

Marshall Memo 83

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
April 18, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

"When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, 'Tom, finish your dinner – people in China are starving.' But after sailing to the edges of the flat world for a year, I am now telling my own daughters, 'Girls, finish your homework – people in China and India are starving for your jobs.'"

Thomas Friedman (see item #1)

"My job is to make sure the kids know that I care, that I appreciate their sharing the truth about their lives, and that I value their opinions. When we have that personal trust, it's not so horrifying for them to write and turn that writing in to me."

Katie Carson, Virginia high-school teacher (see item #3.)

"You prepare us without teaching to the test."

One of Katie Carson's students (*ibid.*)

"It's the best job in the world. Of course, it frustrates me to no end. I scream and rant and rave. I get exhausted. But what an incredible ride, to be able to hang out with these kids, to be able to watch the transformation."

Lori Mack, Virginia high-school teacher (*ibid.*)

"Students will not learn to think for themselves in schools that expect them merely to stay in line and keep quiet. They won't be prepared to create the culture of their time if they do not create culture in their schools."

Nick Rabkin and Robin Redmond (see item #4)

"[I]t is time to stop debating the 'best' method for providing early reading intervention. Time is better devoted to determining how to overcome the great challenges that exist in getting effective interventions placed into schools."

Patricia Mathes et al. (see item #5)

1. What's at Stake for American Students in a "Flat" World

Thomas Friedman, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* reporter and columnist, has just published a new book on globalization, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005). The surging economies of China and India and the inadequacy of American education are recurring themes in the book. Here is a brief excerpt:

"We need to get going immediately. It takes 15 years to train a good engineer, because, ladies and gentlemen, this really is rocket science. So parents, throw away the Game Boy, turn off the television and get your kids to work. There is no sugar-coating this: in a flat world, every individual is going to have to run a little faster if he or she wants to advance his or her standard of living. When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, 'Tom, finish your dinner – people in China are starving.' But after sailing to the edges of the flat world for a year, I am now telling my own daughters, 'Girls, finish your homework – people in China and India are starving for your jobs.'"

"It's a Flat World, After All" by Thomas Friedman, *New York Times Magazine*, April 3, 2005 (p. 33-37), no e-link available

2. School "Connectedness" – A Key to Student Achievement

What does it mean for students to feel *connected* to school? It's when students believe the adults in the school care about their learning and care about them as individuals. What difference does this make? According to recent research, adolescents who feel connected to their school have higher academic achievement and are less likely to engage in risk-taking and health-compromising activities such as truancy, fighting, bullying, vandalism, smoking, substance abuse, violent behavior, experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempting suicide, engaging in early sexual activity, and becoming pregnant.

It is therefore very disturbing to learn that 40 to 60 percent of American youth – urban, suburban, and rural – feel chronically *disengaged* from school. These students

experience one or more of the following: social isolation (including being ignored by social cliques, bullied, or teased), poor classroom management, and a lack of safety in a chaotic school.

What can a school do to build a feeling of connectedness among its students? Johns Hopkins School of Public Health professor Robert Blum summarizes the Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness (see link below) what's needed within a school:

- High academic standards and rigor coupled with strong teacher support for learning; this includes fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.
- An environment in which adult and student relationships are positive and respectful; making sure that every student is assigned to at least one supportive staff member for advice and guidance.
- Building a physically and emotionally safe school environment; applying fair and consistent discipline policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.
- Gathering data on academic performance, incidents of fighting, bullying, and vandalism, absenteeism, and school completion and being accountable for improvement.

In addition, Blum quotes approvingly from a 2004 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine study on factors associated with school engagement:

- Avoid separating students into vocational and college tracks.
- Set high academic standards for all students and provide students with the same core curriculum.
- Limit the size of the school to create small learning environments.
- Form multidisciplinary teams in which groups of teachers work with students.
- Ensure that every student has an advisor.
- Provide mentorship programs.
- Ensure that course content is relevant to the lives of students.
- Provide service learning and community service projects.
- Provide experiential, hands-on learning opportunities.
- Use a wide variety of instructional methods and technologies.
- Extend the class period, school day, and/or school year.
- Provide opportunities for students who are falling behind to catch up.

“A Case for School Connectedness” by Robert Blum in *Educational Leadership*, April

2005 (Vol. 62, #7, p. 16-20),

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template/MAXIMIZE/menuitem.c00a836e7622024fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_journalmoid=3079b465e4013010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_articlemoid=e8a9b465e4013010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

The 2004 Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness is available at <http://www.allaboutkids.umn.edu/WingfortheWeb/schooldeclaration.pdf>

3. Teachers Who Connect with their Students

This article starts with two challenges of teaching adolescents: (a) state standards and high-stakes tests are challenging and time-consuming and some teachers take that as a reason not to have good classroom discussions, run meaningful activities, and allow students to pursue their interests and produce interesting products; and (b) there are too many students for teachers to get to know them as individuals. The article then profiles several Virginia teachers who, the authors say, are overcoming these challenges and running “transformational” classrooms:

- Katie Carson, a fifth-year English teacher, “embeds the required content standards in her instruction, but the students feel that she’s teaching them, not just ‘covering material.’” Reminded by Carson that the class is scheduled to take a Virginia state test in three weeks, a student says, “Yeah, but you don’t bring it up all the time. You prepare us without teaching to the test.” In a variety of ways (having students work in groups, allowing them to share stories, providing snappy questions to be answered when she takes attendance), Carson makes her classroom a fun, interactive place and builds trust among her students; she believes all this has a direct payoff in their willingness to do the work. “My job is to make sure the kids know that I care,” she says, “that I appreciate their sharing the truth about their lives, and that I value their opinions. When we have that personal trust, it’s not so horrifying for them to write and turn that writing in to me.”

- George Murphy, a veteran science teacher, greets students by saying, “Welcome to your favorite class of the day!” An observer notes, “There’s a sense of urgency and excitement about the class. Important work is waiting, and there’s no time to waste.” Murphy does not use a textbook, instead guiding students to find authentic and reputable information sources in print and on the Internet and embedding key understandings in individual student projects on real-life topics. “I think everything in biology should be relevant to what students experience in their own lives,” he says. “It’s the study of life, so a student should be able to connect biology to everything we do.” Here is Murphy’s philosophy: “It’s not the standards

that will make school relevant and vital for students. I want to get them interested in what they're doing. I'm not up front to dance for them. I want to present the students with a challenge, see them rise to the challenge, see them *want* to learn. I want to dare them to have a good time with science."

• Lori Mack, a science teacher in her 18th year, says, "It's the best job in the world. Of course, it frustrates me to no end. I scream and rant and rave. I get exhausted. But what an incredible ride, to be able to hang out with these kids, to be able to watch the transformation."

"Reach Them to Teach Them" by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Kristina Doubet in *Educational Leadership*, April 2005 (Vol. 62, #7, p. 8-15), http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.c00a836e7622024fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_journalmoid=3079b465e4013010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_818d37ec925d82800173fc1062108a0c_articlemoid=d899b465e4013010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

4. Integrating the Arts into the Core Curriculum

In this *Education Week* commentary piece, Nick Rabkin and Robin Redmond, two Chicago-area arts education advocates, make the case for integrated arts programs. They report that the research on teaching a stand-alone arts curriculum shows weak or non-existent effects, but *integrated* arts programs have a very positive impact on student achievement. "A study of 23 arts-integrated programs in Chicago showed test scores rising as much as two times faster than in comparable schools," they write. "A study of a Minneapolis arts-integration program showed that it had positive effects on all students, but was most powerful for disadvantaged learners. Gains in these integrated programs go well beyond the basics and test scores."

Rabkin and Redmond believe that integrating the arts into core subjects has a number of positive effects on a school, creating conditions that cognitive scientists say are ideal for learning:

- The core curriculum becomes more hands-on and project-based.
- Students get more authentic and challenging work.
- Learning in all subjects becomes more visible.
- Assessment becomes more thoughtful as students' work becomes more vivid.
- The arts develop essential cognitive tools: "careful observation of the world, mental representation of what is observed or imagined; abstraction from complexity; pattern recognition and development; qualitative judgment; symbolic, metaphoric, and allegorical representation. These same thinking tools are used in science, philosophy, math, and history."

- In arts-integrated classrooms, students tend to work in groups and learn from each other.
- Students are more likely to invest emotionally in what they are learning; their thinking capacities grow and they work more diligently.
- An integrated curriculum provides powerful professional development experiences and “energizes and challenges teachers.”
- Teachers’ opinions and expectations of their students rise.
- Classroom changes in arts-integrated programs affect the rest of the school: “Schedules shift to accommodate planning and sustained attention to important questions. Parents become more involved. Teachers collaborate and take on new leadership roles. Art and music teachers often become the fulcrum of multi-class projects.”

“Arts integration is not simple or easy work,” warn Rabkin and Redmond. “The pioneering educators and artists who do it swim against a tide of education policy, and work with meager resources.” They offer several suggestions for creating such programs:

- Draw on artistic resources in the community and build sustained partnerships among schools, arts organizations, teachers, artists, researchers, and evaluators.
- View student achievement and school improvement as pivotal to the mission; it’s not just about advancing arts education.
- “Engage teachers and artists from all disciplines in serious inquiry about how the arts are related to learning in other subject and how to make educationally powerful links.”
- “Use the arts as media for learning – the communication of content – and as methods for learning – through artistic practices like careful observation, inquiry creation, practice, performance, representation, exhibition, and reflection.”
 - Adjust to each school’s particular strengths and weaknesses.
 - Persuade the school district to commit resources and raise funds outside.

Summing up, Rabkin and Redmond call for support at the federal, state, and local level, for creating integrated arts programs that will “help close the achievement gap and make schools happier places... Students will not learn to think for themselves in schools that expect them merely to stay in line and keep quiet. They won’t be

prepared to create the culture of their time if they do not create culture in their schools.”

“Arts Education: Not all Is Created Equal” by Nick Rabkin and Robin Redmond in *Education Week*, April 13, 2005 (Vol. 24, #31, p. 46-47)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/04/13/31rabkin.h24.html>

5. Reading Proficiency for All First Graders

In this important study of effective ways to boost the reading achievement of struggling first graders, a team of researchers presents the following conclusions:

- If early reading problems are not overcome, they may “be compounded as students fall further and further behind their peers and habituate ineffective strategies for coping with reading failure... In other words, students may ‘learn to be learning disabled.’”

- The best strategy is a one-two punch – effective instruction in the regular classroom *and* an intensive supplemental program (such as Reading Recovery, Proactive Reading, or Responsive Reading) for struggling students. Improved classroom instruction or a good supplementary intervention by itself is not enough: struggling students need both.

- There is a solid research consensus on the skills primary-grade students must acquire to become competent readers: phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding skills, fluency in word recognition and text processing, construction of meaning, vocabulary, spelling, and writing.

- There is also a consensus that instruction in these areas needs to be *explicit* (i.e., students are not left to infer new knowledge) and, for struggling students, *intensive* (i.e., students are taught in small groups and are highly engaged).

- There is no “one best approach” to supplemental intervention. This study compared two approaches from opposite theoretical perspectives (Proactive Reading from the direct instruction tradition and Responsive Reading from the whole language tradition). Both programs worked equally well with different types of struggling students. Both interventions taught the key skills listed above and had students apply them to reading and writing connected text.

- This led the researchers to conclude that schools and teachers should be given some latitude in choosing an approach to helping struggling readers, as long as it contains the key ingredients: “We hypothesize that if schools are allowed to choose from among effective choices an approach that best aligns with personal philosophy

and theory, then there is likely to be less resistance, higher quality implementation, as well as sustainability over the long term.”

The authors conclude: “We propose that these findings lend support to the argument that it is time to stop debating the ‘best’ method for providing early reading intervention. Time is better devoted to determining how to overcome the great challenges that exist in getting effective interventions placed into schools.”

“The Effects of Theoretically Different Instruction and Student Characteristics on the Skills of Struggling Readers” by Patricia Mathes, Carolyn Denton, Jack Fletcher, Jason Anthony, David Francis, and Christopher Schatschneider in *Reading Research Quarterly*, April/May/June 2005 (Vol. 40, #2, p. 148-182), no e-link available

6. Suggestions for Parent Conferences

Several National Distinguished Principals were asked to give pointers on how teachers should handle parent conferences. They noted that there is a tendency for teachers (especially rookies) to be apprehensive and defensive as they gear up to meet parents and overcompensate by preparing a speech filled with educational jargon. Here’s what these principals suggest:

- *Take care of the little things.* It’s nice to provide refreshments and chairs outside the classroom for parents who arrive early and post a schedule and samples of children’s work for parents to peruse before and after their conference.

- *Be positive and personal.* “Stand and greet the parent with good eye contact, a smile, and a warm handshake,” suggests a Kansas principal. Thank parents for what they do for their children. “Begin and end with something positive about a child,” says a principal from Maryland. “Often families are worried and nervous about seeing the teacher as well. Talk about their children in a personal way.”

- *Don’t be defensive when parents ask about the classroom.* This makes it seem that the teacher is insecure or has something to hide. Take note of parents’ suggestions and follow up on them.

- *Show that you care.* Don’t talk only about academics: “[P]arents want to hear that teachers like their child, in spite of any academic or behavior problems,” says a California principal.

- *Don’t let a conference become confrontational.* If the tone gets negative, the teacher needs to stop the conference in a professional manner and continue it later with the principal present.

- *Be a good listener and watch the time.* Have a agenda or script for the conference so it doesn't run overtime, but also use active listening and give parents enough time to ask questions.

- *Don't blindside parents.* "Conference comments and report card grades should never be a surprise for a parent or a child who is struggling," says a Connecticut principal. Parents should have received a heads-up on any problems in the course of the marking period.

- *Use examples of the child's work.* This is the best way to show parents the progress that's being made – or the work that needs to be done to meet standards.

- *Don't forget the 'A' students.* These children deserve a full conference, not just a pat on the back for being great students.

- *Give and take suggestions.* Teachers shouldn't hesitate to suggest ways for parents to support their children's education at home, and should also be open to parents' suggestions on what will work in school (and also other information, such as a recent divorce, health issues, or attention problems).

- *Don't use jargon or program abbreviations.* Use simple and direct language in conferences so parents don't need to bring a translator.

- *Have a specialist on hand if needed.* If a conference promises to be difficult, it is a good idea to have a counselor, psychologist, or social worker sit in.

- *Don't dwell on the negative, and suggest specific solutions to problems you bring up.*

"Getting Teachers Set for Parent Conferences" by June Million in ASCD *Communicator*, February 2005 (#28, p. 5-6, spotted in *Education Digest*, April 2005, Vol. 80, #8, p. 54-56), no e-links available

7. Arguing with the Arguments Against Gifted Education

In this article, Frances Spielhagen and Bruce Cooper, two advocates for gifted education, make a pitch for "appropriately differentiated academic experiences for high-achieving students to learn at their own pace, with peers of similar capability and interests, and to grow both intellectually and emotionally." The authors acknowledge that schools are under intense pressure to get all students over the proficiency bar, but they refute what they call "seven stupid arguments" made against programs targeting gifted students.

- *All children are gifted.* Yes, Spielhagen and Cooper say, but the "innate dignity of all human beings and the essential right of all children to grow intellectually..."

must not obscure the reality that some people simply learn faster and at higher levels than others.”

- *It's not fair to offer special services to gifted students.* Tight school budgets may mean that it's a zero-sum game in which other children will lose out if funds are allocated to high-achieving students. Nonetheless, Spielhagen and Cooper think it's unfair that gifted students “are expected to drift along with the tide, garnering whatever they can from the educational experiences offered.”

- *Gifted students learn on their own.* True, many of these students can work independently, but “What are they learning?” ask Spielhagen and Cooper. “Are they moving forward, working alone and in isolation? Are they learning at all?”

- *Gifted programs are elitist.* This egalitarian argument says that high-achieving students need the experience of interacting with students of different levels of proficiency. Spielhagen and Cooper agree, but say this is compatible with developing their special talents part of the time.

- *Gifted programs are racist.* The authors acknowledge that in the past, many programs for the gifted have catered disproportionately to white middle-class children. But they argue that new identification policies for gifted programs are more comprehensive and inclusive and promise to include previously underserved populations, if properly funded.

- *Gifted children are weird; no one knows what to do with them anyway.* “The ‘nerd’ or ‘geek’ stereotypes of gifted children prevalent in the media and popular culture are part of a growing anti-intellectualism in American society,” say Spielhagen and Cooper. “This attitude creeps into educational discourse because most teachers have not been trained for the education of the gifted... Already overburdened with the demands of those who must be brought up to standard, teachers recoil from addressing the equally real needs of their gifted students. In this case, however, unfamiliarity breeds contempt, or at least fear and uncertainty about how to proceed.” Teacher training is the key here, the authors argue.

- *Why bother? Gifted students pass the state tests anyway.* Spielhagen and Cooper argue that “proficiency” is a minimum goal and high-achieving students should be pushed to reach higher: “Confronted with dismal showings by U.S. students in global comparisons... we should realize that neglecting the capabilities of our brightest students is a form of economic and political suicide.”

John F. Kennedy is quoted twice in this article: “All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talents.” and “A

rising tide lifts all boats.” Spielhagen and Cooper use the first quote to make the case for a differentiated curriculum for gifted students, the second to argue that providing for the needs of gifted students can further the education of all students: “It can result in vibrant curriculum initiatives that energize the entire school community,” they say.

“The Unkindest Cut: Seven Stupid Arguments Against Programs for the Gifted” by Frances Spielhagen and Bruce Cooper in *Education Week*, April 13, 2005 (Vol. 24, #31, p. 47-48)

8. Short Items:

a. Helping students reflect on a mistake – The River School in Napa, California walks students through the following steps after a discipline infraction. The school believes that this process trains students to make better choices and accept responsibility for their mistakes:

- Acknowledge your mistake instead of blaming, lying, or making excuses.
- “Clean it up” with those involved.
- Accept the consequences for the mistake.
- Learn from your behavior so that you are less likely to make the mistake again.
- Forgive yourself for the mistake and move on.

“Safe Schools for the Roller Coaster Years” by Linda Inlay in *Educational Leadership*, April 2005 (Vol. 62, #7, p. 41-43), no e-link available. Inlay is Director of the River School; her e-mail is linlay@nvusd.k12.ca.us

b. Resources for WebQuests and Weblogs – A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information comes from resources on the Internet. WebQuests typically include introductory information on a particular topic, a specific task to complete, a set of online information sources to explore, guidance on how to complete the quest, and a conclusion to provide closure. For example, Los Angeles 8th-grade language arts teacher Michelle Levin created a WebQuest posing the question, “As a slave, would you have attempted to escape?” This quest is available at http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Emerson_MS/levin_wq. Check out the following website for guidelines for designing a WebQuest. It has examples of appropriate quests for all content areas and grade levels: <http://www.WebQuest.org>. Another similar site is <http://www.Edgate.com>: this site has lesson plans and information aligned with state standards. Edgate also sponsors Schoolnotes, a free tool that

teachers can use to make information available online for students and parents:

<http://www.Schoolnotes.com>.

Blogs can be a way for students to publish writing and other products for a wider audience. The University of Houston's Blogs in Education Web page has article about educational uses of blogs, samples, and related resources:

<http://awd.cl.uh.edu/blog>

"Teaching the DIG Generation" by Lisa Renard in *Educational Leadership*, April 2005 (Vol. 62, #7, p. 44-47), no e-link available. (DIG, by the way, is an acronym for Digital Immediate Gratification.)

c. Rube Goldberg machine contest – The Milwaukee Colleges of Engineering Partnership is running a national contest for high-school students to create Rube Goldberg-type machines. This year's task is: "Remove both old batteries from a two-battery flashlight, install new batteries, and turn the flashlight on in 20 or more steps." For rules and a video of a competition, go to <http://www.uwm.edu/CEAS/rube/> . The Zoom website has suggestions for machines sent in by students ages 5-11:

<http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/sci/rubegoldberginventio.html>

Spotted in *Education Digest*, April 2005 (Vol. 70, #8, p. 80), no e-link available

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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 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.

Website:

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- 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.