

# Marshall Memo 94

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
July 4, 2005

## In This Issue:

1. What's involved in becoming a performance-driven school district
2. Can a principal be a cultural leader *and* an instructional leader?
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## Quotes of the Week

"Why are you so normal?"

A question frequently asked of Ruba, an Iraqi exchange student, by her Massachusetts schoolmates last year (*Christian Science Monitor*, June 28, 2005)

"Much of today's math anxieties are not caused by the mathematics, but rather by instructional strategies that do not work."

Chet Delani in *Principal View*, Summer 2005 (Vol. 19, #4, p. 5, 10)

"Leaders in a performance-driven system consciously build in the time to reflect and determine *whether* any new effort is actually working, *why* it is or isn't, and *how* to make adjustments accordingly."

Lisa Petrides and Thad Nodine (see item #1)

"What happens when teachers' notions of what constitutes being an effective teacher differ from those of the principal? What if teachers are a tightly-knit community but do not have a focus on instruction? And if this responsibility is left to teachers, what is the role of the principal, except as a cheerleader?"

Herbert Wenglinsky reviewing a book for new principals (see item #2)

"For principals and teachers to have substantive conversations about instruction they need good data, or else those conversations degenerate into ideology. Research has found again and again that teachers and principals can talk a good game: They can say that the standards to which they adhere and the pedagogy that they practice are on the cutting edge nationally. But with real data, they are forced to confront what actually happens in the classroom, rather than merely their perceptions of what happens..."

*Ibid.*

"We survived as a species because of compassion, not because of aggression."

Steven Stosny, psychologist specializing in anger (see item #4)

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# 1. What's Involved in Becoming a Performance-Driven School District

This NewSchools Venture Fund study looked at 28 urban school districts and catalogued the degree to which they had shifted from a pre-standards era “culture of compliance” to focusing on performance and results. The study hypothesized that five elements are needed to achieve “high standards for *everyone* and a commitment to dramatically and continually improve achievement for *all* students.”

- *Setting clear, rigorous student achievement goals* – Thinking through what student achievement means, agreeing on measurable, actionable objectives, and disseminating them throughout the district.

- *Aligning resources to meet those goals* – Ensuring that personnel, funds, processes, systems, and stakeholders are focused on reaching the goals.

- *Regularly gathering and assessing data* – Measuring student progress on a regular basis; gathering relevant, timely information on students, classrooms, grades, and schools; and analyzing the information to monitor what has been accomplished, what has not worked, and what remains to be learned. The authors stress this last point: “[I]t is most important that a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement changes the way people undertake their daily work, and becomes embedded in the very culture of the organization.”

- *Designing action plans to improve those results* – Data are used to choose or create new curricula, revise teaching strategies, improve professional development, or initiate other interventions aimed at filling the gaps in student learning.

- *An ongoing feedback loop* – “Leaders in a performance-driven system consciously build in the time to reflect and determine *whether* any new effort is actually working, *why* it is or isn’t, and *how* to make adjustments accordingly.”

The study found that all 28 districts had a long way to go (none of them met all these criteria) and reached a number of helpful conclusions:

1. Many districts were gathering useful information on student achievement, but few were taking the next steps to monitor the results. “Seeking to adopt performance-driven practices,” write the authors, “involves more than implementing promising programs that may have been effective elsewhere – it involves engaging in a continuous feedback loop of gathering information and then discussing, analyzing

and using that information effectively throughout the district to improve student results.” The study identified these key components that can help districts make better use of data:

- Efficiently gathering and sharing student achievement and other data.
- Checking to see if district assessments are aligned with state standards.
- Using assessment results to identify curricular gaps.
- Checking on whether professional development is addressing those gaps.
- Using data to monitor the effectiveness of specific departments, sites, and programs.
- Looking at who is responsible for student results.
- Monitoring how interventions are put in place, and which ones.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.
- Tracking the progress of specific student populations.
- Looking at incentives to achieve desired results.
- Looking at whether the organizational culture supports those efforts.
- Aligning district resources with its goals.

2. Adopting performance-driven practices is a district-wide effort, across functions and hierarchies.

3. Professional development is a crucial tool in the adoption of performance-driven practices; it’s the primary means that organizational leaders can use to engage people in change.

4. In adopting performance-driven practices, there is a happy medium between top-down district leadership and site-based initiative.

5. External factors such as No Child Left Behind and state assessments have had a role in encouraging many districts to focus more on student achievement outcomes, and in motivating them to reflect on their own practices to improve performance.

6. Districts face significant hurdles in adopting performance-driven practices, including: discontinuity in leadership; fragmentation and lack of coordination among departments and functions; lack of technology infrastructure to get and use data; a culture resistant to sharing and analyzing student achievement data; and fiscal constraints.

The study makes these practical recommendations to spread performance-driven practices through a school district:

- Promote instructional leadership (i.e., get principals into classrooms and more actively involved in data analysis and instructional support).
- Develop effective interim assessments, give them at least quarterly, and use the results to continuously inform instructional decisions.
- Embed professional development in everyday practices, including “just-in-time” training, “at-elbow” coaching, and “real-time” support from instructional coaches as teachers and teacher teams analyze interim assessment results and put them to work in classrooms.
- Build an organizational culture that values inquiry and that is actively engaged in reviewing and improving performance through a variety of means. This includes “using performance-driven evaluations and other means to promote ownership of outcomes.”

*Anatomy of School System Improvement: Performance-Driven Practices in Urban School Districts* by Lisa Petrides and Thad Nodine, Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management of Education, May 2005 for NewSchools Venture Fund. For a PDF of the whole 84-page study, go to:

[http://www.newschools.org/viewpoints/documents/District\\_Performance\\_Practices.pdf](http://www.newschools.org/viewpoints/documents/District_Performance_Practices.pdf)  
Spotted in *Education Gadfly*, June 2, 2005

## **2. Can a Principal Be a Cultural Leader *and* an Instructional Leader?**

In this review of *The New Principal's Fieldbook: Strategies for Success*, Harold Wengling compares two competing messages in the book. The first emphasizes the need for new principals to assess the “hidden history” of a school, to be extremely sensitive to the school’s culture, and to introduce change slowly, making teachers feel that it is their idea. The book gives a poignant example of an eager principal who was in too much of a hurry. He worked hard to do a complete makeover of the teachers’ lounge, including putting up new curtains and installing a beverage station, but made the mistake of shoving a dusty wreath into a closet. It turned out that the wreath had been made by a former teacher who had recently died of cancer. Teachers did not respond positively to the principal’s well-intentioned gift to the faculty because they thought he had been disrespectful of their colleague.

The second part of the book describes a more focused principal who aspires to be an instructional leader. The bolder principal collects data about students and teachers and worries less about how teachers deliver instruction and more on how students receive it. The instructional leader pushes teachers to use portfolios, diagnostic assessments, and other tools to constantly measure the progress of their students and tailor instruction to meet their needs. He or she regularly drops into classes for 5-7 minutes and learns a great deal from these mini-observations. The instructional leader gets teachers involved in “lesson studies,” action research, and mentoring, creating a “professional learning community” in which teachers are constantly talking with one another about instructional issues, what they have tried in their classrooms, the strengths and weaknesses of their students, and how to support each other.

Wenglinsky worries about principals who put too much emphasis on being cultural leaders and not enough on instruction. “What happens,” he asks, “when teachers’ notions of what constitutes being an effective teacher differ from those of the principal? What if teachers are a tightly-knit community but do not have a focus on instruction? And if this responsibility is left to teachers, what is the role of the principal, except as a cheerleader?”

Wenglinsky believes that these two side of the principalship can be reconciled. He believes that principals “must integrate themselves into the community of teachers, and if they distinguish themselves from the teachers simply by virtue of their authority over them, they will be rejected for ‘putting on airs.’ But if principals feel secure in (a) the subject matter that the teachers are teaching and (b) their ability to institute structures that help teachers learn, such as time for common lesson planning or mentoring through peer observations, then just as a teacher can serve as a nonhierarchical cultural worker with students, a principal can serve as a nonhierarchical cultural worker with teachers.”

“In my experience,” continues Wenglinsky, “this dynamic is best generated when principals and teachers discuss concrete data. Professional development sessions, school leadership meetings, faculty meetings, and the like tend to be ‘poisonous’ because there is no content to them. When the meetings involve the discussion of nonsubstantive issues, such as the symbolism of the wreath in the example presented earlier, teachers and principals alike are distracted from the

discussion of learning. Both the principal and the teachers are at fault in such an instance because they are losing sight of the fact that the whole reason their community was constituted was to promote student learning, not to decide who should make the coffee in the morning.

“For principals and teachers to have substantive conversations about instruction they need good data, or else those conversations degenerate into ideology. Research has found again and again that teachers and principals can talk a good game: They can say that the standards to which they adhere and the pedagogy that they practice are on the cutting edge nationally. But with real data, they are forced to confront what actually happens in the classroom, rather than merely their perceptions of what happens, and the perceptions can diverge from the reality.

“The principal, as a cultural worker, should have more experience using data to improve instruction and should assist teachers in doing so by continually injecting the information from data into instruction. These data can include a wide range of artifacts, from test reports broken down by content area to portfolios of student work. By presenting this information, principals can encourage teachers to debate what instructional approaches make the most sense and what content knowledge teachers may need to ‘brush up’ on.”

Book review of *The New Principal's Fieldbook: Strategies for Success* by Pamela Robbins and Harvey Alvy (ASCD 2004) by Harold Wenglinsky in *Teachers College Record*, July 2005 (Vol. 107, #7, p. 1413-1417), no free e-link available

### **3. A Middle-School Program for Twice-a-Week Journal Writing**

This review of *Rain, Steam, and Speed: Building Fluency in Adolescent Writers* describes the book's approach to improving young adolescents' writing: students write in journals twice a week for twenty minutes with recorded music playing in the background, and the teacher reads and grades each journal primarily based on the quantity of writing. The result, the authors claim: improved fluency *and* better quality writing (they define fluency as the *facility* with which a person uses language).

The authors organize the three components of the program under the three lead words in the title: rain, steam, and speed. (These were inspired by a mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century painting by Turner showing a steam locomotive moving through the rain, with people plowing a field on one side and people boating on the other side.)

- *Rain* – The authors believe that background music (always instrumental) is essential to create a climate for writing, as well as to keep students from talking to each other. They believe that music diverts students “toward new direction and license in writing;” that “great music springs us loose from the constraints of our lives... takes us along with it, a great train on its frontierward tracks, as listeners and as writers... plays not only with our emotions... but also, simultaneously, with our intellect.” The authors experimented with different types of music and found that certain kinds increased the quantity and vividness of students’ writing. (The book has an appendix listing the classical, jazz, and world music that proved most effective.)

- *Steam* – The program’s prompts or student-selected topics. The goal is to get away from deadly journal entries such as “I woke up at 7, had breakfast, came to school, went home at 3, and went to bed at 9.” The authors feel strongly that prompts should not be one-liners or topics that students “should be” interested in but instead multifaceted topics that students really *are* interested in. Prompts can be serious, lighthearted, funny, and everything in between – death, joy, love, parents, peers, anger – to curb monotony and add interest. The authors recommend that teachers write the prompt on the board in longhand; this shows teacher effort, a desire to get students writing, and offers a springboard for more complex ideas, providing questions upon which to base real answers.

- *Speed* – Students’ fluency and increasing confidence and proficiency are generated by good prompts, the music, the twice-a-week regularity of the journal writing, and their teacher’s feedback on what they write. This section of the book contains numerous suggestions on how to create this momentum.

Book review of *Rain, Steam, and Speed: Building Fluency in Adolescent Writers* by Gerald Fleming and Meredith Pike-Baky (Jossey-Bass 2005) by Diane Olson in *Teachers College Record*, July 2005 (Vol. 107, #7, p. 1457-1460), no free e-link available

#### **4. Taking Responsibility for Anger**

This *Psychology Today* article describes the work of Steven Stosny, a clinical psychologist who has developed an unconventional approach to helping people deal with extreme anger. Stosny had early personal experience with the subject: when he was three, he was rushed to the hospital with a roof shingle lodged in his skull. His

father had become enraged when Stosny poked a stick into wall plaster that was still damp and flung the shingle at him.

Stosny's approach differs from conventional "anger management." He believes that most out-of-control anger comes from people who don't take responsibility for what's making them angry. "Most people with real anger problems think that something outside of them controls what they think and feel," he says. "They see themselves as just reacting to their environment... I've worked with more than 4,500 court-ordered DV [domestic violence] offenders and child abusers and I never met one who didn't feel like a powerless victim. No matter how victimizing they are, they see themselves retaliating against an unfair relationships or an unfair world... I want them to learn that there's something in them that regulates their emotions, regardless of what other people do." At one point in his research, Stosny checked back with his mother, who said that his dad's behavior was not a show of power. "He felt powerless all the time," she said.

Stosny has uncovered a pattern of children blaming their unpleasant feelings on others, and when they grow up and feel shamed or disregarded in situations that have nothing to do with loved ones (in rush-hour traffic, for example), getting angry and targeting the person who made them feel that way. This pattern tends to be self-reinforcing: anger gives a neurochemical rush that relieves anxiety and provides a physiological boost, creating a nasty cycle that turns people into "anger junkies."

Stosny believes that many people with anger problems have lost their core relationships and need to reconnect. "We survived as a species because of compassion," he says, "not because of aggression." But cognitive therapy won't change these deeply-ingrained behaviors and it's impossible to disarm every trigger for anger in today's world. Instead, anger-challenged people need to recognize the first signs that they are losing their temper (e.g., muscle tension and increased heart rate) and take control of their reaction. Stosny's CompassionPower therapy involves an intensive 14-week workshop with a 750 repetitions of the key messages. There are five steps to dealing with mounting rage, summed up in the acronym HEALS:

- H - At the first sign of anger, call up the word *heals* in your mind. If a particular person is making you mad, you should actually picture that person with the word on his or her face.

- E – *Explain* to yourself your “deepest core hurt” that lies behind the anger, such as feeling unlovable, disregarded, or powerless.

- A – *Access* and take inventory of your core values – what makes your life worth living: good deeds you’ve done, loving relationships or values you want to uphold, like honesty or bravery.

- L – *Love* yourself.

- S – *Solve* the problem; address the conflict that underlies the anger.

Stosny has 1,000 trained workshop leaders in 35 states and 15 countries and a forthcoming book (*Stop Walking on Eggshells*). His approach has attracted a good deal of attention in recent months, including an appearance on Oprah. Does it work? Internal studies and anecdotal testimonials are positive, but there still hasn’t been independent research to confirm its effectiveness.

“The Lion Tamer” by Cecilia Capuzzi Simon in *Psychology Today*, July/August 2005 (Vol. 38, #4, p. 54-60), no e-link available

## 5. Short Item:

*a. Yellow pages for kids with disabilities* – This website lists educational consultants, psychologists, diagnosticians, health care specialists, academic tutors, speech language therapists, advocates, attorneys, government programs, grassroots organizations, special education schools, parent support groups, each state’s special education regulations, and other information on special education organized by state. It’s at <http://www.yellowpagesforkids.com>

Spotted in *PEN Weekly Newsblast*, July 1, 2005

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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](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# 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 best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 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 39 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of 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, provide e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2003-04).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year (\$25 for a half-year, beginning late January). Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

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- Focus topics
- Headlines for issues 1-68
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
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- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

## ***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  
District Administration  
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Update (ASCD)  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
Harper's  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Educational Review  
Journal of Staff Development  
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.