

School Supplement

—Contents—

Dotcom Madness	18
Creativity	19
Geography	19
History	19
Internet	19
Math	20
Multiple Subject	20
Reading	21
Science	21
Teacher Utilities	22
Directory of New Release	22
All Star Software for Schools	24

Volume 1, Number 3

Children's Software Revue School Supplement (CSR School)™ is published bimonthly (every other month, six times per year) as a supplement to CHILDREN'S SOFTWARE REVUE.

Entire contents © 2000 by Active Learning Associates, Inc.

All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited.



Making Sense of the Dotcom Madness!

There's a war going on right now, and the battlefield is in the wires and cables that connect our homes with our schools. Dotcom-crazed investors are pouring millions of dollars into web based teacher/parent communication services, hoping to capture the eyes and minds of our kids and families. Unfortunately, these investors are in for a rude lesson: schools are tradition-bound institutions, and change takes place very S-L-O-W-L-Y, if at all. For some teachers, "high tech" is an Apple IIe with a 3.5 inch drive, and the Internet is nothing more than a fancy encyclopedia, with a bit of e-mail thrown in. It'll be years before the majority of teachers will embrace electronic record keeping, lesson plans, and interactive textbooks. Consequently, we can expect that many of these new "edu-ventures" won't last long. We predict that in 5-10 years, there will be only a few large companies still standing. In this article, we take a look at some important players right now, as well as some key trends that every educator needs to understand.

Fact 1: Ready or not, here it comes. There's no turning back: Schools are becoming wired. As more classrooms get stable Internet access, teachers are starting to think about creating web pages for their classrooms and using the web for research.

Sorting Out the Online Services for Schools

Service	What It Does	What You Do There
Achieve.com www.achieve.com	A free, private online service for teachers, parents and students, designed to be a place where educators can post homework assignments, info on school events, etc.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication
BigChalk.com	A web-based collection of Internet resources, including The Electronic Library, MediaSeek, ProQuest for K-12, MediaSeek, HomeworkCentral.com, BigChalk Assessment, BigChalk Retriever, and BigChalk Classmate.	Classroom Portal Curriculum Filtered Web Searching Homework Help Lesson Plans Talk to Other Teachers Tutoring
Brainium	A subscription-only web-delivered science curriculum, designed for elementary and middle school students. Contains some of the better web-delivered content we've seen to date.	Homework Help Curriculum Learning Objectives
Classroom Connect	Started as a subscription newsletter reviewing Internet sites. Now does teacher training, web-based adventures, and web-based content delivery.	Curriculum Research Teacher Training Virtual Adventures
ClassWorks Gold	A network-based math and language arts curriculum, with a feature that allows teachers to integrate third party software into the system.	Curriculum Learning Objectives Lesson Plans Research
Education Place www.eduplace.com	One of the more established sites (since 1996), this free, rich Internet site contains activities, lesson plans and resources for teachers, parents and children.	Curriculum Homework Help Learning Objectives Lesson Plan Ideas Research Talk to Other Teachers Tutoring
FamilyEducation.com	A collection of services and sites for parents, teachers and children, including teachervision.com, funbrain.com, schoolcash.com, myschoolonline.com and infoplease.com.	Homework Help Lesson Plans Research Talk to Other Teachers Testing Tutoring
Highwired.net	One of the first Internet newspaper systems for schools, this is also a classroom web site builder.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication
iMind.com	Consists of a server, curriculum integration software, a tutorial software package and a teacher training component.	Classroom Portal Curriculum Homework Help Learning Objectives Lesson Plans Tutoring
INET Library	This is a subscription-based search engine designed for schools and libraries. It contains no advertising and features star ratings of sites.	Research
K12Planet www.k12planet.com	This is a home/school Internet portal package designed to provide parents and students with access to information about student progress, attendance and other important information.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication
Learning Odyssey Version 1.0	This web based subscription service combines live tutors with structured activities.	Tutoring Homework Help Curriculum Learning Objectives
Lightspan.com	A free, ad-supported education portal for teachers, parents and kids. Contents include a classroom web site builder, lesson plans on any subject and a database of web sites relevant to K-12 classrooms.	Classroom Portal Curriculum Homework Help Learning Objectives Lesson Planning
www.math.com	Offers homework help, math lessons, math tables and formulas, instant online converters and equation solvers and more. The ad-supported site is keyword searchable and also has an online store with math-related books and products.	Homework Help
mysunburst.com	This free, ad-supported service, first released at FETC 2000, makes it easy to create your own personal teacher's "home page" where you can post assignments for each one of your classes.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication
Parent CONNECTxp	An Internet-based software package designed to give parents ongoing read-only access to their child's school records and report card.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication Student Records
Riverdeep.net	A subscription-based service to deliver science and math lessons for Middle School levels.	Electronic Curriculum Learning Objectives
sitalive.com	The site is supported by both banner ad sales and subscription fees which start at \$49/year as of April 00. Once signed in, children can follow other children as they sail on a tall ship, or visit a tropical rainforest in Australia.	Virtual Adventure
rSchool.com	A new portal that includes lesson plans, classroom home pages and a place where teachers can post messages for parents.	Classroom Portal Home/School Communication Student Records
TopTutors.com	Tutors meet on-line with each student for 45 minute sessions. Kids and certified teachers can talk to each other using microphones and headphones.	Homework Help Tutoring
wwwrrr	Three Internet-related services to schools including a web site creator, a content delivery system (reading, math and science) and a teacher training component.	Classroom Portal Curriculum Student Records Teacher Training

Fact 2: Software and the internet services will continue to get better. Teachers have access to sites for lesson plans, objectives, standards and other kinds of relevant information. Those smudged lesson plan books, and tri-copy report cards will soon join the ranks of the slate and the McGuffey reader.

Fact 3: Hardware is improving. Major advances like wireless networks (including the Airport and Proxim, WAVlan and so on) make it so computers can get to the Internet without plugging in. Simple digital devices will continue to drop in price and increase in power until all children have "anytime, anywhere" Internet access.

Fact 4: New possibilities for learning will emerge. Instead of learning about the planets from a dry textbook, kids can send an e-mail message to a cosmonaut who is orbiting above the earth.

Fact 5: Educators will always argue. For example, a huge debate will emerge about the role of commercial content and advertising in schools. Will poorer schools be forced to choose services that are ad-supported, rather than subscriber based?

Fact 6: Digital content will increasingly supplements print content, but books will never go away. Teachers will even take inservice (wwwrrr and Classroom Connect) over the 'Net. More schools will start to replace textbooks with network-delivered alternatives that are integrated with lesson plans and assessment tools (Classworks Gold). ✪

Questions to Ask When Evaluating a Web Based Service for a Schools

Who's behind the curtain? Some of these services seem like "The Wizard of Oz" in that they don't want you to look behind the curtain. Go ahead and look. Check, for example, the names and business associations of the principal developers. Dig deeper to find out if they are coming from an educational position, or a purely business position.

Don't buy something based on a Demo.

Make sure you are provided with a test password so you can evaluate the real thing. Make sure you check during busy times of the day to see if there is a difference in performance.

Who chooses the content your kids will see?

If there's a list of "recommended" links or materials, ask to be informed of the criteria used in making the choices. Is it done by a committee? Who's on the committee? The best services gladly disclose this information.

Will it be around next week? What about next year? In this era of rapid change, be wary of putting your eggs in one basket, especially if with any expensive service. That way, if the company is here today and gone tomorrow, you'll be safe. What do you risk? Besides initial money, consider the value of staff training, getting your community to change bookmarks, and the hassle of switching.

Watch out for "Free" services. Lightspan, for example, advertises itself as a free service, but someone is paying for those mouse pads and glossy brochures. If it is really free, than why are they trying to get you to sign up so badly? What's the real motive? (Answer: ad dollars).

What is the role of advertising in the site or service?

In our investigations of over 20 sites and services, we found a variety of forms of advertising, some being easier to spot than others. The worst kinds are lists of "recommended" resources or products, where the resources are actually products that the company makes more money on. We won't name names, but we could. We'll leave that for you to figure out. The best services clearly mark banner ads.

Airport — See "Wireless Network"
Plug this miniature flying saucer thing into a live modem, and you start broadcasting the Internet through thin air into iBooks and late model iMacs.

Cookies — "How did they know that about me?" Many web sites are invisibly tracking what you've done on their site. They write small bits of code (called cookies) in your browser. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. For example, it is nice that Amazon.com knows what books you've ordered before, and automatically fills in the form for your next order. But just the same, you should know that it is happening, and that you can disable cookies in your browser's "preferences".

Internet — The future delivery vehical for digital information.

Intranet — A school wide or local network, generally kept from the Internet (or WWW) by a password protected barrier, or firewall.

Wireless Network — In the near future, students will access the school's networks with wires. A variety of companies are competing for this business, including netschools.com, proxim.com and apple.com

Portal — The first screen you see when you start using the Internet. In the future, every class, school and library will have a portal. You can set up your own portal for free at America Online, Snap and Yahoo.

Search Engine — a service that indexes the Internet.

Virtual Adventure— First started by MECC in 1990 (Africa Trek and MayaQuest), these generally subscriber-based adventures let children follow the daily progress of a team of explorers. Currently, Classroom Connect is one of the leaders in this area.