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VITAL News

Virginia Initiative for Technology and Administrative Leadership



If I Were a Principal

Quick and Easy Teacher Websites

Over the past three years, I have spent time with lots of principals talking to them about how they can encourage technology integration in their buildings. I often ask myself what I would do if I were in their shoes. Over the next few months, I will take a stab at answering that question by recommending several web resources that I would provide to my faculty if, indeed, I were a principal.

Since a larger and larger majority of students have access to the web at home and rely on it for information, I would want each teacher to have a website for posting homework, upcoming events, and links to resources. But, as a trainer, who over the past decade has trained many teachers to create websites yet seen very few of them ever get published or updated, I understand the problems associated with requiring teachers to have websites. So, the first resource that I would make available to my teachers is Quia. I discovered this site over five years ago and used it daily during my last two years in the classroom.

Why Quia? It allows teachers to quickly and easily create a website without having to know anything about html or ftp or any of the other acronyms or procedures that often get in the way. Within a few minutes of creating a login, they can have a website up and running so the focus is not on web design but instead--and more importantly--on using the web to communicate with students and parents.

Because Quia is on the web rather than housed on a school server, teachers can update their websites anytime and anywhere without involving the usually overworked school technology staff. In addition, teachers can use the Quia tools to create online learning activities and quizzes (without knowing anything about computer programming) that students can access both at school and from home. Finally, Quia offers users the ability to upload documents so teachers can post handouts, multimedia presentations and other forms to their websites.

What's the catch? The only downside I can think of is that it is not free. A one-year subscription for one teacher costs \$49, but prices quickly go down if a school buys subscriptions for all its teachers. But the ease of use and ability to communicate far outweigh the cost. If you want to learn more, visit <http://www.quia.com>. Thirty-day trials are available. If you want to see an example of a Quia website, mine can be visited at <http://www.quia.com/pages/richardson.html>. And, as a final endorsement, I continue to use Quia in my work with pre-service teachers at William and Mary because its quiz functions are much more robust and easy to use than those provided by Blackboard.

In my opinion, despite its cost, Quia just makes sense in terms of its simplicity, flexibility and powerful tools for teachers.

*Happy Surfing,
Karen*

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Moodling Around

Forget Blackboard...Now There's Moodle

No matter where you take a college course these days, you will be given access to some version of course management software, or CMS, for short. The College of William and Mary, for instance, where I teach and learn, uses Blackboard, one of the most widely used of the various products available.

By accessing the Blackboard site that accompanies the class, students can find assignments, course documents like the syllabus and PowerPoint presentations, as well as links to web resources. In addition, most course management systems offer online discussion areas where faculty and

students can extend the classroom conversation to the virtual world.

Unfortunately, the cost of licensing these course management systems is often prohibitively expensive for K-12 school divisions. Now, there is a free, open-source alternative called Moodle. Users can download the software, install it on almost any web server, and quickly begin offering online course sites to their teachers.

For more information about this free software, visit the Moodle site at <http://moodle.org/>.

Focus on Your Data To Improve Your School

Gathering data. You do it all the time. With it, you've gained an expert understanding of how your school operates. But have you also capitalized on it to improve your students' learning? Data Retreats, two-day leadership institutes, help you focus on the important data you've gathered and create the strategies you want to help improve your school.

A Data Retreat is a two-day training opportunity in which district and school teams work together to analyze their data, develop hypotheses, and ultimately leave with a meaningful school improvement plan. It provides training that is:

- Relevant, since educators work with their own data.
- Collaborative, since educators work in teams.
- Reflective, since educators have time to study and find insight.

An annual Data Retreat provides continual professional development to education leaders when used as part of the ongoing school improvement cycle. It offers a unique experience based on analyzed data and team dynamics.

Successful school leaders and their staff collect and use data to guide instructional decisions. Classroom teachers embed assessment

of student learning into their instruction and adjust their lessons according to their learning data. Because in-depth reflective data study is difficult to do during the busy school year, setting time aside for a Data Retreat empowers leadership teams to build dynamic focused improvement based on their school's data--on an ongoing basis.

NCREL-licensed facilitators are available to provide data retreats at a reasonable cost for school divisions in Virginia. To learn more or to schedule a Data Retreat for your school or district, contact Dr. John Wenrich at (540) 231-3668 or wenrich@vt.edu.

