

# Marshall Memo 517

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

December 30, 2013

## In This Issue:

1. [Some important occupational roles in a technology-dominated world](#)
2. [Rethinking assessment in light of what improves learning](#)
3. [A Massachusetts school confronts its achievement gap](#)
4. [A hero-villain narrative in the Los Angeles value-added debate](#)
5. [More concerns about value-added evaluation of teachers](#)
6. [Effective use of open-ended questions in elementary classrooms](#)
7. [Getting students to read poems with fluency and expression](#)
8. [Setting classroom tone from the get-go](#)
9. [A Connecticut physics class does the improbable](#)

## Quotes of the Week

“Ask me what I love most in life, and how I want to spend what limited allotment of it I have, and I will tell you that I want to be around friends and family, or reading, or writing, or in the outdoors, body and mind at play in the world. Ask me what I did today, where all the hours went, and – well, check my Twitter feed.”

Kathryn Schulz in “Seduced by Twitter” in *The Week*, Dec. 27, 2013 (p. 40-41)

“The utter simplicity of the notion that test scores are the goal of public education, and that teachers directly impact and, therefore, should be measured by them in the absence of other information or measures, is eclipsed only by the sheer volume of the complexity it obscures.”

Rachael Gabriel and Jessica Lester (see item #4)

“I worry sometimes about administrators and coaches who are so immersed in their technology and in taking notes during observations that they miss half of what is happening in the classroom. For shorter observations, it is better to sit and absorb what is happening and then write down your notes once you leave.”

Robyn Jackson in *Never Underestimate Your Teachers: Instructional Leadership for Excellence in Every Classroom* (ASCD, 2013, p. 164)

“One of the major enemies of growth is impatience. You cannot grow your staff all at once and right away. Real growth, the kind that sticks, takes time and deliberate planning.”

Robyn Jackson (*ibid.*, p. 138)

*Esse quam videri* (To be, rather than to seem)

The motto of Garrison Forest School in Maryland

---

## 1. Some Important Occupational Roles in a Technology-Dominated World

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks quotes Tyler Cowen, author of *Average Is Over* (Dutton, 2013): “If you and your skills are a complement to the computer, your wage and labor market prospects are likely to be cheery. If your skills do not complement the computer, you may want to address that mismatch.” Here is Brooks’s list of cognitive styles that will probably thrive in the years ahead:

- *Freestylers* – This style works well with technology, knowing when to be humble and let it do its job and when to overrule it – for example, following your GPS when you’re in unfamiliar territory and ignoring it closer to home.
- *Synthesizers* – This style can sort through the plethora of information online and “crystallize a generalized pattern or story,” says Brooks.
- *Humanizers* – “People evolved to relate to people,” he says. “Humanizers take the interplay between man and machine and make it feel more natural.” Think customer service and figuring out when automated check-out is *not* the right configuration.
- *Conceptual engineers* – Being able to come up with creative ways to solve unexpected problems.
- *Motivators* – “Managers who can motivate supreme effort in a machine-dominated environment are going to be valuable,” says Brooks.
- *Moralizers* – Not everything can be measured with metrics. Every workplace needs what he calls a “self-conscious moralizer” who looks for non-quantifiable qualities like loyalty.
- *Greeters* – People who are good at welcoming others (sometimes by name) in restaurants, hotels, law firms, foundations, and companies will find work, says Brooks.
- *Economizers* – There will also be work for people who advise marginal workers on how to live rich lives on a small income.
- *Weavers* – And there will be jobs for those who “combat the dangerous inegalitarian tendencies of this new world,” concludes Brooks.

“Thinking for the Future” by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, Dec. 10, 2013,  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/10/opinion/brooks-thinking-for-the-future.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/10/opinion/brooks-thinking-for-the-future.html?_r=0)

[Back to page one](#)

## 2. Rethinking Assessment in Light of What Improves Learning

In this article in *Independent School*, Mariale Hardiman (Johns Hopkins University) and Glenn Whitman (St. Andrew’s Episcopal School) describe how teachers at Whitman’s school have used research to improve the way they use assessments:

- Most curriculum units now begin with a pre-assessment to measure prior knowledge and serve as a baseline to measure student growth.

- Teachers use frequent on-the-spot assessments to check for understanding, including ungraded surprise quizzes, Socrative “clicker” questions, and entry and exit slips. Teachers have found that asking students to retrieve information from short- and long-term memory enhances retention (the “testing effect”).

- Students are often given the opportunity to correct what they got wrong on tests. “Delaying or ‘scaffolding’ feedback, and having students struggle with finding the correct answer, leads to better retention than does simply providing correct answers,” say Hardiman and Whitman.

- After an assessment, teachers ask students what cognitive demands it made – attention, memory, visual thinking, executive functioning, language, neuro-motor function, social or higher-order cognition – and what implications that has for the way they study.

- Teachers share research on how multitasking with technology degrades students’ ability to study effectively and consolidate memory.

Hardiman and Whitman also suggest using “Assessment Tic-Tac-Toe”, which allows middle- and high-school students to play to their strengths and develop new skills. During the school year, each student is asked to choose three cells from a row, column, or diagonal to be used as the summative assessment for three different units. Students are responsible for creating a grading rubric for each assessment they choose.

Podcast	3-D medium: Trifold poster or diorama	PowerPoint, Prezi, or Keynote presentation
Student-designed flipped classroom lesson	Hypertext essay	iMovie/Final Cut
Public speaking/oral presentation	Free space (what else is available that your teacher has not learned about yet?)	2-D medium: Painting, drawing, PowerPoint poster

“Assessment and the Learning Brain: What the Research Tells Us” by Mariale Hardiman and Glenn Whitman in *Independent School*, Winter 2014 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 36-41), no e-link available; Whitman can be reached at [gwhitman@saes.org](mailto:gwhitman@saes.org).

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

### 3. A Massachusetts School Confronts Its Achievement Gap

In this article in *Independent School*, Brian Johnson reports on how his 1,000-student PreK-12 independent school analyzed its racial and class achievement gap. Here are some of the data points that emerged:

- Most black and Latino students entered the school at grade 9, and many came from schools that made fewer academic demands and didn’t prepare them with the study skills needed.

- African-American students were under-represented in disciplinary referrals but over-represented in academic probation.
- White students were dismissed from the school at a higher rate than black students.
- Senior grade-point averages over a three-year period were 3.32 for Asian Americans, 3.27 for whites, 3.07 for Latinos, and 2.72 for African Americans.
- Black and Latino students outperformed white students nationally on the critical reasoning and quantitative reasoning sections of standardized tests, but lagged behind their white peers at the school.
- In the upper school, a significantly higher percentage of black and Latino students ended up in base-level math (Algebra I) and science (Physical Sciences) courses than their white and Asian-American peers.
- This resulted in fewer black and Latino students taking upper-level courses, languages, and electives, which hampered their competitiveness applying to elite universities.
- A survey showed that a significant number of Latino and black students felt that teachers didn't understand or support them as well as they might.
- And in a panel discussion, a highly respected black alumna said she never felt fully accepted or connected when she was at the school – that it was really two schools, one for white students and one for students of color.

“It was difficult to argue with these numbers,” says Johnson. The school definitely had an achievement gap. The school’s introspective process resulted in six key actions:

- *Developing a common language around success* – The school identified the qualities, dispositions, skills, and competencies needed for a student to succeed in the school. This made it possible to pinpoint what individual students needed and coordinate support. The lower and middle schools put these qualities into their report cards.

- *Improving parent/staff communication* – Advisors and teachers are expected to reach out to the parents of their black and Latino advisees and establish trusting relationships.

- *Creating a summer bridge program* – This one-week experience supports incoming ninth graders who are behind academically and introduces them to the school’s culture and expectations.

- *Creating a learning support center* – Students with minor to moderate learning differences get peer tutoring or access to outside tutoring services. The center has worked to overcome students’ embarrassment admitting that they’re having academic difficulty.

- *Changing the course placement system* – The math and science departments began offering core courses over the summer, and the science department shifted Biology to ninth grade for all students. “These changes have significantly altered course-taking patterns,” says Johnson, “thus helping all students gain access to higher-level curriculum.”

- *Refining professional development and teacher evaluation* – Changes focused on cultural competence and pedagogy and technology that support the learning of all students.

How successful were these efforts? In early 2012, the school got a report showing that the achievement gap in seniors’ grades had narrowed significantly, with African-American students making the biggest GPA gains (from 2.72 to 3.07). And a survey of students showed

signs that a new school culture was evolving, with more students feeling successful and more reporting that teachers were tuning instruction to their needs, recognizing their best efforts, and caring about their success, and that grades reflected understanding of course material.

“A Look in the Mirror” by Brian Johnson in *Independent School*, Winter 2014 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 42-47), <http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/A-Look-in-the-Mirror.aspx>

[Back to page one](#)

#### **4. A Hero-Villain Narrative in the Los Angeles Value-Added Debate**

In this thoughtful *Teachers College Record* article, Rachael Gabriel (University of Connecticut) and Jessica Nina Lester (Indiana University) report on their close reading of 52 articles that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and other publications around the time that newspaper published the value-added measurement (VAM) rankings of more than 6,000 Los Angeles elementary teachers in 2010. The policy narrative created by the *LA Times* and supporters of value-added, say Gabriel and Lester, “has important similarities with the traditional quest romance or wish-fulfillment dream story so often found in English literature. This particular narrative has a hero (the *Los Angeles Times*), victims (the public), several villains (districts, unions, and VAM-detractors), and tools (public VAM ratings) for the defeat of the villains. It also embodies a certain mythical quality, as the public is asked to suspend their disbelief while characters toil toward the holy grail of school reform... the measurement and identification of effectiveness in teaching.” These echoes of traditional fairy tales “give this particular version of VAM a sense of familiarity, veracity, and, therefore, power over the public imagination.”

Measuring teachers’ impact on student learning has challenged researchers (and intrigued the public) for over a hundred years. But how can we separate a teacher’s contribution from other variables – family background, neighborhood factors, previous teachers, peer influence, working conditions within each school, and students’ entering skills and knowledge? Value-added measurement to the rescue! VAM claims it can isolate the impact of the individual teacher by estimating how students *would have done* on standardized tests, taking everything else into account, and then comparing that trajectory to students’ actual results with Teacher A. “If a student scores higher than projected, a positive ‘value-add’ or ‘teacher effect’ is attributed to their teacher that year,” explain Gabriel and Lester. “If a student scores lower than projected, the teacher has not ‘added value’ to the student’s achievement trajectory and, therefore, has a negative value-added score.” Based on this claim, value-added measurement has been adopted by a number of states, especially those vying for Race to the Top funds, as an important factor in decisions on the hiring, promotion, tenure, and dismissal of teachers. In addition, states have been encouraged to trace the data back and form judgments about teacher-preparation programs.

But as VAM has been adopted by many of the nation’s schools, there has been a steady drumbeat of criticism, mostly in scholarly journals and debates in academic circles. These are the major concerns:

- The large number of classroom-level variables that cannot be disentangled from a teacher's score;
- Other adults within a school (co-teachers, specialists, aides, parent volunteers, substitute teachers, out-of-school tutors, etc.) providing reading or math instruction in addition to the classroom teacher;
- The variability of scores assigned to individual teachers from year to year;
- Large error rates in identification;
- The effect of students' class assignments (which are not random) on a teacher's score;
- Differences in teacher ratings depending on which tests are used;
- Variability depending on which VAM formula is used;
- Variability in the standardized tests used in different states, districts, and schools;
- The lack of standardized test data for teachers in non-tested grades (60 percent or more of teachers in most districts).

What has led policymakers and the public to ignore such significant, deal-breaking concerns? Gabriel and Lester believe it's because they are being seduced by the simplistic, heroic narrative put forward by the *Los Angeles Times* and other VAM proponents. Here is how the argument plays out:

- *The Times as heroic* – “As the hero,” say Gabriel and Lester, “the *Los Angeles Times*’ mission was to reveal true, objective, statistical effectiveness, thereby ridding the public of a silent evil currently operating within its schools – the (presumably) ineffective teachers... It was also positioned as giving the public the power (based on statistics) to ‘see through’ the characteristics of teachers and schools they once trusted. In so doing, the *Los Angeles Times* positioned itself as the hero who has the ‘courage’ to wield VAM on a mission to deliver the public from ineffectiveness in teaching.” The issues are presented in binary terms and people are asked to choose sides – getting rid of bad teachers or letting them continue to hurt children; holding recalcitrant districts accountable or allowing the status quo to fester; being pro-student or pro-teacher, pro-reform or anti-reform.

- *“The best we have” as a moralizing defense* – During the public debate around the release of teachers’ scores, the *LA Times* acknowledged that value-added analysis is imperfect – but continued to make bold claims about individual teachers’ effectiveness by arguing that VAM is better than other measures of teaching quality, and that despite the problems, there are no other options. And it claimed the moral high ground by pointing to the (unarguable) difference that good teaching makes to students’ lives. “According to the *Los Angeles Times*, then, any alternative to VAM would be the terrible status quo, and no one who cares about children wants that,” say Gabriel and Lester. “Even though VAM was described as being an ‘incomplete’ measure of teacher effectiveness, the readers were still left with only one option: VAM... Opposition to VAM is equated with embracing ignorance about teacher effectiveness and standing in the way of reform... Further, with the future of children linked to teacher effectiveness, and teacher effectiveness linked to VAM, the discourse surrounding teacher quality was narrowed, as the public was left with few possibilities of what counts as quality.”

“The utter simplicity of the notion that test scores are the goal of public education, and that teachers directly impact and, therefore, should be measured by them in the absence of other information or measures, is eclipsed only by the sheer volume of the complexity it obscures,” conclude Gabriel and Lester. “By describing VAM as the ‘best we have,’ minimizing any exploration of alternatives, and casting opposition to VAM as automatically anti-reform, the newspaper articles succeeded in making the use of VAM in high-stakes decisions nationwide all but inevitable... Until the goals of public education reflect something other than scores, teaching is not likely to be defined by anything else. The tools used to measure teaching and learning are likely to remain limited to the simple attribution of value as calculated by test scores.”

“The Romance Quest of Education Reform: A Discourse Analysis of the *Los Angeles Times*’ Reports on Value-Added Measurement of Teacher Effectiveness” by Rachael Gabriel and Jessica Nina Lester in *Teachers College Record*, December 2013 (Vol. 115, #12, p. 1-32), <http://www.tcrecord.org/library/abstract.asp?contentid=17252>; the authors can be reached at [rachael.gabriel@uconn.edu](mailto:rachael.gabriel@uconn.edu) and [jnlester@indiana.edu](mailto:jnlester@indiana.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## **5. More Concerns About Value-Added Evaluation of Teachers**

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Stuart Yeh (University of Minnesota) identifies serious flaws in the 2011 study by Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff – a study that has been used to justify value-added evaluation of teachers. Chetty et al. argued that using value-added modeling (VAM) to fire the bottom 5 percent of teachers and replace them with average teachers is a cost-effective way to boost students’ achievement and lifetime earnings.

Yeh concedes that value-added analysis does a somewhat better job of evaluating teachers than traditional classroom observations. But he argues that using value-added data to fire teachers, and making claims about boosting student achievement and lifetime earnings, require a higher standard of proof than comparing it to the failed teacher-evaluation methods of the past. He cites numerous studies questioning the reliability and validity of value-added modeling and says that using VAM data to identify the high-performing and low-performing teachers is no more reliable than flipping a coin.

Because of that, says Yeh, the use of value-added to terminate teachers “is likely to result in an avalanche of lawsuits by terminated teachers. The evidence overwhelmingly favors litigants who assert that results based on VAM do not meet the legal standard of adequate cause for termination, suggesting that terminated teachers would be likely to win almost every case, since it would be nearly impossible for school districts to show ‘adequate cause’ for termination based on VAM. Districts would have to fall back on existing methods for identifying poor teachers, which currently result in the involuntary termination of a very small percentage of all teachers.”

So the Chetty et al. argument for cost effectiveness falls apart, says Yeh. Taking everything into account – generating value-added data, identifying and firing poor-performing teachers, dealing with grievances and lawsuits, and replacing the teachers who are fired with

newly minted teachers – the cost would be astronomical (on average, a full teacher-dismissal process in New York state costs \$216,588 and takes 502 days) and the gains in student achievement would be minuscule – 0.00843 standard deviations per year across all students.

The challenge, Yeh concludes, is finding the most efficient approach for improving student learning: “A number of cost-effectiveness analyses have now been performed that permit comparison of 22 of the leading approaches for raising student achievement. The results... suggest that the most efficient approach – rapid performance feedback – is approximately 5,700 times as efficient as the use of VAM...”

This approach, using the Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math programs, changes classroom dynamics and students’ attitudes about their own ability to learn through immediate feedback. By contrast, says Yeh, the value-added strategy “relies on the conventional model of instruction, which fails to individualize task difficulty and therefore fails to change the tedious experience of schooling for students who are above-average and the discouraging experience of schooling for students who are below-average. Failing to address these dynamics, VAM-based policies place the entire burden of raising student achievement on teachers who are locked into systems that inadvertently undermine student engagement and achievement.”

“A Reanalysis of the Effects of Teacher Replacement Using Value-Added Modeling” by Stuart Yeh in *Teachers College Record*, December 2013 (Vol. 115, #12, p. 1-35),  
<http://www.tcrecord.org/library/abstract.asp?contentid=16934>

[Back to page one](#)

## 6. Effective Use of Open-Ended Questions in Elementary Classrooms

In this helpful article in *The Reading Teacher*, Barbara Wasik and Annemarie Hindman (Temple University) say teachers sometimes ask questions that students can answer with a single word – for example, “Did you like the book?” elicits a simple “Yes.” Better for teachers to ask open-ended questions that invite elaborated responses. But there are two reasons teachers might hesitate to do this: the pressure to move on with the curriculum, and the uncomfortable silences when some students struggle with more-complex questions. Wasik and Hindman urge teachers to get past these two concerns, arguing that the nature of the prompts and teachers’ responses to students’ responses make a major difference in student learning. They suggest that teachers prepare a series of open-ended questions for each lesson, and then take cues from students’ responses to generate more questions. Here are their suggestions:

• *Focus prompts.* A general question like “What did you do over the weekend?” isn’t the best use of classroom time, say Wasik and Hindman. Teachers should ask questions about the particular words and ideas that are at the core of the lesson – and make sure students use those words and ideas in their responses (students need to use new words multiple times before they’re learned). For example, during a primary-grade unit on spring, the teacher might ask:

- What signs of spring did you see on your way to school?
- What comes out in the spring?
- Describe the animals you saw coming to school.
- How do we know that spring is on the way?

- Describe the parts of a flower.
- What signs of spring do you see on the cover of this book?
- How might the caterpillar on the cover change throughout the story?
- What plants are we eating for lunch?
- What parts of our lunch would a rabbit like to munch on? A caterpillar?

Some target words might be *breeze, flower, grass, leaf, petal, plant, rabbit, squirrel, stem*.

- *Give children time to respond.* There are several reasons teachers sometimes cut off students' responses to open-ended questions, among them: not wanting one child to monopolize the response; impatience with repetitive answers from several children; and loss of momentum and student focus waiting for a response from a hesitant child. "All these practices, although motivated by the important desire to keep the classroom running smoothly, have the potential to limit the value of open-ended prompts, which depends in large part on how children respond," say Wasik and Hindman. "Teachers should not simply ask open-ended prompts and move on; instead, they should foster as much child talk as possible in response to these prompts." The quantity of student talk about key words and ideas is what matters, even if there's repetition and a few awkward silences.

- *Provide meaningful feedback.* Immediate praise – "Great idea!" or "That's right!" – may not be the best strategy. To extend and deepen classroom conversations, more-complex feedback helps students get used to extended, higher-level conversations about substance. For example, after asking, "Why do we see more insects in the spring than in the winter?" the teacher might accept several responses and then follow up on the theme by asking, "Describe some of the things that insects need to survive" and "How could insects hide from predators?" and "Tell me about some things that insects like to eat."

- *Encourage complete sentences.* "If children use only a few words to respond to a question, they are not able to practice using language as fully as they should," say Wasik and Hindman. Teachers should model complete, elaborated sentences and prompt students to respond in like manner.

"Realizing the Promise of Open-Ended Questions" by Barbara Wasik and Annemarie Hindman in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2013/January 2014 (Vol. 67, #4, p. 302-311), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1218/abstract>; the authors can be reached at [bwasik@temple.edu](mailto:bwasik@temple.edu) and [ahindman@temple.edu](mailto:ahindman@temple.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## **7. Getting Students to Read Poems with Fluency and Expression**

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Sheila Seitz suggests the following lesson sequence to get grade 3-5 students reading poems well:

- *Lesson 1* – The class watches a YouTube video of a reading of "Casey at the Bat", a poem by Edward Thayer [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7\\_tNazVJGU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7_tNazVJGU&feature=related), and discusses the way the poem was read. In small groups, students then share their thoughts about the poem, responding to these questions: What words stood out to you? Are there any phrases you can remember? Did the narrator pause at any point? Do you think the reader has read the

poem only a few times? Why or why not? The teacher then has students watch the video [www.favoritepoem.org/FlashVideo/Isamuel.html](http://www.favoritepoem.org/FlashVideo/Isamuel.html) of a boy reading the poem, this time asking students to focus on four aspects of oral expression: rate (the speed at which the poem was read), repetition (why did the poet use some words more than once?), onomatopoeia (words that sound like their meaning), and voice (for example, the umpire calling the strikes). The teacher hands out a printed copy of the poem [www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174665](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174665) and has students highlight punctuation, key words, pauses, etc. Students are told they will be choosing a poem in the next lesson and will be asked to read it with expression.

- *Lesson 2* – Students explore the website [www.poetry4kids.com/poems](http://www.poetry4kids.com/poems), choose a poem based on its appeal and readability, and print a copy. Students then read their poem several times, mark it up (referring to their annotations in “Casey at the Bat”), and check that they understand the meaning and message and what emotions will be appropriate when reading it aloud. Students practice reading aloud, and the teacher circulates, giving feedback and checking for understanding. Students then rehearse their poem with a partner and get feedback.

- *Lessons 3 and 4* – Students continue to practice reading their poem to themselves, to a partner, and to the teacher, getting suggestions on expression.

- *Lesson 5* – Students perform their poem in small groups or for the whole class. Other students rate each presentation using a three-level scale (*Whoa, Working, Wow*) with the following criteria:

- I recognize the text as poetry.
- The reader understands the poem and is able to read it with emotion.
- The reader is able to make the meaning of the poem clear.
- The reader is fluent and expressive.

Students might also make a video of their performances and watch and critique themselves.

Older students might use the poem “The Raven” to kick off a similar lesson sequence: [www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15638](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15638). Younger students might use the Shel Silverstein poem, “Ickle Me Pickle Me Tickle Me Too” available at [www.openculture.com/2012/05/shel\\_silverstein\\_reads\\_poem\\_ickle\\_me\\_pickle\\_me\\_tickle\\_me\\_too.html](http://www.openculture.com/2012/05/shel_silverstein_reads_poem_ickle_me_pickle_me_tickle_me_too.html)

“Toolbox: Poetic Fluency” by Sheila Seitz in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2013/January 2014 (Vol. 67, #4, p. 312-314), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1216/abstract>

[Back to page one](#)

## 8. Setting Classroom Tone from the Get-Go

In this article in *Edutopia*, Richard Curwin says students pick up their teacher’s mood and the intellectual and emotional climate of a classroom within seconds of walking in. Here are his ideas for starting lessons with energy and excitement and whetting students’ desire to learn:

- *Get your mind right*. It helps a lot if you love what you’re teaching – or have found a way to teach something you don’t love in a novel and compelling manner. Students pick up on a teacher’s energy.

• *Use teasers.* For example, “Tomorrow we will learn an amazing thing that happens when you touch the belly of certain African frogs. See you tomorrow.” or “Today we are going to see how functions are used in making computer games.” or “Today we’re going to see why some people think Shakespeare is sexier than Madonna. Let’s start reading.”

• *Start with a compelling question.* These should be related to the content of a lesson, amplify students’ natural sense of wonder, and challenge their belief about the way things are. Some examples:

- First-grade particles unit: *What is the smallest thing you’ve ever held in your hand?*
- Upper-elementary history unit on the Pilgrims: *Is there anything your parents could ever do to you that would make you run away from home?*
- Middle-school math: *What does Martin Luther King Jr. have in common with Algebra?* (They’re both concerned with equality.)
- Middle-school English: *Why don’t “good” and “food” rhyme?*
- High-school history: *If Napoleon spread nationalism, how did nationalism doom him?*
- High-school English: *If Hamlet were a television sitcom, what would be a better title?*

“Your Lesson’s First Five Minutes: Make Them Grand” by Richard Curwin in *Edutopia*, Apr. 15, 2013, <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/first-five-minutes-richard-curwin>

[Back to page one](#)

## 9. A Connecticut Physics Class Does the Improbable

In this article in *Independent School*, high-school physics teacher Raymond Cirimo describes how he challenged his AP Physics B class to apply everything they learned to launching a video camera as high above the earth’s surface as possible and recording the journey there and back. “I announced to the students that the year’s curriculum would be taught as it has always been,” he says. “However, at the conclusion of each unit, they would need to present to the class how the material they had just learned applied to this project. Finally, I told the class that, in order to accomplish the assigned task, they had to actually build and launch the device they designed together.” Students struggled, cooperated, and... Here’s their report: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffD1gluOr\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffD1gluOr_s).

“Getting Our Students to Own Their Educational Experience” by Raymond Cirimo in *Independent School*, Winter 2014 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 12, 14), <http://bit.ly/1h9Ocpj>

[Back to page one](#)

© Copyright 2013 Marshall Memo LLC

***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.marshall48@gmail.com](mailto:kim.marshall48@gmail.com)*

# 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 43 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.
- How to change access e-mail or log-in

## ***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 Update/Curriculum Update  
Education Week  
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Educational Horizons  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Elementary School Journal  
Essential Teacher  
Go Teach  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Educational Review  
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)  
Journal of Staff Development  
Kappa Delta Pi Record  
Knowledge Quest  
Middle School Journal  
NASSP Journal  
NJEA Review  
Perspectives  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
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 Language Educator  
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools  
The New York Times  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
Theory Into Practice  
Time  
Wharton Leadership Digest