Educational software extends beyond academic needs

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Development of educational software has a remarkably short but impressive history. Due to regular updates and releases of new programs, every year practical application of educational software expands more and more beyond the narrow boundaries of individual subjects.

The purpose of this writing is to show that in many cases educational software has outgrown its academic environment and deserves a closer look as powerful business computer programs, capable of facilitating sophisticated information exchange by demonstrating, illustrating, categorizing, evaluating, testing, and preserving data.

I would like to share my working experience with programs such as Inspiration, RoboDemo, CourseBuilder and Blackboard, used both for my teaching and business projects. Inspiration is a small program that can be downloaded from the www.inspiration.com web site. It takes only 27.8 MB of hard drive capacity.

As a rule, educators use Inspiration to customize instructions, set learning standards, assess student progress, and energize comprehension of subjects such as language arts, science, and social studies. As strong visual support, it also can be integrated in any brain storming activities that require outlining, diagramming, concept mapping and webbing.

By checking and correcting spelling errors, Inspiration usually turns the tedious process of building diagrams or branching information into an enjoyable and easy experience. Its multiple file and export formats allow users to integrate Inspiration projects with Microsoft Word, Power Point and HTML documents.

Multiple file and export format support makes a program, called Robodemo, a very helpful tool for projects that require online training. Robodemo with "magic easiness" creates movie clips, methodically recording every step of work within any other application that is open on the desktop. Robodemo creates simulations in a small Flash format to incorporate them in Power Point presentations, e-mail messages or

publications on web sites.

In spite of their small file size, these simulations retain perfect screen resolution. Robodemo can be installed at no charge as a trial version or purchased as a full version for a special price of $299 at www.ehelp.com.

If you want to avoid programming errors, working with HTML, DHTML, and JavaScript on interactive web pages, consider an investment in Dreamweaver MX Extension called CourseBuilder, the most popular Macromedia learning tool. Multiple choice interactions become easy with the CourseBuilder as it collates survey data and efficiently manages learning progress.

This robust extension offers a menu of 40 pre-scripted learning interactions including drag-and-drop, multiple choice and true/false exercises and tests. I find it useful for my Digital Imaging and Computer Graphics classes. To discover more features of the extension, visit www.macromedia.com web site.

Interaction with students becomes flexible and less dependent on restricted office and class hours with powerful software called Blackboard. In MiraCosta community collage, instructors use it for developing tests, conducting surveys, and managing. Discussion boards and Virtual Classrooms make Blackboard a valuable means of dynamic collaboration and communication.

The Blackboard is a sophisticated communication program that protects privacy of its users by accepting user names and passwords. My two cents - blackboard can be a good business investment for any institution with multiple divisions, heavily dependent on successful Internet communication. Additional operational efficiencies for this program you can find at www.blackboard.com/ highered/index.htm

Last but not least, educational programs in general and the ones, mentioned above, are notable for their user friendly interface and as a rule do not require a significant amount of time and effort to learn. Aware of their short learning curve, you can master many of them in 15 or 20 minutes.

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