# Marshall Memo 624

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 15, 2016

## In This Issue:



## Quotes of the Week

"Making schools smaller was not an inherently unsound strategy. It was a poorly shepherded one."

Jack Schneider (see item #1)

"Our schools don't need disrupters, armed with grand notions about transformation. They need facilitators capable of building capacity."

Jack Schneider (*ibid*.)

"At its core, good teaching is about relationships – because students allow themselves to learn from people they trust."

David Saavedra (see item #3)

"Since teacher turnover causes the most harm in schools with large populations of disadvantaged students, our kids struggle to overcome the effects of both poverty and an unstable, rookie teaching staff."

Bruce Hansen in "In Low-Income Schools, Teachers Need Guidance" in *Education Week*, February 10, 2016 (Vol. 35, #20, p. 28), www.edweek.org

"Many educators believe that English language learners will eventually 'grow into' correct language usage through continual exposure. Although some students will manage to grow in that way, most students will not."

Kristina Robertson in "A Lesson in Taking Flight" in *Educational Leadership*, February 2016 (Vol. 73, #5, p. 56-61), http://bit.ly/1Tj5CkW; Robertson can be reached at kmrobertz@gmail.com.

## 1. Did the Small-Schools Movement Really Fail?

In this article in *Education Week*, Jack Schneider (College of the Holy Cross) bemoans the fact that philanthropists and policy leaders have largely abandoned the push that started around 2005 to break up large schools. He is critical of the mindset of early supporters of the small-schools movement: "From their vantage point, small schools were a potential moonshot." When initial results were disappointing, funders took their one-big-solution thinking elsewhere. "In the eyes of Gates and company, the problem was with small schools as a particular policy fix rather than the thinking behind the fix. Collective faith in silver bullets – in finding 'what works' and 'taking it to scale' – remained absolute. Never mind the obvious disregard for the importance of context or inescapable complexity of improving schools."

What were the actual results in small schools? Much better than the early reports suggested. A 2014 study by MDRC found that graduation rates in New York City small schools improved by 9.5 percent. These gains, along with significant increases in college enrollments, were felt across every student subgroup. In Chicago, a team from Northwestern University found similar results in that city's small schools, despite the fact that they served the most high-risk populations. Researchers have concluded that a more-intimate educational environment increases opportunities for students to have trusting, caring, and attentive relationships, both with one another and with adults, which is a key component in getting better academic and downstream results.

The problem, says Schneider, is that the narrow, naïve change theory developed by small-schools advocates didn't take into account the other factors that need to be in place for any school to succeed – among them school culture, improved instruction, and better guidance for students. As Deborah Meier put it, "Small schools are not the answer, but without them none of the proposed answers stand a chance." Schneider continues: "Making schools smaller was not an inherently unsound strategy. It was a poorly shepherded one. Had policy elites thought more about their plan, developed a more nuanced theory of action, set more reasonable goals, or taken a more holistic approach to measuring outcomes, the small-schools movement might have turned out differently… The dominant approach in the 'excellence for all' era emphasizes common sense over research, transformation over tinkering, scale over fit, simplicity over complexity, and measurement over trust. It sets sky-high expectations, produces simplistic strategies, and ensures disappointment, even in the case of modest successes like the small-schools movement."

This approach produces policy churn, which has several downsides. Not only does it abandon promising ideas before they've been given a chance to prove themselves, but it undermines public confidence in fixing underperforming schools and feeds educators' skepticism about other reform initiatives coming down the pike – *this too shall pass*.

"Our schools don't need disrupters, armed with grand notions about transformation," Schneider concludes. "They need facilitators capable of building capacity. Rather than deciding what works and taking it to scale, we need donors and policy leaders who are interested in helping to strengthen schools and districts, encouraging experimentation, and facilitating the kinds of small changes that add up to big ones. Assisting in the cultivation of gardens may not be as sexy as finding scalable solutions. 'Small change' is a less enchanting battle cry than 'paradigm shift.' But being right, even if only moderately so, is always better than being wrong. And gradual progress, frustrating though it can be, is infinitely preferable to perpetual churn."

"Why Small Steps Are Better for Small Schools" by Jack Schneider in *Education Week*, February 10, 2016 (Vol. 35, #20, p. 21-23), www.edweek.org

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## 2. Will New York State's Untimed Tests Be Valid and Fair?

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Robert Pondiscio notes the vociferous push-back on New York state education officials' January announcement that state's annual grade 3-8 reading and math tests would henceforth be untimed. The *New York Post* called the new policy "lunacy" and others questioned the fairness and validity of allowing some students to spend much more time on tests than others.

"I confess that my initial reaction was not very different," says Pondiscio. "But after reading the research and talking to leading psychometricians, I've concluded that both the *Post* and I had it wrong – untimed tests are *not* less accurate." Removing time limits doesn't significantly alter outcomes for students without disabilities, he says, but it does improve the performance of students with special needs – similar to the effect of their getting an accommodation allowing them more time. Thus, removing time limits has a gap-narrowing impact.

There are two kinds of tests, Pondiscio explains. With *speed tests*, such as a multiplication drill, the method for getting answers is clear and obvious, and the test measures how many problems students can get right in a fixed amount of time. With *power tests*, students answer a smaller number of more-complex items, and problem-solving ability, not speed, is what's being measured. Most state tests are power tests, designed so that nearly all students will be able to complete all the items. Eighteen states already administer untimed, computer-based tests from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. What these and other adaptive tests measure is which items students answered correctly, with no premium on speed.

Pondiscio wonders if one factor in New York's shift to untimed tests was an attempt to make tests less stressful in order to mollify parents who took part in the "opt out" movement

last spring (20 percent of students statewide didn't take the tests). But he believes that what really motivated the opt-out movement was the tests' high-stakes for teacher evaluation (New York has since put this on hold for several years).

There's another factor: many parents' and educators' contention that too much instructional time is being devoted to assessments. Untimed tests will increase testing time.

"Pencils Down? Not So Fast" by Robert Pondiscio in *The Education Gadfly*, February 10, 2016 (Vol. 16, #6), http://edexcellence.net/articles/pencils-down-not-so-fast

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## 3. A Massachusetts Teacher Works to Understand His ELL Students

(Originally titled "Empathy Is the Gateway")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Massachusetts high-school teacher David Saavedra remembers what it was like being a Peace Corps volunteer for three years in Mozambique, and realizes that the experience provides specific ideas for connecting with his immigrant students. Saavedra believes that the greater a teacher's empathy for what students are going through, the better they will learn. Specifically:

• *Treat silence gently*. "When a person arrives in a country where he or she doesn't speak the language," he says, "observation is the first instinct. Silence is a coping mechanism during this adjustment phase as a newcomer focuses simply on taking in information." Saavedra remembers arriving in Mozambique and being overwhelmed by unfamiliar words, sounds, gestures, people, devices, customs, and routines. "Imagine how overwhelming this must be for a child," he says. Teachers need to respect this "silent period" and create a nurturing environment that scaffolds learning experiences and encourages students to speak when they are ready. Some key steps: talking one-on-one with new arrivals, welcoming them, learning how to pronounce their names, getting a feel for their mental state, and perhaps negotiating non-verbal signals for participating in class.

• *Offer content*. Saavedra remembers being shouted at by a woman in a Mozambique market when he didn't understand that something he was buying needed to be weighed ("PESAR!"). "Not having sufficient context to understand what's going on around you is incredibly frustrating," he says. "I felt stupid and believed everyone around me was judging me as such." Teachers of ELLs need to create a context-rich environment in which students can get the support and cues they need from pictures, objects, exemplary work samples, and, of course, oral instructions.

• *Give them breaks*. "Functioning in a second language is incredibly mentally taxing," says Saavedra. "For me, this mental exhaustion came and went for months… At times, I felt an unusual need for sleep, probably because my brain just needed a break." Teachers of ELLs need to understand this, check in privately if students' heads are on their desks, and give them down-time when they need it. It's comforting and helpful just telling students you understand and asking them to do their best.

• *Understand being "in between."* Saavedra remembers a point 7-10 months into his Peace Corps experience when he was struggling to integrate his new experiences with his

American identity. "Cultural expectations no longer seemed novel, interesting, or exciting," he says. "They just seemed wrong, and it made me angry." He's watched ELLs in his school get to this point and become withdrawn, less studious, and disruptive. Cultural and personal integration takes time, usually longer than a school year. "One small but powerful way to help students through this transition is to simply acknowledge the student's reality," he says, "even if you haven't experienced it and don't fully understand it." A teacher might suggest talking to a trusted individual, drawing pictures, or keeping a journal (with no emphasis on grammar or syntax).

• *Build trust*. Saavedra's experience in Africa was extraordinarily helpful in empathizing with his immigrant students, but he knew there was a big difference: he had chosen to move there as an adult, whereas most of his students were uprooted and brought to the U.S., sometimes without even having the chance to say goodbye to loved ones. "The trauma associated with this lack of agency demands empathy," he says. "And effective teaching for language learners demands empathy, the fuel for relationships, too. At its core, good teaching is about relationships – because students allow themselves to learn from people they trust."

"Empathy Is the Gateway" by David Saavedra in *Educational Leadership*, February 2016 (Vol. 73, #5, p. 66-69), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/214WV0c; Saavedra can be reached at dsaavedra@cpsd.us.

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## 4. Six Suggestions for Effective Instruction of English Language Learners

(Originally titled "Engaging Your Beginners")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Jane Hill (McREL International) offers these suggestions for engaging and challenging beginning-level ELLs:

• *Consider each student's stage of language acquisition*. This allows educators to set realistic expectations for what each student should be able to do. These are the levels and the kinds of questions appropriate to each one:

- Pre-production (often called "the silent period") – *Show me… Circle the… Where is…? Who has…?*
- Early Production (single words or two-word phrases, yes-or-no responses, and repeating familiar patterns) – *Yes-or-no; either-or; Who, What, How many?*
- Speech Emergence (short sentences) – *Why…? How…? Explain… Questions requiring short sentences*.
- Intermediate Fluency (sentences of increasing length and complexity) – *What would happen if…? Why do you think…? Questions requiring more than one sentence*.
- Advanced Fluency (near-native fluency) – *Decide if… Retell…*

"Although ELLs need to be held to the same standards as native English speakers on what they know and understand," says Hill, "how they get there and how they demonstrate that knowledge will look different, depending on their level of English skill."

• *Use tiered questions*. Teachers should ask students questions appropriate to their level, but when they approach the upper end of a level, it's effective to start asking questions from the next level up. For example, students at the Early Production stage get *yes-or-no* questions and then, as they become more proficient, *Why? How?* and *Explain…* questions.

• *Don't expect the same product from all students*. "When every student receives the same homework assignment, ELLs may struggle because they haven't learned the skills they're supposed to practice through that task," says Hill. "They may even practice incorrectly." Better to tier homework and in-class assignments, tailoring the language demands to students' levels.

• *Engage Pre-production students at the same level of thinking as other students*. Don't water down the curriculum for ELLs at early stages of English acquisition, says Hill. The five levels of English do *not* correspond to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, she says: "How well a student can speak a second language has nothing to do with her or his ability to think abstractly." A question can be at a low level of English usage but a high level of conceptual understanding. For example, a Pre-production student studying ecosystems might demonstrate analysis by categorizing types of plants found in desert and alpine tundra biomes using pictures and labels.

• *Don't assess language when you want to assess content knowledge*. In a science lesson on how the eyeball allows humans to see, it would be a mistake to ask ELLs to write a comparison of nearsightedness and farsightedness. Instead, the teacher might ask those students to use the results of an experiment to construct models of eyeball shapes that would result in near- or farsightedness.

• *Be aware of one's own language use*. Teachers should slow their rate of speech, speak in complete sentences, and make full use manipulatives, miniature objects, photos, pictures, drawings, gestures, body movement, pantomime, and facial expressions. Hill also advises that teachers not overuse idioms and pronouns, opting instead for nouns, which convey more meaning to ELLs.

"Engaging Your Beginners" by Jane Hill in *Educational Leadership*, February 2016 (Vol. 73, #5, p. 18-23), http://bit.ly/1RGb5Cs; Hill can be reached at jhill@mcrel.org.

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## 5. Clearing Up Common Misconceptions About ELLs

(Originally titled "10 (Usually Wrong) Ideas about ELLs")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Michigan ESOL teacher Barbara Gottschalk corrects these erroneous beliefs about ELL instruction:

• *Misconception #1: ESOL teachers should know students' language*. "I've had as many as eight different languages represented in my classroom," says Gottschalk. An ESOL teacher might be fluent in one or two, but not eight! What's important is good training and empathy for second-language learners.

• *Misconception #2: ELLs won't learn English if they don't speak it at home*. Research says that strong native language skills facilitate learning English. Gottschalk tells parents,

"We'll take care of the English at school; you can help us by trying to develop your child's native language at home and encouraging good study habits in general."

• *Misconception #3: ESOL students excel at math*. "I wish this positive stereotype were true more often," says Gottschalk. Language demands in math pose challenges for many ELLs – especially requirements to explain one's thinking.

• *Misconception #4: Teachers need to simplify the curriculum*. Teachers need to stick with appropriate grade-level standards but find ways to support students' learning.

• *Misconception #5: ELLs should be retained if they're behind*. It takes 5-7 years to fully master a new language, says Gottschalk. Better to move ELLs along with modifications, accommodations, and support from ESOL teachers or trained paraprofessionals.

• *Misconception #6: ELLs should speak English with one another at lunch*. While English is expected in the classroom and ELLs shouldn't exclude peers by speaking an unfamiliar language, they have a right to chat in their language outside the classroom.

• *Misconception #7: Immigrant families are uninvolved*. Many ELLs' parents believe it's the school's job to educate their children and consider classroom volunteering and fund-raisers odd. Lack of time, money, or transportation are additional reasons they may not be a frequent presence in school.

• *Misconception #8: ELLs should know about U.S. cultural events*. Asking an ELL about his or her Super Bowl pick, for example, could be a conversation stopper. Don't assume cultural assimilation.

• *Misconception #9: ELLs are ignorant*. "Ms. G., the new girl, she don't know anything!" said a student. In fact, ELLs come to school with many life experiences, and it's the teacher's job "to tap those experiences and link them to the new information we're teaching," says Gottschalk. "Newcomers aren't nearly the blank slate they appear to be."

• *Misconception #10: Recently arrived immigrant students won't be behavior problems*. Frequently untrue! says Gottschalk. ELLs need the same rules, routines, and expectations as native-born students.

"10 (Usually Wrong) Ideas About ELLs" by Barbara Gottschalk in *Educational Leadership*, February 2016 (Vol. 73, #5, p. 62-64), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1LpN38g; Gottschalk can be reached at gottscha@wcskids.net.

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## 6. Three Teachers Radically Revamp Their Curriculum Units

In this article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, Kristina Doubet (James Madison University), Jessica Hockett (a consultant in Illinois) and Catherine Brighton (University of Virginia/ Charlottesville) report on a three-year research project whose theory of action was that instruction and results will improve if teachers follow these principles:

- Focus curriculum and instruction on authentic, discipline-based content.
- Use questioning techniques that allow for multiple interpretations.
- Tailor instruction according to evidence collected from formative assessments that tap into students' skills and thinking.

Doubet, Hockett, and Brighton describe three case studies of primary-grade teachers in high-poverty schools who followed these principles to revamp curriculum units they'd been teaching for some time.

• *Ms. Ball's kindergarten social studies unit* – For many years, this teacher's approach to the required unit on Pocahontas and the Jamestown Settlement was to show the Disney film "Pocahontas" and have students discuss what they learned. Ball wasn't thrilled with this approach but believed it gave all students access to the content and was especially helpful for students who had recently moved to the United States. Ball's questions were typically along these lines: *Who is Pocahontas? What do you know about Jamestown?* Although she frequently assessed students' reading levels and used the data to move them in and out of reading groups, she didn't systematically assess students' thinking.

Ball began to rethink this unit by defining three key understandings: (a) Historical stories often combine fact and fiction; (b) We can distinguish between fact and fiction by using our minds (reasoning); and (c) We can also tell fact from fiction by consulting outside (non-fiction) sources. Students spent several days studying Pocahontas through read-alouds, audio texts, and other sources, sang songs about some of the important ideas, and watched each other putting on mini-performances. Students then viewed the Disney film, pausing it at several points to discuss particular scenes, and then talked about how accurately it presented historical information and completed a class "movie review."

Ball's questions in the revamped unit were: *What's the best story you've ever been told? Why? Who told you that story? Was it real or made up? Why do we tell stories? How can we tell if a story is real or make-believe?*

To check for understanding, Ball made a T-chart on poster paper with Fact on one side and Fantasy on the other. She gave students pairs of pictures to stick on the appropriate side of the chart – a rabbit and a picture of Bugs Bunny; a photo of an iguana and a picture of the dragon from "Shrek"; and a portrait of the historical Pocahontas and a picture of the Disney version. As students placed the pictures on the T-chart, they discussed the difference between fact and fantasy and how they could tell one from the other. Ball noticed that students who grasped the conceptual difference had difficulty with the academic skills – and vice versa.

"Ms. Ball was surprised by how engaged students from varied cultures were in the historical inquiry process," report the researchers. "The representation of information in text, pictures, performances, and especially songs, made complex ideas accessible to everyone."

• *Mrs. Grand's kindergarten math unit* – Measurement was not this teacher's favorite topic – she found it dry and disconnected from the rest of her curriculum. In the past, she read Rolf Myller's story, "How Big Is a Foot?" and had students measure several classmates as they lay on the floor. Grand's questions were typically like these: *Who can tell me what this is (holding up a ruler)? How is it divided up? How many inches in a foot?* Like Ball, Grand used reading assessments to group students by level but didn't assess their conceptual understanding in any depth.

Rethinking the unit, Grand reflected on how she used measurement in the real world and established her key understanding: Measurement helps people communicate and make

decisions. The class's first activity was measuring the length of various animals, conducting a "meeting of scientists," and reporting their findings. Then students decided which snack to choose by weighing out three grams of several different snacks. Students concluded with a mini news report about what they had discovered through measurement. Grand's revamped questions were: *Why might we use these tools (displaying a ruler, tape measure, bathroom scale, and thermometer)? What does it mean to "measure" something? When have you or someone in your family measured something? Why do we measure things?*

For assessment, Grand began with a pre-assessment of students' understanding of measuring units and different measurement tools. This revealed very different groupings than her regular reading assessments, which meant that when she grouped students for the measurement tasks, there were different reading levels in each group. Grand was able to differentiate support according to students' understanding of rulers, inches, inch blocks, and other manipulatives.

All students achieved or exceeded the lesson's objectives. "Mrs. Grand reported surprise at how talented some students were in math," report the researchers, "even though they struggled with language (and vice versa)."

• *Ms. Holden's first-grade science unit on animals adapting to their environment* – In the past, this teacher read a book about animal habitats, questioned students about the story, and had them draw pictures of their favorite animals and their habitats. Typical questions: *What is your favorite animal? Where does this animal live? What special feature does this animal have?* In terms of assessment, Holden had never tried to determine individual students' readiness to tackle this unit – or their conceptual understanding afterward.

The rethought unit started with students discussing how their own bodies adapted to their environment. Then students chose an animal from a menu of options and researched (from print and non-print resources) how it was adapted to its environment. Finally, they used their findings to create reports (words and pictures) for zookeepers illustrating how to help these animals survive if they were brought to the zoo. Questions: *How do our bodies help us survive? What body parts or special features help us meet our basic needs (food, water, shelter) and keep us safe? How does your animal's body help it survive? What special features does your animal have that help it meet its basic needs and stay away from danger?*

Holden kicked off the unit with a whole-class introduction to the unit and then did a pre-assessment, asking students to draw and label a picture (or talk one-on-one with her) showing how their bodies helped them survive. She was shocked to see wide variation in conceptual readiness, from students who hadn't understood anything from her mini-lecture to a student who was able to draw an accurate diagram of how humans take in air and distribute oxygen through the body. This information helped Holden guide students to choose animals from the menu at the appropriate level of complexity and challenge. Holden brought in the school librarian to provide the right books and materials for each student, and all students engaged eagerly in researching their animals.

"Ms. Holden at first thought the research project would be too difficult for many students," say the researchers. "Because students were genuinely motivated by choice and

supported in their research, she found that they were able to accomplish much more than she expected."

Each of these upgraded curriculum units took more class time than previously, conclude Doubet, Hockett, and Brighton. However, "teachers made up for that time by asking students to wrestle with key ELA standards in the context of required content. Furthermore, each unit built toward imaginative yet authentic performance tasks that were relevant to students. This, in turn, increased student investment and achievement, as every child was able to investigate and create rather than simply remember and regurgitate… Notably, some of the students who challenged these teachers' expectations most were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds different from those of their teachers. In addition to their practices, then, the teachers had 'made over' their thinking about which students were capable of mastering standards."

"A Teaching Makeover Improves Learning for Diverse Students" by Kristina Doubet, Jessica Hockett, and Catherine Brighton in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2016 (Vol. 97, #5, p. 64-69), www.kappanmagazine.org; Doubet can be reached at doubetkj@jmu.edu.

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## 7. Adapting to New Standards for Teaching World Languages

In this article in *The Language Educator*, curriculum directors Greta Lundgaard (Plano, Texas) and Brandon Locke (Anchorage, Alaska) say that the 1996 *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* and their "Five C's" made a positive difference to world language instruction across the U.S. But over time, say Lundgaard and Locke, the standards became "comfortable and routine." The 2015 publication of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* has been a jolt for many foreign-language teachers with its emphasis on college and career preparation, critical thinking, creativity, and the collaborative interplay between language, culture, and communication. To overcome teachers' natural resistance to change, there will have to be "solid modeling," says Sheryl Castro of Catalina Foothills, Arizona. "They will want examples of what the World-Readiness Standards look like and sound like in the classroom. They will need time and feedback as they make adjustments to their assessments and daily teaching and learning practices."

Lundgaard and Locke suggest three guidelines to create a "greenhouse" that will help nurture the transition to the new standards: (a) communicate and share everything; (b) celebrate breakthroughs, large and small; and (c) consistently involve the entire community of learners. They suggest focusing on several significant changes in the new standards:

• *The definition of communication* – The 1996 standards said: "Students communicate in languages other than English." The 2015 standards require that students: "Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations for multiple purposes." The professional development challenge is addressing the concept of *functional* language in different settings – interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.

• *The emphasis on analysis* – The 1996 standards described the presentational mode thus: "Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers

in a variety of topics." The 2015 standards say: "Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers." The new standards ask students to notice, reflect, and analyze communication in real-world situations, which is more cognitively demanding. It's the emphasis on *analysis* that poses the biggest shift from the previous standards' emphasis on the more passive modes of *understanding* and *interpretation*.

• *The definitions of connections, comparisons, and communities* – The 2015 standards put more emphasis than their predecessors on developing students' cultural competence – "a skill that is now, more than ever, of critical importance," say Lundgaard and Locke. The ability to communicate and understand across cultures offers economic as well as intellectual advantages to students. Curiosity, empathy, compassion, and flexibility will serve graduates well, and it's an important part of the mission of world-language teachers to develop these traits in their students. Technology is a key classroom tool in helping teachers and students escape their parochial limitations. On this point, the new standards say, "learners often do not recognize and understand the cultural roots of many of the behaviors and beliefs in their own society until they see how these are manifested in another culture."

Interestingly, the instructional approach recommended by the World-Readiness Standards demands less of teachers in terms of being an expert on specific aspects of the target culture and students' home cultures – historically a source of anxiety for teachers. The new standards suggest that students should act as "cultural sleuths," investigating, explaining, and reflecting on the target culture's perspectives, practices, and products. Orchestrating this process should be more comfortable for teachers – and more productive for students.

"No longer can we view ourselves simply as elective teachers teaching luxury classes," conclude the authors. "We must embrace the innovation and change embedded within the World-Readiness Standards and recognize the critical importance of our profession."

"A Different Perspective: Seeing the World-Readiness Standards as Innovation" by Greta Lundgaard and Brandon Locke in *The Language Educator*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 32-36), no e-link available

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## 8. An Online Tool to Help Students Develop World Language Proficiency

In this article in *The Language Educator*, Bobby Hobgood (University of North Carolina/Charlotte) says that a perennial challenge in world language classrooms is building students' proficiency and confidence in oral presentation. He recommends Powtoon, a free, web-based application www.powtoon.com that allows students from middle school through university to create short animated videos (five minutes or under) with voiceover. The online platform has a media library, a recording tool, and a timeline for synchronizing visual media with audio. Hobgood mentions videos he and his colleagues have made with students: a marketing video for foreign visitors to a city in North Carolina; short biographical videos of famous Hispanic inventors; a self-introduction for a host family prior to traveling abroad.

To get the most out of a program like Powtoon, Hobgood suggests that teachers follow these steps:

- Review the concept of digital storytelling.
- Introduce the idea of storyboarding as a way to think through a presentation in a logical sequence.
- Have students write a script without animations and go through an editing process.
- Record the voiceover. This is students' opportunity to showcase their oral proficiency.
- Choose visuals. Students tend to get carried away exploring the visual library and Internet, and Hobgood advises teachers to make sure the visuals serve the script and not the other way around.
- Develop a rubric to assess the videos.

"Tech Watch: Tips from Educators" by Bobby Hobgood in *The Language Educator*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 59), no e-link available

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## 9. What Effective School Boards Do

In this article from *The Illinois School Board Journal*, Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien list the characteristics of school boards that get the most positive results with their students:

• The board commits to and stays focused on a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction, with clear goals toward that vision.

• Members have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels. Poverty, low parent involvement, and other external factors are seen as challenges, not excuses.

• The board is accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues (no micromanaging) and more on policies to improve student achievement.

• The board has collaborative relationships with staff and the community and establishes a strong communications structure to inform and engage internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

• Members are data-savvy, asking for, embracing, and monitoring key information, not shying away from bad news, and using data to drive continuous improvement.

• Members align resources (e.g., professional development) to meet district goals, sustaining funding even in tough budget times.

"Characteristics of Effective School Boards" by Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien in *The Illinois School Board Journal*, July/August 2015 (Vol. 83, p. 10-12), spotted in *Education Digest*, March 2016 (Vol. 81, #7, p. 45-48), no e-links available

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## 10. Short Items:

***a. Ideas for Black History Month*** – This *Edutopia* article by Matt Davis has numerous suggestions for effective teaching during Black History Month, as well as for the rest of the year: http://edut.to/1PzfqES.

"Six Teaching Tools for Black History Month" by Matt Davis in *Edutopia*, January 15, 2016

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***b. Games for world language classrooms*** – Games2Teach is a free resource with ideas on how to incorporate games into language learning: https://games2teach.uoregon.edu. Languages include Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and German.

"Websites to Watch" *The Language Educator*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 60)

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***c. Online help for young students learning Spanish*** – This free resource from Kentucky's PBS LearningMedia http://ket.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/exploraciones has a video series for students with little or no prior experience in Spanish, as well as themed units, lesson plans, activity ideas, and other materials.

"Websites to Watch" *The Language Educator*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 60)

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***If you have feedback or suggestions,***
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# About the Marshall Memo

### *Mission and focus:*

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

### *Subscriptions:*

Individual subscriptions are $50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

### *Website:*

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions (with results of an annual survey)
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

### *Core list of publications covered*

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest