

Marshall Memo 69

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 10, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

"When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative."

Robert Stake on the two types of assessment (see item #1)

"Regrettably, professional development leaders too often fall into the same trap in planning that teachers do when they plan their lessons. They plan what they are going to do rather than what they want their students to know and be able to do. Their planning tends to be event-based or process-based, not results-based."

Thomas Guskey (see item #1)

"Team-building exercises are without content... Team-building exercises postpone the day when the real business begins."

Ruth Mitchell (see item #3)

"Short-term, decontextualized professional development does not create the kind of long-term change in teacher practice that can effect meaningful improvements in student achievement."

Allen Trent et al. (see item #6)

"A very significant learning for me is when to be a participant and when to be a facilitator. This will be difficult, as I love facilitating, but I understand clearly that when I facilitate, I give away my ability to express my knowledge, ideas, and beliefs."

Sonya Wrisley, a California principal (see item #4)

1. Backwards Planning of Professional Development

In this important article in *Journal of Staff Development*, Thomas Guskey lists five ways that educators commonly evaluate the effectiveness of professional development activities:

- a. *Participants' reactions* – Did teachers say they liked the workshop?
- b. *Participants' learning* – Did teachers pick up new knowledge and skills?
- c. *Organizational support and change* – Did the school give teachers enough resources, time, and support to make the new program work?
- d. *Participants' use of new knowledge and skills* – Did teachers effectively apply what they learned?
- e. *Student learning outcomes* – Did students' learning improve (as measured by test scores, rubric scores, attitude surveys, attendance, dropout rate, etc.)?

Guskey says that school leaders need to keep an eye on all five of these on an on-going basis, since each provides important information during the school year and at the end of the year. He quotes a nice definition of formative versus summative evaluation: "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative." (Robert Stake) Guskey cautions that a professional development program can fall apart at any of the five levels. For example, teachers might enjoy a workshop but never apply the new ideas – resulting in zero impact on student learning.

Guskey then argues that *planning* professional development in this sequence is a mistake. "Regrettably," he writes, "professional development leaders too often fall into the same trap in planning that teachers do when they plan their lessons. They plan what they are going to do rather than what they want their students to know and be able to do. Their planning tends to be event-based or process-based, not results-based."

The antidote to this tendency is to plan professional development *backwards*, starting with the last step listed above and proceeding to d, c, b, and then a. Each step has direct implications for the next, and all are driven by whether student learning will improve as a result:

- First, school leaders should look at the student learning outcomes they are seeking (e.g., improved reading comprehension, math problem-solving skills, behavior in class, collaboration with peers, persistence in school) and plan the assessments that will be used to judge the success of the professional development

program (e.g., test scores, rubrics, portfolios, projects, performance tasks, survey data).

- Second, school leaders should decide what classroom practices and school policies are most likely to produce these student learning outcomes. Leaders should look carefully at the research evidence for any new program, ask how reliable the evidence is, and find out whether it was gathered in contexts similar to theirs. “Be particularly mindful of innovations that are more opinion-based than research-based,” cautions Guskey, “promoted by people more concerned with what sells than with what works. Before jumping on any educational bandwagon, always make sure that trustworthy evidence validates the selected approach.”

- Third, leaders should look at whether support, resources, time, instructional materials, technology, etc. are in place.

- Fourth, leaders should decide what knowledge and skills teachers need to acquire to successfully implement the new program. “What must they know and be able to do,” asks Guskey, “to successfully adapt the innovation to their specific situation and bring about the sought-after change?”

- Finally, leaders should focus on the adult learning experiences that will most effectively get the new skills and knowledge into teachers’ heads. Workshops? Seminars? Study groups? Action projects? etc.

Guskey sums up the steps principals should use to plan professional development: (a) backwards planning of the whole process; (b) formative assessments to “dipstick” how things are going; and (c) summative evaluation: did students learn?

“Taking a Second Look at Accountability” by Thomas Guskey in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 10-18), no e-link available

2. Ideas Are More Important Than Terminology

In another article in *Journal of Staff Development*, Thomas Guskey notes that educators sometimes get tangled in disagreements about jargon and terminology. These, he says, “often squander precious time and detract from the important work that needs to be done.” He tells the story of working with a group of teachers in a high school and asking, as a joke, whether a learning goal (“The student will be able to...”) should be called a standard, goal, objective, competency, outcome, benchmark, proficiency, performance, expectation, aspiration, or New Year’s resolution. The teachers couldn’t reach consensus, and in frustration, Guskey walked down the hall to

the cafeteria and asked the question to ten different students. Every one had the same answer: “*Who cares?*”

Guskey says that really sound professional development “avoids battles over terminology by maintaining a laser focus on learning and learners. In dealing with standards, it keeps discussions centered on what students should learn, what they should be able to do, and what evidence best reflects that learning. The specific labels attached to those things really don’t matter.”

“Five Key Concepts Kick off the Process” by Thomas Guskey in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 36-40), no e-link available

3. Teacher Teams Working to Improve Classroom Assignments

In this article, Ruth Mitchell describes a process (created by The Education Trust and dubbed Standards in Practice) in which a teacher team looks at an assignment and works together to make it more rigorous, challenging, clearly written, and targeted toward important concepts and knowledge.

Two theories of action underlie this process: (a) The quality of assignments is crucial to student learning (for example, if a sixth grader is given an assignment at the third-grade level, the student will produce third-grade work); (b) teachers can improve the quality of their assignments by working with colleagues.

Mitchell recommends that teacher teams meet about every two weeks, appoint a facilitator for each meeting, and follow these steps:

- *Step 1* – One teacher brings a recent assignment given to students (along with students’ responses to the assignment) and explains how and when it was given and what students were expected to learn. The teacher also works through the problem (if it’s math) or describes the expected answer. (If the assignment is a worksheet or a straightforward set of steps, the team then skips straight to the sixth step below.)

- *Step 2* – The team asks questions about the assignment to clarify what students have to know and be able to do in order to complete it successfully.

- *Step 3* – The team identifies the standards and the Bloom taxonomy levels that apply to the assignment. The team facilitator guards against “Bloom’s creep” – the claim that an assignment is higher in the taxonomy than it really is.

- *Step 4* – The team drafts a 4-3-2-1 scoring guide/rubric for the assignment. The best way to do this is to use an easel sheet or overhead to brainstorm what Level 3 (proficient) performance on the assignment would look like, for example, the correct answer, a written explanation, work is shown, justification is given, it’s in the form

requested (e.g., five paragraphs with a bibliography), the required treatment is given (application, analysis), there are no errors in mechanics, usage, grammar, and spelling. Teachers can then tease this into levels 4, 2, and 1.

- *Step 5* – The team uses the rubric to score students’ work, debating and resolving papers where teachers’ scores differed by more than one point.

- *Step 6* – The team discusses how the assignment might be revised or how to re-teach the lesson without repeating the same material. No one is allowed to say “Throw it out and start a new one.” If re-teaching is clearly required, the facilitator has the team list on chart paper: (a) what students already know and can do, and (b) what they need to be taught.

Interestingly, Mitchell is not a fan of team-building exercises at the beginning of this process. “Team-building exercises are without content,” she says. “They cannot prepare teachers for the real business of using professional judgment on assignments. Team-building exercises postpone the day when the real business begins. Team building actually happens simultaneously with focusing on the assignments.”

“Building a Better Assignment” by Ruth Mitchell in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 42-47), no e-link available; Ruth Mitchell can be reached as ruthriter@verizon.net

4. How Principals Should Share Leadership in Meetings

In this thoughtful article, California researcher Robert Garmston argues persuasively that principals should not be the facilitator of meetings in their schools. Principals should set the agenda, he says, and then have a teacher work within that framework as a neutral facilitator. The facilitator’s job is to efficiently coordinate staff energies to make each meeting successful, which involves:

- Clarifying if the meeting is a dialogue to deepen understanding or a discussion to make decisions;
- Clarifying whether the group will decide, recommend, or inform;
- Deciding if topics are within the group’s sphere of influence;
- Deciding which discussion tools to use;
- Checking participants’ understanding of the task and processes;
- Managing the dynamics and traffic flow of the conversation;
- Pushing for closure;
- Pressing for specificity;
- Intervening to correct behaviors that will detract from the group’s work or the

capacity to get work done;

- Helping a group that meets more than once reflect on and learn from its experience and become increasingly effective;
- Keeping his or her own personal opinions silent and concentrating on process.

Garmston says that if principals try to act as facilitators and remain neutral, “the group is robbed of the principal’s knowledge, values, and expertise. In many situations, the principal’s knowledge is an important resource to a group as it makes decisions affecting students’ learning. If the principal is facilitating the meetings, he or she may not be able to adequately communicate that knowledge and may send mixed messages. Teachers may conclude that the real agenda is to get buy-in to the principal’s ideas.” Garmston quotes Sonya Wrisley, a California principal, who wrestled with this dilemma: “A very significant learning for me is when to be a participant and when to be a facilitator. This will be difficult, as I love facilitating, but I understand clearly that when I facilitate, I give away my ability to express my knowledge, ideas, and beliefs.”

There’s another problem if the principal tries to juggle all the balls involved in facilitating: his or her attention will be diffused and the group will not get the principal’s specialized knowledge and point of view. The principal, Garmston argues, needs to focus on:

- Writing the agenda, framing the meeting, and stating desired outcomes;
- Clarifying the money, time, or other resources available to the group.
- Joining actively in the discussion, which includes contributing ideas, debating colleagues, giving a rationale for an item’s importance, and linking items to other school initiatives.

“For Principals, the Trick is Knowing When to Pass on the Facilitator’s Hat” by Robert Garmston in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 63-64), no e-link available

5. John Ogbu’s Last Book: Refining His “Acting White” Concept

John Ogbu, the noted scholar of African-American student achievement, died recently. His final book, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*, received a long and thoughtful review in the current *Harvard Educational Review*. The book looks at the phenomenon of African-American students’ disengagement in Shaker Heights public schools and refines Ogbu’s theory that a fear of being accused of “acting white” keeps many black students from committing their

full energies to school work.

Ogbu's data lead him to conclude that "Black students in Shaker Heights and probably elsewhere did not reject making good grades per se because it entailed acting White... These students seemed to reject certain attitudes and behaviors that they perceived or interpreted as White, but that were *conducive* [emphasis added] to making good grades." Dorinda Carter, the reviewer, paraphrases Ogbu: "These behaviors and attitudes included speaking Standard English and breaking speech rules by speaking Standard English at the wrong times, enrolling in honors and advanced placement classes, acting "smart" in class (e.g., raising their hands to answer questions, always getting the answers right, always completing homework and schoolwork, and hanging out with too many White students who make good grades. Black students were also accused of acting White for reasons not related to academic success but to social acceptance. For example, dressing like White students, having a predominantly White peer group, and participating in sports traditionally dominated by White students (e.g., tennis, lacrosse) were considered "White" behaviors. As a result, many Black students who valued social acceptance by other Black students reported rejecting the above behaviors quite often."

In this book, unlike his previous research, Ogbu explains in detail the reason why Black students label certain attitudes and behaviors as acting White. "These reasons," explains Carter, "primarily centered around ambivalence towards Blacks who were successful in White institutions or White establishments in society with regard to whether they had abandoned their racial identity. This ambivalence was often applicable to perceptions of Black students who were successful in school as well. Ogbu's new data raise the question of how the Black community and schools can work to minimize this type of ambivalence and dismantle the perception of certain attitudes and behaviors as racialized.

Carter continues: "Ogbu found that the overarching 'cultural model of pedagogy' of the Black parents was that teachers and the schools should make their children learn and achieve success. Given this ethos, Black parents' school participation and involvement were dismal among working-class, middle-class, and professional parents. Similarly, parental involvement at home indicated a lack of close supervision of children's homework, poor coaching on effective time management, lack of shielding from negative peer pressures, and ineffective methods for motivating children to engage in schoolwork. When one considers the community forces simultaneously with system factors, Black student academic disengagement becomes

a huge dilemma in U.S. education.”

What does Ogbu recommend? In this book, he supports school choice, performance contracts and merit pay, cooperative learning, and “culturally responsive pedagogy.” He also recommends a number of community initiatives, including effective role models, emphasizing the pragmatic value of education, developing and institutionalizing effective parental educational strategies, and teaching children how to work hard and persevere to make good grades.

Editor’s Review: *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement* by John Ogbu (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003) by Dorinda Carter in *Harvard Educational Review*, Winter 2004 (Vol. 74, #4, p. 440-453), no e-link available

6. Lesson Study Tweaked in Wyoming

This article describes how a study group composed of researchers from the University of Wyoming and staff from the Laramie public schools adapted Japan’s “lesson study” approach to their particular context. The group decided to change the Japanese model by developing a curriculum *unit* rather than an individual lesson, and to shift the emphasis from whole-group content instruction to looking at the teacher as facilitator and seeking evidence that individual students were learning. The Wyoming educators also decided to include a special education teacher, parents, and selected students in their lesson study group (Japanese groups include only teachers).

After trying their modified lesson study approach a couple of times, the Wyoming group noted several positive features:

- *Collegial support* – They felt collaboration definitely improved teaching.
- *Ongoing professional learning* – The process reinforced their belief that “[s]hort-term, decontextualized professional development does not create the kind of long-term change in teacher practice that can effect meaningful improvements in student achievement.” They said it made them more open, reflective, and deliberate in their teaching.
- *Teacher ownership* – This approach put teachers at the center of the action research process.
- *Depth versus breadth* – The lesson study approach emphasized in-depth thinking about teaching and learning versus superficial coverage.

While the Wyoming educators learned a lot from the process, they had the following concerns about implementing lesson study as the Japanese practice it:

- *Observers remaining aloof* – They decided they didn’t like the Japanese policy

that observers should not help students during a lesson. The Wyoming educators thought that if they saw a student struggling with a problem and the teacher was busy, they should intervene.

- *Lack of support* – American schools don't yet have Japan's commitment to lesson study in terms of time and resources, which makes it difficult to implement in most U.S. schools.

- *No national curriculum* – The fact that Japan has uniform national learning expectations means there is a common set of curriculum goals and a common language of instruction for lesson study. The fact that the United States doesn't have a national curriculum led the Wyoming team to veer away from looking at individual lessons and focus more on student understanding.

- *Differentiating instruction* – Japanese lesson study focuses on the teacher's execution of a carefully-planned whole-class lesson. The Wyoming group thought this misses individual student differences and how individual students are reacting to a lesson.

[The Wyoming adaptation of lesson study takes such liberties with the Japanese model that it cannot, in my opinion, be called lesson study. Japanese educators would push back on most of the Wyoming changes in their model, especially the idea of differentiating instruction: the whole point, they would say, is to teach the lesson right the first time so that all, or virtually all, students get it!]

“Japanese Method Gets a Wyoming Accent” by Allen Trent, Timothy Blum, Meredith McLaughlin, and Dorothy Jean Yocom in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 53-56), no e-link available

7. Literacy Pen Pals in Washington, D.C. Schools

Five years ago, Nina Zolt, a wealthy Washington, D.C. entrepreneur who wanted to make a difference for kids, started In2Books. This innovative literacy program is now up and running in a number of D.C. and Chicago public schools and is making a positive difference.

The program anonymously pairs students with trained adult pen pals through the Internet. Each pair of pen pals reads a carefully-chosen book and the adult writes to the student with their opinions about the characters, story line, and central themes of a book and asks questions about what he or she might have learned from the book. Students write back with personal greetings and their own impressions, following writing guidelines given by their teachers.

Each participating class gets lots of free books, and pen pals exchange letters or e-mails on five books in the course of the school year. Students are reportedly enthusiastic about the program and eagerly anticipate each letter or e-mail. Jennyfer Diaz, a teacher at West Elementary School, said, "The program gives children a lot of materials, and the pen pals help them to engage more with the books." Diaz also likes the training, teaching strategies, materials, and the discussion groups that come with the program. Juanita, one of her students, said, "I like writing to my pen pal because I get to learn about a new person in my life."

What about results? Independent studies have shown that students who participate in In2Books score 9 points higher on the Stanford Achievement Test, have stronger critical-thinking skills, and are more efficient writers than students in control groups. Teachers can look at progress by going to the program's online database, which catalogs each student letter and scores it on a common grade-level rubric.

"Entrepreneurs' Literacy Program Takes Off in D.C. Schools" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, January 5, 2005 (Vol. 24, #15, p. 6), <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16in2books.h24.html>

8. High-Stakes Tests Faze High-Achieving Students the Most

Surprisingly, a recent study found that exam pressure seems to have a more negative effect on high-achieving than on lower-achieving students. When they were under the gun, students who usually scored high were rushed and worried about pleasing others and lost their edge in short-term or working memory (the ability to keep numbers and thoughts in a "holding pattern" while focusing on the problem at hand). The study found that lower-achieving students, whose working memories were less powerful, were less likely to go to pieces under exam pressure.

Dr. Randall Engle, a Georgia Institute of Technology psychologist, remarked: "The finding makes very little sense on one level; the better kids should do better, right? But we know from other work that this is what happens on some tasks: You put some extra intellectual load on people with these skills, and their performance just drops off."

High-achieving students' short-term intellectual machinery seemed particularly fragile when they felt the hot breath of competition on their necks, were afraid of failing and racked with self-doubt, and were aware of a ticking clock. Students with lower-functioning working memory seemed less affected by these pressures, probably because they used less taxing strategies to solve problems, did

more estimating, saw patterns in the problems, and guessed more.

The one thing that the researchers found was helpful to all students facing high-stakes tests was making problem-solving strategies more automatic. “Once a skill has been trained up to a point,” explained Dr. Engle, “the differences in working memory become less important, and you’re not as vulnerable.”

In schools around the world, teachers have a word for this technique: *studying*.

“When Pressure Is On, Good Students Suffer” by Benedict Carey in *New York Times*, December 21, 2005

9. Short Items:

a. Tsunami relief – New Leaders for New Schools, Teach for America, City Year, and a number of other groups have organized a national effort to involve students and school staff in providing support for the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami. A website (<http://www.quartersfromkids.org>) is up and running today, and there will be a national launch event, probably in New York City, this Wednesday. The website provides links to respected relief organizations (including Oxfam America, Save the Children, and UNICEF), so that contributions can go directly to providing relief assistance in South Asia.

Another website, Modern Mom, offers help to parents and teachers as they try to help children deal with extremely upsetting images they are seeing in the media: <http://www.modernmom.com/content/1379>.

b. Two websites with teacher-written units – Here are two websites with units written by teachers in Massachusetts and New York. Although the units do not follow the full Understanding by Design format, they have standards, guiding questions and a careful presentation of learning activities.

The first, from the Regional Education and Business Alliance (REBA), (<http://www.reba.org/standards.htm>) has units on: Grade 2 poetry, Grade 3 history (what was it like in 1776?), Grade 3-4 exploration (Columbus, etc.), Grade 4 social studies (location of continents and oceans), Grade 4 cross-disciplinary, Grade 6 math (data), Grade 6 English Language Arts (friendship), Grade 10 biology (cells), Grade 11 English/Language Arts, and Grade 11/12 economics (inflation).

The second website, created by teachers in the Oswego City School District, (<http://www.oswego.org/staff/cchamber/unitwriting/index.cfm>) has numerous units from kindergarten through seventh grade.

“Peers Add a Potent Perspective” by Judy Carr in *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2005 (Vol. 26, #1, p. 52)

c. Triangulation article text – For a PDF of the full Sarah Butzin article summarized in Marshall Memo 67 #2 (“Stop the Insanity: It Takes a Team to Leave No Child Behind” from *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2005), click on <http://www.ifsi.org/Butzin%20Article%20PDK.pdf>

d. Fordham Foundation standards analysis – The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has just released twin reports: The State of State Math Standards 2005 <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=338> and The State of State English Standards 2005 <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=337>. The reports give Fs to a number of states and As to very few. Check out your state!

Spotted in *The Education Gadfly*, January 6, 2004

e. Achieve graduation standards report – Achieve, Inc., a non-partisan clearinghouse of information on standards in schools here and abroad, has just released a report on all 50 states’ graduation standards. You can get the full report at <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/index.cfm#2118>. The data show, among other things, the difference a rigorous high-school curriculum makes, especially for disadvantaged students. For example, African-American students who enter college with at least Algebra II under their belts increase their chances of completing college from 45 percent to 75 percent, and Latino students increase their chances from 61 to 79 percent.

Spotted in *The Education Gadfly*, January 6, 2004

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals and other educators very well-informed on important research and ideas in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 years of experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, coach of principals, and writer, acts as “designated reader.” Kim searches through 39 publications the week they come out, chooses the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning, and summarizes them in a brief e-mail. Some ideas will be familiar, reinforcing what readers already know; others will be new and genuinely thought-provoking.

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Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
Curriculum Update (ASCD)
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Harper’s
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Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible.