

Using Technology in the Elementary Classroom

By Marilyn Western

The One Handheld Classroom

You're probably already using your handheld computer as a personal calendar and address book, but did you know you can also use it for a management tool for your classroom? Let's see how you can get more use out of that hand-sized gizmo.

Of course, you'll spend the week before school entering your school calendar in the **Datebook** with staff meetings, professional development days, holidays, field trips, etc. I enter anticipated weekly 'themes' on the Sunday page. Update as the year progresses. Need to change a meeting time or day? Just drag to the new day or time. Use the *Note* option to give more info about the event – the person in charge of the meeting, how to find the meeting place, materials to bring, etc.

Hint: To set an alarm, create an appointment in your Date Book, then tap *Details*. Tap the *Alarm* option checkbox. A new option appears – how many minutes/hours/days advanced notice you'd like – if you are setting a reminder to attend a meeting next door, you might want to have the alarm go off 5 minutes before the meeting. If you have to present at the meeting, you may want to set the alarm for 30 minutes before so you can set up the projector, etc.

Not exactly 'calendar-ware', but **Big Clock** is a neat little piece of freeware available at <http://www.palmbld.com/software/pc/BigClock-2000-07-10-palm-pc.html>. I use the stopwatch/timer option often to count down 1 minute. That's all the time students have to get back in their seats, or to brainstorm as many words as they can or find a partner. I'm sure you can come up with more uses for this clever little program.

As soon as you have your class list, spend a few minutes adding parent contact info to your **Address Book**. Create a category named *Parents* (categories are like folders) so you can quickly sort through your entries. Use the *Notes* option freely to add extra important information. While you have time this summer, create a category called *School* and add staff phone numbers and email addresses for easy contact info you can keep with you.

Hint: To set your electronic 'business card', open your *Address* record, hit the *Menu* button (bottom, left, silkscreened button), choose *Select Business Card*, and choose *Yes* – you want to make this name your business card. To send your 'business card' to another handheld, hold down the *Address* button. Consider setting up several cards for yourself – one with 'public' professional contact information to send to parents and colleagues (your school phone, fax, school email), and another with personal information for friends (home and/or cell phone, personal email). Set up your 'public' information as your business card to beam when you press the *Address* button. To beam your personal entry, open it and pick *Beam Address* from the *Record* menu.

The handy little **Memo** or **NotePad** area of your handheld can also make your school life a little more organized. Take notes at a staff meeting, workshop, or conference. You can beam those notes to others and get their notes from sessions. Name one memo *Classroom Budget* and another *Personal Spending* to keep track of your purchases, both from your classroom budget and your own pocket. Add a *note* for each entry to record whether you've turned in a receipt and whether you were reimbursed. This will help on April 15th! Text from web pages can be copied and pasted into your desktop application and then synced to your handheld for later reference – for example, hours, location, and contact info for field trip locations or the text directions from MapQuest. You can also copy & paste important info from email – names, urls, directions, and so on. Other Categories you might find helpful: *Quotes* (jot them down when you hear them) *Web Sites* (enter the url to check out later) *Experts* (list your friends, neighbors, colleagues and their area of expertise) *Bulletin Board ideas*, any *committee* you happen to be on, and *Recipes* (add those great dishes you find at school potlucks special luncheons)

Hint: Can't remember how to write a Q in *Graffiti*? Draw a line from the bottom of the *Graffiti* area to the top of your screen. The *Graffiti* 'cheat sheet' will magically appear. Check out your letter (use the 'down arrow' to see more pages), then press the *Done* button to return to your original message.

Originally meant to be a checklist for things you have to do, the **To Do** list can be adapted to some helpful teacher lists. Put together a category called *Field Trips* and enter a list of all the things you need to do to prepare for the best field trip ever. Top off your list with Reserve a bus, Send out permission slips, Notify Office, Pack Bubba's medications, etc. You might even want to create a second category called *Field Trip Paraphernalia* and list all the things you should take with you.

Other things you could create ongoing lists for: Items to collect for Parent-Teacher conference portfolios, classroom party preparations, a list of students by 1st name (I give this list to parents along with a camera. They check off as they take pictures to make sure everyone is a photo-star) or even Friday night videos you heard were good but haven't seen yet. Name another list *Loaned*. Use it to keep track of who borrows your 'stuff'. Create a similar list called *Borrowed* and use it to keep track of items that you should return to others. Use the *Date Due* option to remind yourself to follow up on loans. Check off the item when you get it back or return it. If you have a difficult time remembering details, you may want to archive so you have a record.

If you have a little spare money, look at **Real Teacher 4.1** at <http://sarahwww.badcircle.com/realteacher/RTNew.html>. Download the 14 day demo, and if you fall in love with it, you pay just \$6 for this little cutie of a program. You'll get templates for recording lesson ideas, borrowed and loaned items, expenses, even an area to sketch out your ideas. And you'll definitely have to try the Staff Meeting Bingo!

Hint: Press the *To Do* button repeatedly to view the different To Do categories: once to see all the categories, again to see the 1st category, once more to see the 2nd, etc. Works the same way for the Address Book, To Do, and Memo Pad.

If you have **Documents to Go**, use it to carry a copy of your weekly schedule, a checklist of students, emergency lesson plans that can be printed out at a moment's notice, and a document that contains important sub information such as fire drill procedures, medication guidelines, students that are reliable, etc. Also include a document with your professional stationery heading (you DO have one, don't you?) to write letters on the fly, a blank lesson plan document to use when inspiration strikes, and a 'Just wanted you to know' note template. Add a database of your classroom library books (ever hold a great book in your hands that looks familiar and wonder if you already have it?) and another of videos that you've used along with the ordering number and the unit you use it with (add a 'movie review' to make notes about *how* you've used it in your classroom). Carry your grade level outcomes and a copy of your district tech outcomes – for both teachers and students as well as a copy of your report card. Imagine the looks on your colleagues' faces when you say, "I've got a copy right here!" It'll be worth the effort!

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