indignation and resentment toward the Superintendent and Business Managers that squeeze budgets until the numbers "oink" and order the IT Department to "make do" with half the number of technical support staff that are necessary to provide the stellar support service that everyone deserves. In short, express the kind of support and understanding that leaves a positive memory and a positive feeling about you in the mind of the Techie. (Save the tirade for the Superintendent and Business Office folks that deserve it.) Make a friend. Be glad to see your IT Friend the next time, and your friend will be glad to provide whatever special service that is possible. Summary Empathy, kindness and a willingness to learn go a long way in communicating with IT staff members.

And specific, precise observations go a long way in assisting the IT helper to help you in an efficient manner.

And by the way, the same skills that are needed to communicate with the IT folks are the ones needed to communicate with your students.

Communicate with Techies with the same level of empathy, kindness and willingness to learn that you use to communicate with your students.

Teachers are people persons, and IT Staff are people. Accepting responsibility for the success of the communication and communicating your respect for each person are traits that define a Master Teacher.

The IT Guy or Gal can be your friend if you behave in a friendly and helpful manner. The choice for how smoothly and sweetly the Service Request/ Work Order proceeds is 80% to 90% yours.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Short Article at 10:00

## Feature Article

Recess: Academic Time-Waster, NOT!

Recess may become a casualty of "teach to the test" initiatives in some schools, and a casualty of budget-cramped four-day school weeks in other districts. But, recess is an integral part of learning, and not a time-wasting drain on the school day.

Fun, letting off steam, changing the pace of the day, building and tearing down ad hoc relationships, implementing game rules, winning triumphantly and losing gracefully, or less so&hellip; these are only a subset of the lifelong lessons learned and practiced at recess.

And modern children need recess more than ever.

Gone are the days of students' after school "pick-up" games in the school playground, teaming up in friendly rivalry in vacant lots, or wild-and-woolly tournaments on a not-so-busy neighborhood street.

Free normal childhood interaction with lots of other childhood personalities is crucial for development of emotional and interpersonal intelligences. In addition, foundation and the values associated with teamwork, problem-solving, shared decision-making and project management are formed during childhood playtime.

But modern lifestyle and societal burdens prevent children from acquiring these skills outside of school, so recess is a critical need. A few of these influences include:

Unsupervised, Broadband Internet Access

Play Dates

Latchkey (Self-Imposed) Child Care

Bedroom Media Centers (Cable Television with Premium Channels, Stereo, Multiple Game Consoles

After-School Programs

Homework

Accelerated Block Programs

Behavior Management Programs that Seek to Keep Children Quiet, On-Task and Focused Upon Test-Taking Skills

Fear of Being Outside the Home and Unsupervised, Including:

Parents Driving Children to the Homes of Friends and Playmates

Sex Offender Registries

School Bussing or Parents Delivering and Picking Children Up at School

Centralized Schools with Extensive Physical Plants and Huge Student Populations (Instead of Neighborhood Schools within Walking Distance)

Looming Four-Day School Weeks will provide Less Opportunity for Children to Interact Teaching in an Era of Fear The No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) and its effort to "root out" non-highly qualified teachers created a mentality of 1.) standards-based instruction, 2.) a loathing of any off-task, off-test school-day activities and 3.) higher-order thinking drill time focused upon improving high-stakes test scores.

In addition, line up and wait your turn Physical Education Classes (begrudgingly scheduled to meet state requirements and to provide teachers with a planning/ conference period) fail to provide the unstructured, outdoor play time that children require.

And paring down recess to a one after-lunch time slot, where students have to choose between eating a pleasant meal in a quiet and relaxed atmosphere (at their leisure) or getting outside to play for the remainder of the half-hour lunch period Sidebar Forgive the sarcasm. A quiet, peaceful, unhurried luncheon where ideas can percolate and digest is the environment that builds healthy bodies and minds.

Most school lunch periods are the embodiment of the factory shop floor, foundry or automated trough-filling feedlots. The noise is horrendous. Is it a wonder that children dump the contents of their meal trays and seek escape outside, away from the clamor and din? But, even when teachers extend the after lunch recess period by ten minutes, a twenty-minute play period, once a day, fails to satisfy students' need for physical activity and play.

Un-Stress through Change-of-Pace Activities Stress researchers advise change-of-pace activities to decrease stress levels. This means that if students and teachers spend extensive periods focusing upon mental activities, the physical (preferable fun-filled) activity erases the effects of stress.

And, physical activity is more effective in decreasing stress than other, sedentary activities such as watching television during a break. Even eating fails to diminish stress levels...as large cohorts of obese children demonstrate. Stopping academic activities for anything that is not content-based instruction, and believing that these in-seat "breaks" perform the role of recess is an indicator of unenlightened teaching, or the mark of following misguided administrative directives. Learning through Change-of-Pace Activities The "adult learning cycle" is 90 to 120 minutes long. This is the time that focused attention and concentration can take place. Of course, this focusing time varies by age and individual characteristics.

For children, the length of focus time is shorter.

Fortunately, longer study times can be sectioned into shorter periods. Just getting up, changing seats, indulging in a "rest room break" (if the pace of high-stakes test coaching allows) serve to rekindle attention. Sidebar Almost every teacher agrees that students that need to take advantage of the rest room facilities are unable to concentrate on much else. And that concentration diminishes in inverse proportion to the internal pressures that signal a need to leave the classroom.

Some teachers clutch to an aversion for allowing students to enjoy unsupervised time, even restroom time. Emphasis on this level of control is detrimental to learning.

Of course, there is a solid foundation for concern. Younger students might "play" in the bathroom, stop up sinks with paper towels, float sticks and debris and sail an imaginary navy. They might sing, talk to students of other classes, and otherwise amuse themselves at the cost of the teachers having to repeat a set of instructions.

Older students might smoke, take drugs, "tag" the stalls, or use the time to send text messages to their friends. However, students that need to be away from the classroom that badly could be steered toward more productive outlets.

And we don't mean listening to the teacher drone about textbook content. In fact, saying words and acting out the behavior, the Total Physical Response (TPR) can erase some of the recess deficit that our students experience. Sidebar For a description of how to employ the TPR Method, see the Classroom Toolkit articles, Total Physical Response: Building "Verbal-Physical" Connections that take Hands-On Learning to a New Level and Total Physical Response - Story: Integrating Storytelling into Instruction

Even semi-aerobic activities such as singing, dancing or yoga can strengthen memory and learning. Sidebar The secret to yoga as a semi-aerobic activity is to breathe slowly, and imaging the breath flowing into the stretched body parts. The time for change of pace varies by the weather. Bright, sunshine-filled days allow longer periods of concentration and allow for daydreaming.

Dreary, stormy days (with low barometric pressure) require more frequent diversions from study. And, during periods of high ("rubbing hackles and fur" the wrong way) wind, intense focus on academic tasks should be avoided altogether. During certain weather conditions, students (and their teacher) become grouchy and irritable. (No we are not talking about gloomy high-stakes test days.)

Wise teachers break ranks with their lesson plans, shelf the schedule; and substitute games, art, entertaining videos, etc. Be sure to plan for these days and keep resources available for an instant launch.

For games on these days, choose games where everyone wins. Avoid pitting "Team Grouch" against "Team Wedgies-at-Every-Desk." Games with winners and losers add aggravation to the already irritated, and salvaging instructional goals would be better served with silent, free reading.

Of course, the longer the concentration period, the longer the change-of-pace activity needs to be.

So, a period of intense study either will be followed by recess (that the enlightened teacher schedules), or will be followed by a period of fidgeting, daydreaming and inattention (that the test-stressed teacher doesn't want). These off-task, off-focus reactions to intense and extended periods of study are normal responses that are set off by students' biological clocks and body rhythms.

The teacher who schedules the recess, break or change-of-pace improves instruction at accelerated rates as compared to the "taskmaster, rub their noses into the grindstone if they don't pay attention" teacher.

But, there are other ways of taking change-of-pace breaks besides exiting to the playground. Directed Daydreaming: Recess in a Box (Box-like Classroom, that is) Daydreaming serves a vital and beneficial biological process. These benefits include a constellation of components that include: Relaxation

Stress Reduction

Memory Processing

Idea Incubation

Mental Processing using the Students' Most-favored Learning Style (Preferred Intelligence) Processing

But, teachers can harness this momentum-changing power with "directed daydreams."

Directed daydreams are narrated guided fantasies that ask students to imagine scenes, scenarios and other mental movies.

These teacher guided excursions can include all five senses; i.e., vision, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. And during these narrations, teachers can work in suggestions for increased memory, ease of recall, integration of ideas and positive self talk.

Scenario content has unlimited possibilities, and is best conducted in an "ad hoc" manner instead of being read or taped in advance. With so many variables to choose from, these guided "mini-vacations" need never be repeated.

SidebarThe intent of not repeating scenarios is to expand students' perceptions and conceptualizations, and to connect students' thinking with as many of the Multiple Intelligences as possible.

Boredom is not an issue for most children because relaxed fantasy and directed daydreaming are intrinsically self-rewarding

However, some emotionally disturbed children may reject this activity, possibly because they lack comfort with more intimate association with their thoughts, images and imagination.What are these variables?Multiple Intelligences Senses

Locations

Situations

Associations

Modes of Experience

Modes of experience include:Behaviors

Feelings

Sensations

Symbols and Mental Imagery

Thoughts and Beliefs

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Experiences

Self-Talk

Ideal, Values, Personal Meaning

As long as the guided imagery proceeds at a slow pace and is spoken with a rhythm based on relaxed breathing , the content is seldom relevant, so it is easy to work subject matter content into the narration. Not only will students remember the content-based associations, but many students are likely to respond with creative ideas and novel associations. Allowing students to write or draw in personal journals following a guided imagery session also pays integrated learning dividends.SidebarSome teachers like to play background music when they conduct guided imagery sessions.This practice is beneficial, but the conducting teacher loses the ability to slow the pace of the narration to deepen students' relaxation because the students rhythms will entrain to the beat of the music.

On the other hand, playing soft but lively music after a guided imagery session, such as quick pieces written by Mozart, can gear (rev up) students attention to the pace needed to focus and concentrate.

If school administrators question the use of so many guided imagery sessions (or if they happen to walk in and observe, simply float the directions toward test-taking scenarios, and you will be evaluated as a "hero." It is easy to waft in references as to how this interlude leaves students relaxed and better prepared to focus as they enter the "garden of test-taking delights." SummarySo, rather than cave in to the demand that you "scrub recess and other time-wasting activities" in favor of high-intensity academic inquiry and focused test-taking drill; instead, serve liberal helping of recess and change of pace activities during each school day.

The math of recess and change of pace activities is "addition and multiplication"&hellip;adding memory, idea integration and creative thinking into each student's learning.

And ignore the rants of anyone who would "subtract" recess from the school day. These folks are experiencing "clouded thinking," possibly due to the stress of intimidation (and vigilance) from the test-taking gestapo.

Remember that harmony with the basic biology of human development and synchronization with the natural mental processing of students' mental capacities yields superior results to pontificated political mandates.

The rhythm and learning requires change of pace activities to keep focus and concentration in tune. Recess is necessary for maintaining the delightful melody of learning success and accomplishment.

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

## Quick Tips

### C-SPAN Classroom

Election season brings interest in all things political.

But finding (and trusting) unbiased, un-slanted, un-spun reporting from modern mass media outlets? You be the judge.Then, there is C-SPAN Classroom.

C-SPAN Classroom is a public service of the cable industry.

Since Cable Operators are folks that eschew regulation and are wary of politicians who might turn on them, despite the overly generous contributions, these folks business bottom lines can't afford to alienate either political party. This motivates them to provide even and fair news coverage.A Super Primary SourceC-SPAN Classroom offers unique, primary source video. (This means "original" sources of information rather than information about primary

elections&hellip;which they also cover.)

C-SPAN Classroom focuses on free materials for teaching Civics and U.S. Government. These include a focus upon: Principles of Government

The U.S. Constitution

The Legislative, Executive and Judicial Branches

Political Participation C-SPAN Classroom also offers teacher resources that include: Sample Clips

A Newsletter

A Video Search

Grants and Fellowships

A Very "Liberal" (pun intended, C-SPAN Classroom's words - meaning: generous) Copyright Policy C-SPAN Classroom encourages teachers to use C-SPAN resources without cost. The policy allows teachers to make video tape copies without obtaining permission if the use&hellip;Is for an educational use

Is not offered for sale or subsequent distribution

C-SPAN is credited as the source of the video These materials can be used by teachers at school and at home&hellip;and these copies can be kept for as long as you want.

C-SPAN Classroom also allows saving video taped materials on digital media; i.e., CDs and DVDs, or saving this content using online storage systems such as video servers.

Rules for using C-SPAN Classroom Digital Content

Teachers can use C-SPAN Classroom by: content and teachers can digitize C-SPAN Classroom content for use

by: Digitizing the content

Purchasing the content from the C-SPAN Store and using it, sharing it

Downloading the content from the C-SPAN Archives

Keeps backup copies of the content indefinitely

Providing C-SPAN content to students on CDs or DVDs as long as the content is available without cost to all students in the course

Posting C-SPAN-produced content on a non-commercial Website or a school district Intranet site

Using C-SPAN-produced content during professional presentations as long as the fee for delivering these presentation is nominal Uses that Require Licensing (and maybe paying a fee) Teachers that use C-SPAN content for distance learning classes will have to obtain a written license, and might have to pay a licensing fee.

The reason: Many colleges and universities charge for distance learning and dual-credit classes.

Distance learning would be classes that are distributed by: Public broadcasting stations

Local cable or public access

Internet and Network access

Distribution of courses by CDs or DVDs (not just copies of programs that you give to all your students) C-SPAN

Classroom "StudentCam" Contest C-SPAN Classroom sponsors a StudentCam Contest each year.

This Year's StudentCam Topic is, "A message to the new President"

Students (alone or in teams of up to three students) develop a presentation to ask the new president, "What is the most urgent issue for the new president to address after taking office, and why?"

Students create a short (5 to 8 minutes) video documentary to explore an issue of national importance. This should be an issue that they believe the new president of the United States must act upon.

Student documentaries need to include more than one viewpoint and must contain C-SPAN program content to qualify for the contest.

The deadline for submitting the documentary is January 20, 2009" (Inauguration Day). Students in grades 6 to 12 are eligible to enter.

Winning students will be interviewed on C-SPAN, and there are \$50,000.00 USD in available prizes. Link to the C-SPAN StudentCam Press Release C-SPAN Politics Although the Primary and Full-Fledged Presidential Campaigns seem like they has been a long and acrimonious road, C-SPAN Politics has kept up with the fray and the frayed nerves.

Of course, there is still time for one or both of the campaigns to take an even more nasty turn for the worse. If either candidate fails to reign in the zealots that support them, "mud could fly and sleaze could tarnish" both campaigns; even though the principle aspirants have agreed to step above the "ooze and slime" that characterized the last several campaigns.

C-SPAN reports on political ads, debates and campaign "stump stops." And they offer fair coverage, rather than slants and spins that "Dote and Promote" for their owner's (or stockholders' favorite) and "Thump the Chump" for the candidate that their employers disfavor.

C-SPAN Politics also shares Podcasts and historical documentaries of previous political campaigns. These are real, primary sources.

Sidebar Unfortunately, many of these resources require Real&#8482; Player to be installed on your computer. Get

Real&#8482; Player Here Red State, Blue State: The Real Patchwork Everyone has seen the ubiquitous

"Red-State-Blue-State" political maps that shrink understanding of the Electoral College to a simplified graphic.

But, voting in states also divides along "urban/ suburban/ rural", ethnic make up, and racial make up.

C-SPAN Politics provides a political map that drills into the "voting-block-tendencies" of areas within states.

States Political Regions Map (not overall, one party takes all summary)

Unfortunately, sifting through primary source material is time consuming and tedious. (Students get lost or distracted when turned loose on sites with tremendous resources, so teachers must sort out appropriate information and provide rubrics, project maps and assignment blueprints to keep students on track.)

The extra work is worth the effort.

Even elementary school teachers can benefit from these resources when they develop presentations that add color and commentary to augment the boring (politically correct, uncontroversial) textbook content. SummaryC-SPAN Classroom, C-SPAN StudentCAM and C-SPAN Politics contain a huge primary source archive. Resources for teaching current events, civics, social studies, government (even history) are available without charge.

Take advantage of these resources&hellip;when you have the time.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Quick Tips at 08:00

## Top Tips

### Online Newspaper Services for Kids

The election presents a chance for students to learn from newspapers and primary sources. However, many original sources are difficult to read and content that is relevant to students' levels of reading and understanding is sparse.

The solution is to find online newspapers that are written for the age and interest level of your students.

And, the trend is for these "kiddie" publications to be colorful, even a bit garish." This may grate on adults sensibilities and impinge on readability, but children must respond to "impact color," otherwise, why would so many world-class sponsoring organizations be using the same format?

(Too bad that these world-class sponsoring organizations make themselves look amateurish by the design of these sites.) Quality Content Reporters that write for children try the "Hey Kids!" style of writing, as if they were "buddies. Of course young people see through this ploy. Students know that the writers are not kids, and it is amazing that they read past the initial sentence of these stories.

Quality reporting for students requires the same level of respect and support for students' competencies that teachers demonstrate, hour by hour, in classrooms everywhere.

It is amazing that reporters ignore the classrooms of Master Teachers where they could learn how to write for young people.

Of course, there are a lot of teachers who teach well, but can't write for children or adults; so reporters need to evaluate and choose which teachers they observe and imitate. Rules for Writing for Young People Rules for young people begin with a respectful attitude and honest, straight talk. Adults that pretend to be kids lack credibility.

Writers for kids need to understand that they are "under contract" to the young people, and that they must deliver value to kids in the same way that reporters for adults also must deliver value to their readers.

For example, why would an online kids news magazine display an ad for Lasik+ eye surgery, and show a young adult couple looking into each other's eyes? What about an ad for a BodyDiagnostic mattress?

To their credit, Yahoo seems to have changed the name of their site from "Yahooligans" (Meaning: Young Criminal Gang Thugs") to "Yahoo Kids." Writing News Materials The ideal source of news materials is the students' teacher.

But, teachers' time is too precious and scarce to take on this task.

However, a "syndicate" of teachers researching and contributing could spread the work load and make the process viable.

One caution is that teachers need to compare three news sources and not use any three words in a row from any source to avoid charges of plagiarizing the news article.

Another issue is that some school districts claim ownership of all writings (probably illegally) that employee teachers create.

Another caution includes the of huge value but limited in usefulness is to have older students write the news articles for younger students.

Although student-written material holds greater sway with students than adult material, copyright issues involving under-legal-contract-age arrangements with student writers limit how these materials can be distributed.

The safest arrangements involve classroom writing projects where students research and share their articles, compositions and reports with members of their class or campus. Student Publications Here are some of the available publications, ostensibly targeted for students: Kids Post ( Sponsor: Washington Post)

National Geographic for Kids (Sponsor: National Geographic)

Scholastic for Kids (Sponsor: Scholastic)

Kids Newsroom (Source: Kids Newsroom.Org)

The Newseum (Source: Newseum - more adult oriented)

Scholastic News Zone (Sponsor: Scholastic)

Sports Illustrated for Kids (Sponsor: Sports Illustrated)

Student Connections (Sponsor: New York Times)

Time for Kids (Sponsor: Time, Inc.)

Weekly Reader (Sponsor: Weekly Reader)  
Yahoo Kids (Sponsor: Yahoo)  
Yak's Corner Sponsor: Detroit Free Press)Foreign PublicationsK-Zone (Australia - Sponsor: Pacific Magazines)  
The Newsroom (Great Britain - Sponsor: BBC)  
KidsNetwork (India - Sponsor: Pitara.com)  
Newspapers Around the World (Sponsor: refdesk.com)Other Publication ResourcesCrayola Kids Magazine (Sponsor: Crayola)  
Dig - archaeology (Sponsor: Cobblestone Publishing)  
Family Corner Online (Sponsor: Family Corner Magazine)  
In the News - news puzzles (Sponsor: BBC)  
WayBack - US History for Kids magazine (Sponsor: WGBH Educational Foundation)  
Yes Mag -Canada's Science Magazine for Kids (Sponsor: Peter Piper Publishing)ReferenceEncyclopedia.com  
The Informationsphere  
OneLook Dictionaries  
Quotations Page  
Research It!  
Roget's ThesaurusSidebarLinks courtesy of: Mr. Donn.Org  
California State University, Northridge

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

## **Teacher Survival Strategies**

**Rapport Building: How Personal can your Professional Persona Be?**

Rapport is the degree that you are in harmony with the people around you. For teachers, building rapport with students is crucial. But, rapport is more than getting along.

"Getting along" is like playing chords on a guitar, piano or organ. The right notes seem to fit, while the wrong notes grate and irritate.

But "rapport" is like the hum of a tuning fork. The tuning fork vibrates at the same frequency as the note, and the tuning fork even sets up a sympathetic vibration when the correct note is sounded. A "Tuning Fork" Listening Mode with your students. The idea here is to connect with your students on a frequency that is in harmony. This is accomplished by attunement at an unconscious and at a higher-consciousness level. This can be described as an "intuitive level." Of course, you must like your students and respect them, or the rapport that you building will be short-lived and backfire. Faking rapport is worse than being mean and disagreeable with your students. You can be forgiven for being "uptight and an ignoble \_\_\_." (four or more letter words could be inserted here).

The reason is that faked rapport leaves an unconscious discomfort, and the unconscious mind is slow to forgive. It is possible for the conscious mind to rationalize away distrust and "give the rapport-deceiver the "benefit of the doubt." But, the unconscious reaction retains a pure memory and remains unswayed by rationalizations. Intuitive Listening: More than Reading Between the Lines" Intuitive listening with the intent to build rapport separates "winning-circle" Master Teachers from come-in-later, bringing up the rear "also rans."

Some teachers use this skill without practice, and their colleagues believe that the rapport builder has a "magic formula" that accounts for their success.

Other teachers might describe the observable part of what the Master Teacher does as "charisma."

But, charisma is a kind of rapport. And although rapport can not be earned, it can be lost. First Gain Rapport, then Lead. Some fearful and confidence-lacking folks may object that building rapport is dangerous because the teacher could lock in to the negative thoughts and emotions of damaged and disturbed students.

But, this fear is groundless if the teacher is grounded in their own self-esteem.

Of course, a teacher that lacks self-esteem and holds a diminished self-concept should not be in the classroom, anyway. There are far easier and less rigorous ways to make a lot more money than to teach. And, our children deserve teachers who are people at their best. Sidebar It may be against employment laws for school district Human Resource Officers and Interview Committees to ask about emotional handicaps and mental illness, but mental health is a prerequisite for classroom teaching success. What the teacher does once rapport is established is to move from where rapport is established to a more mentally healthy, more harmonious, more functional level of awareness. The teacher moves to this level within himself or herself, and students follow suit.

If rapport is solid and firmly established, then students will move along to a more healthy level, drawn by the internal focus of strength and confidence that the teacher holds. Sidebar This process is similar to the Mutual Storytelling Technique, only the rapport process remains non-verbal, silent and below the conscious level of student awareness while the Mutual Storytelling Technique is verbal and rational. For a description of the Mutual Storytelling Technique, see. If the Strategy is not Conscious and Rational, Can it be Professional? Teachers have a subservient and unfettered trust in academic, cognitive, concept-oriented thought. It almost seems to be "blasphemy" for a teacher to espouse an intuitive strategy that bypasses the conscious mind. Worse, it seems sacrilegious to trust in a professional concept that

does not rely on a "theory."

However, feel free to attach whatever theory you wish to your rapport building practice.

Your supervisor and colleagues are better left to form their own opinions about your stellar success with your students. Let them believe that you are a "born leader" or an outstanding coach. It is too difficult to explain that you just care about your students and that you trust in non-verbal, intentional communication.

Besides, the implied imperative at work creates difficulties with your colleagues.

Here is how the implied imperative functions to impair collegial relationships. You describe just how easy it is to care about your students and how easy it is to trust in the basic goodness and personal capacity of your students. Of course, your colleagues are achieving less than quality results with their classroom management, "Don't smile before Christmas" approach. So, your describing the ease of the rapport building strategy is bound to irritate them because they will assume that you are "putting them down" by claiming that rapport building is "easy" when they are encountering so much difficulty. Keep these rapport-building secrets to yourself. They are secrets, not because they shouldn't be revealed; but because you should not reveal that you are using them. Caution: Never Tell Students that you are Building Rapport. The same logic and rationale holds about explaining the rapport-building process to your students.

You must never tell your students what you are doing. Revealing the process to your students allows the conscious minds of your students to begin making excuses, building rationalizations, generating doubt and inculcating fear into your relationship.

Rapport building must be kept "out of sight and out of mind (the conscious mind)," the more secretive to the conscious minds of your students, the more professional the practice.

So, intend to build rapport on non-verbal, unconscious and higher-consciousness levels by listening to the trust and harmony between you. Let the vibrations be connecting you to your students be like a tuning fork, intuitive. And hold the intention to connect to your students until these vibrations or intuitions are well established and solid. Then, move your consciousness in a positive, caring, loving, friendly and supportive way toward the best self-concept that you can muster.

In the process, you may also become amazed at what your students have to teach you.

Positive rapport is a two-way street.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 05:00

## **Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills**

### **Manage your Principal for a Positive and Productive Campus**

Teachers are subjected to the "Chain of Command" and evaluated as effective teachers when they follow orders; especially the orders of the campus principal that supervises them. But teachers leave themselves vulnerable and on slippery ground if they fail to manage their principal.

Of course, this means providing help and support to the principal, not figuring out clever ways to delegate from below. "Delegating from below" is the career-limiting strategy of getting your boss to do the work that you were assigned. We will not delve into the specific tactics of delegating from below because the tactics benefit no one, neither in the short-term, or in the long-run. A Mutual Success Relationship. Managing your principal means building a relationship that is beneficial to your principal and to you.

This includes identifying how the principal operates, finding out what the principal needs from you, and delivering all the help that you can. This means doing your work in ways that meet the needs of your principal, and does not mean doing the principal's work.

This process does not include arguing with your principal (either in public or in private) and does not include exerting influence upon your principal to change to your way of thinking; or to change the principal to your way of operating. Campus Culture, Management Style and Sphere of Influence Skills. Before you can get positive principal attention, before you can obtain approval for implementing your ideas and before you become recognized as a key member of the campus faculty; you have to produce results that benefit your students, that benefit your principal, and that benefit your school district.

Just "doing your own thing" is unlikely to provide a benefit to your principal, or to produce any support from your principal.

What is required is for you to pinpoint exactly what you need to do, then follow through with your support plan. Once this relationship is established, you will be trusted; and you can count on your ideas receiving a positive audience.

Campus culture refers to understanding how the folks on the campus where you work interact and operate. For example, is the campus Performance-Based or Test-Score-Driven?

Political, Bureaucratic, Centralized or Decentralized?

Planning-Based or Ad Hoc?

Clique-Driven or Best-Idea-Driven?

Collegial or Adversarial?

Stressed or Relaxed?

Adversarial or Supportive?

Are Decisions Made Slowly and Deliberately or Quickly

Etc.? Management Style refers to: Authoritarian, Democratic or Laissez-Faire Leadership

Accessible or Inaccessible Decision-Making

Open or Closed Budget Management

Formality or Informality

Importance of Paperwork vs. Informal Reporting Conversations

The idea here is to match your principal's method of working so that the principal is comfortable with the way you

interact and relate. "Sphere of Influence" Skills

Here are the questions to ask (of yourself) to determine if your management relationship with your principal is on the right track: Does the principal respect your work and rely on what you do?

Does the principal listen when you make suggestions or share ideas?

Do you know what is going on campus, and does the principal keep you informed?

Do you avoid rumors and trust the information that the principal gives you?

Do you solicit feedback about how you are relating to the principal? Do you pay attention and act on that feedback in a positive way?

Do you avoid cliques and keep on positive terms with all departments and factions on campus?

Do you treat everyone with respect, including students, parents, faculty and staff?

Do you focus upon facts and research instead of personalities if you disagree with decisions?

Do you listen before you answer?

Do you know what the principal expects you to deliver?

Do you keep your cool when disagreements occur or when temper fuses ignite powder kegs?

Are you prepared to do what it takes so that your contribution to the campus is positive and beneficial? Goal: What is Good for your Campus  
The reason for managing our principal is to work in harmony with your principal for the good of the campus.

Manage your principal correctly avoids schemes to get your way, avoids power plays to push your ideas, or avoids conniving to cut yourself a "bigger slice" of whatever is on the table (as long as it isn't more work).

Harmony, cooperation, collegiality and avoiding stress are hallmarks of a Master Teacher who is managing their principal.

A competent and fully successful principal will appreciate (and maybe reciprocate) in providing the help and support that you need when you manage the relationship with skill.

But, even a substandard, incompetent and less-than-fully-functional principal will be helped by your diligence in managing the relationship.

Managing your principal is in everyone's best interest.

Be sure to do so skillfully and wisely for a positive and productive campus.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Under-the-Radar Teaching Skills at 03:00

## **Professional Self-Development**

The Twelve Worst Planning Practices

Planning is the most important "non-outcome, non-output, non-urgent, non-teaching" task that you can perform. Planning delivers visible but difficult to connect and document paybacks.

So, planning is often deferred, put off or relegated to miscellaneous moments instead of to "prime-time, crucial, high impact thinking and high impact productivity" times. Major Planning Mistakes  
Here are twelve major planning mistakes that teachers make:

1.) Completing Urgent tasks before Completing Important tasks  
Urgent tasks must be completed, just be sure that you find time to squeeze in the important tasks each day, preferably before starting on the urgent tasks

2.) Saying "Yes" too Soon, and too Often

This includes the "sins" of being eager to please, eager to help, eager to accept someone else's work or someone else's responsibility. Delegate instead of taking on more work

3.) Accepting Global, Idealistic Goals instead of Specific, Doable Goals

Reaching for the stars is great, but be sure to keep your feet on the concrete ground (pun intended). Pursuing ideals is the mark of a Master Teacher, but be sure to focus on the coordinates of doable, measurable specific tasks that prove your progress

4.) Mistaking a Schedule, Activity List, Lesson Plans and Curriculum for Goals

Schedules, Activity Lists, Lesson Plans and Curriculum Frameworks are tools, but these tools cannot substitute for goals. Goals must be S.M.A.R.T.; i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Frame Oriented. Anything less is a pretend goal that is unlikely to deliver positive, desired results

5.) Targeting Activities that others claim to "Work" without testing, and without developing a Contingency Plan

Activity lists, target-focused tactics and secret strategies do not constitute a plan. In fact, these prized finds can become distractions and contribute to "Information Overload." Test everything that others share with you. Prove to yourself, for

yourself; that each activity, tactic and strategy works at this moment, with your specific students. Don't generalize beyond what you have been able to prove, now

6.) Jumping into Programs, Innovations or Changes too Quickly

Think, Plan, Test&hellip;then implement. Avoid "Do first, regret afterwards." Remember that if you select one path, you prevent yourself from taking every other path. Be sure to have escape routes in mind at every turn

7.) Lack of a Tracking Process

Know where you are going and when you are supposed to arrive at specific milestones. And, know early that you are going in the wrong direction. Make corrections early, not "after the fact"

8.) Killing Great Ideas because they Require too Much Work

"Wrong work," not hard work is the enemy of efficiency and success. Rid yourself of non-productive tasks and zero in on high-payoff tasks. Avoid choosing the "easy jobs" instead of choosing "difficult but effective" tasks. Work on the right tasks will deliver more satisfaction and success

9.) Focusing on Short-Term Solutions when Long-Term Investments are Required

This is the mistake of grabbing for easy answers, picking only the "low-hanging fruit." Many teacher goals require the investment of a lot of time and effort, challenging logistics, and repeated trial and error. When the goals are right, the additional work is worth the effort

10.) Working Manually when Technology would Streamline and Automate Tasks

Spend the "up front" time installing and learning the technology that will speed up and automate your work. Avoiding the use of technology because the "learning curve is steep only leads to a sharp slippery slope at the back end of a project." (You will find yourself slipping, sliding and struggling when you should be coasting to success.)

11.) Focusing your "One Size fits All" Solution towards the "Average" Student

Plan for variability in student learning, plan for multiple reteaching sessions, plan to communicate to students using multiple learning styles (Multiple Intelligences). Assuming that you are "skillful enough to teach every student with one-trial learning" is not only a planning error, but an error in professional judgment. Allow time for all the reteaching and all the practice that real learning requires

12.) Planning for What Happened Before instead of What Might Happen

Positive planning is proactive and successful planners always assume that anything (or everything) can change (maybe instantly). Plans that leave you "blind sided" were created with a "blind eye" to reality. Expect to adjust your plans, and you will be ready for that eventuality. You are going to have to adjust, so build proactive strategies into your plans from the start.

Perhaps your planning process is clean and sparkling, and you can't find any of these major mistakes in your professional life.

If so, either open your eyes, or show other teachers how you can "walk on water" because just about every teacher is burdened and stressed with extra, useless work and out-of-focus directives.

And, even if you don't commit these "planning sins," refrain from casting stones on your colleagues because you didn't arrive at your Master Teacher status without your share of mistakes.

The benefit of knowing these 12 Worst Planning Practices is that you could learn to choose to practice each one&hellip;only once.

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

## **Perfecting Personal Talents**

The Art of Teaching is about Art

Art and creative expression are central to competent, resourceful and enlightened teaching. Art is self-expression&hellip;communication beyond the tools and media used for that expression. Art is the purpose of teaching.

So, what is art?

Art is creative expression using media such as paint, ink, charcoal, water colors on canvas, paper, brick?

Art is imaginative use of sound that is produced from instruments, voice, percussion?

Art is plying and shaping clay, stone, wood, plastic, cement, iron, glass?

Art is teachingThe Experience of ArtWhat is the experience of art?

Art must communicate. Whether that communication is to an audience, to a class or to viewers who, 325,000 years in your future, travel from all parts of the globe to view scenes that you create on a cave wall.

Art is communicating across the Internet to billions of people, or to a special someone with a love poem.

Art also must be experienced by its creator. Creating art is fun, joyful, exciting. Creating art allows its creator to sidestep the feeling of time and to span the barriers of space and culture.

In some ways, art is love.

Art is expressive and transcendent. Art communicates&hellip;even across time and space.

And, art is the birthright, the innate ability, the capacity of every person.The Creation of ArtArt flows.

Sometimes art floods, surges. Sometimes art trickles and seeps.

But, art is an "inside-out" process.

Art always comes from within; whether from conscious, unconscious or higher consciousness regions of our being.

Fabrications, computer creations and natural phenomena are not art. A crystal or snowflake are not art. Art is personal, and carries the stamp of the persona that created it.

No person can create the art of another. And for its time and skill level, each work of art is the perfect expression of that person. Art is like a fingerprint, a signature; like DNA. How Art Goes Astray Art is natural and self-rewarding. Art is sufficient unto itself.

But, art goes astray when one person tries to copy the expression of others. When this happens, art ceases and imitation begins.

Imitation art fails to express and communicate. Imitation art may seem pleasing to eye, pleasant to ear, prideful to own. But imitation art is the hollow facade. the soulless copy, a ridicule of the real. The Purpose of Teaching Art The purpose of teaching art to children is to give voice to their self-concept and to help them out-picture their self-esteem.

Students are taught art, not as a way to control their voice and improve the quality of their products, but as a way to discover and express who and what they truly are.

Of course, some teachers focus upon the form and function of the expression, rather than the expression itself. In doing so, they perform a disservice to their students, and they rob others of the benefit of linking to the person of that student; either in the now, or in a time closer or farther in the future from now. Sidebar The one area that we have yet to discover a method for art communication is with the past. That is, we do not know of a means of sharing artistic expression with folks in the past. Art communicates to the now, and to the future. The Art of Teaching Teaching is art. Teaching is the teacher's self-expression, therefore, great teaching must be artistic teaching.

And, as caring, love and respect for students merges with class content; unique and creative ideas flow, moment by moment, from teacher to student.

The Master Teacher is a performer. Whether a conductor, musician, singer, dancer or actor.

And there is an energy that passes between the Master Teacher and the apprentice students.

Content is imparted, but ideals and images are inculcated in full measure.

The Master Teacher responds to students, the communication is two-way, and students and teacher are in rapport.

Artistic communication is congruent, with communicator and recipient in congruent interaction.

The delivery of the lesson, and the learning of the lesson are also timeless.

Teacher and students loose track of time, and interruption and schedule requirements are disappointments. Attempts to capture and recreate that particular artistic experience fail.

The best that can be attained is to create and express new art anew, with each successive lesson.

There is no capturing and bottling teaching as art.

A new day, a different subject, students sitting in different places; there is no going back. There is only a new creation, a new expression; new art.

Teaching is high-level self-expression, and high-level art. Learn to prize the artist that you are.

And learn to accept and enjoy the self-expressions of your students.

It is amazing how the subtle artistry of teaching has such a solid and concrete impact on the learning of your students.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Perfecting Personal Talents at 01:00