Marshall Memo 315

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 21, 2009

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Quotes of the Week

"I'm just glad I'm not stupid after all."

> Amy, a fourth grader, upon learning that her low grades were due to vision problems (see item #6)

"[F]actors related to a student's vision are significantly better predictors of academic success than is race or socioeconomic status."

> Pete Hall and Leanne Liddicoat, quoting Maples (2003) (*ibid*.)

"If adolescents naturally play by searching for novel and exciting experiences that make them feel alive and that bring them closer to their peers, doesn't it make sense to try to channel this developmental need into positive activities at school?"

> Laura Warner (see item #7)

"Teachers ought to place their focus on continuous learning, which involves practice, observation, reflection, scholarship, and then more practice. Instead, they focus on employing the tricks of the trade to fool administrators, who they believe are intent on catching them in the act of ineffective instructional practices."

> Paul Sutton in "Thinking Anew About Teacher Tenure" in *Education Week*, Dec. 16, 2009 (Vol. 29, #15, p. 20-21) http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/12/16/index.html

"Many teaching problems begin when teachers don't anticipate student confusions, can't figure out how to scaffold needed prior knowledge, and don't carefully think out experiences that would allow students to access new knowledge."

> Jon Saphier and Lucy West (see item #2)

1. How Is the Health Care Crisis Like the Problems in Our Schools?

In this intriguing *New Yorker* article, Boston-based surgeon and writer Atul Gawande wades into the debate on U.S. health care reform with an analogy that seems just as apt for improving schools. Some problems can be solved by government edicts, says Gawande – for example, providing health care to millions of uninsured Americans. But other problems, like the skyrocketing costs of health care, are so complex that they can't be solved by a master plan. Drafts of the health care bill have been criticized for offering nothing more than a bunch of pilot programs – experiments on different ways to control costs. Gawande suggests that pilot programs may in fact be the best strategy, and he uses the analogy of how American agriculture was revolutionized at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1900, American families spent more than 40 percent of their income on food. Farming was labor-intensive and inefficient, tying up almost half of the labor force. The U.S. was a poor country with low crop yields, high prices, limited choice, and uneven quality. The only way up was for farming to become more efficient, reducing the cost of food and freeing up labor and dollars to boost other sectors of the economy. But how? "The agricultural system was fragmented and disorganized," writes Gawande, "and ignored evidence showing how things could be done better. Shallow plowing, no crop rotation, inadequate seedbeds, and other habits sustained by lore and tradition resulted in poor production and soil exhaustion. And lack of coordination led to local shortages of many crops and overproduction of others."

Why didn't the invisible hand of the market induce farmers to use better methods? Because they were wedded to tradition. Farmers scoffed at new ideas, calling them "book farming."

The rest of the world was in the same fix. Communism came up with a master plan to solve the problem – government-run, "scientific" farms and collectives. "We know what that led to," says Gawande: "Widespread famine, and tens of millions of deaths." The U.S. ended up trying a very different approach – with extraordinary success. It all started with a pilot program.

In February 1903, a U.S. Department of Agriculture agent, Seaman Knapp, arrived in the East Texas town of Terrell intent on persuading farmers to work smarter. He knew nobody would listen to a bureaucrat from Washington telling them to adopt "better" ways of farming, so he asked around and found one farmer who was willing to devote 70 acres of his farm to trying some "scientific" methods. Knapp gave the man a list of simple innovations: plowing

deeper, better soil preparation, using only the best seed, applying plenty of fertilizer, and more thorough cultivation to remove weeds and aerate the soil around the plants.

Despite the fact that 1903 was a terrible year for boll weevils, the farmer did extremely well, clearing an extra $700. He immediately started using the new methods on the rest of his farm. Knapp had found the key insight: "What a man hears he may doubt, what he sees he may possibly doubt, but what he does himself he cannot doubt." Some other farmers in the area tried Knapp's methods with similar results, and the ideas spread rapidly.

The next year, Knapp got funding to expand the pilot to other parts of Texas and to Louisiana, sending out 38 "extension agents." The basic ideas were refined and extended, and very rapidly they spread to the entire United States, with thousands of extension agents and hundred of demonstration farms. As these experiments flourished and produced results, the Agriculture Department tracked the data and did comparative-effectiveness research, setting up experimental stations in every state. The U.S.D.A. got into weather forecasting and other ways to help farmers be more productive.

"What seemed like a hodgepodge eventually cohered into a whole," writes Gawande. "The government never took over agriculture, but the government didn't leave it alone, either. It shaped a feedback loop of experiment and learning and encouragement for farmers across the country. The results were beyond what anyone could have imagined." Productivity soared, prices came down, the U.S. become a superpower, and today only two percent of Americans work on farms and families spend only eight percent of income on food. The strategy worked, Gawande concludes, "because United States agencies were allowed to proceed by trial and error, continually adjusting their policies over time in response not to ideology but to hard measurement of the results against societal goals."

The same principles apply to reforming the health care cost crisis, he argues. "If we want to start solving it, we first need to recognize that there is no technical solution. Much like farming, medicine involves hundreds of thousands of local entities across the country – hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, home-health agencies, drug and device suppliers. They provide complex services for thousands of diseases, conditions, and injuries that afflict us." Our current "system" doesn't hold down costs – in fact, it's designed to raise them. But the remarkable history of American agriculture suggests that "you can have transformation without a master plan, without knowing all the answers up front… Transforming health care everywhere starts by transforming it somewhere." That's where lots of pilot programs are the key. "None of this is as satisfying as a master plan," says Gawande. "But there can't be a master plan. That's the crucial lesson of our agricultural experience. And there's another: with problems that don't have technical solutions, the struggle never ends."

Gawande traveled to his home town, Athens, Ohio, and interviewed Rory Lewandowski, the local agricultural extension agent. How have things changed in the hundred years since Seaman Knapp went to East Texas? In some ways, a great deal, but every day Lewandowski faces new challenges as he works 65-80 hours a week with the 660 farmers in his area, visiting half of them each year. An example: one farmer's spinach plants were afflicted with downy mildew and were collapsing, threatening the loss of the whole crop by the

weekend. Lewandowski explained that the disease gets started with cooler temperatures and high humidity. He advised against an idea the farmer had picked up on the Internet – switching from overhead watering to misting. "That still leaves too much moisture on the leaf," he said, recommending a switch to drip irrigation and installing fans in the greenhouse. Wouldn't the fans spread the spores around? worried the farmer. Yes, said Lewandowski, "But you need wetness on the leaves for four to six hours to get penetration through the leaf cuticle. You've got to understand the biology of this."

Of course there are times when Lewandowski doesn't know the answer. "You've got to be able to say, 'I don't know, but I can figure it out for you,'" he says, and reaches out by phone or e-mail to other extension agents in the area. Gawande asked him if he has had any victories, and he said, All the time. "But he has no illusions: his job will never end… And small farms in Athens County are surviving because of him. What he does involves continual improvisation and education; problems keep changing, and better methods of managing them keep emerging – as in medicine."

[And as in education. Does this sound familiar? We now know that there isn't one right way to teach – it depends on the teacher, the subject matter, the students, the group dynamics, the community, the time of year, and a number of intangibles. Teaching is tremendously challenging, and no magical solution is in store. Sometimes teachers figure things out for themselves; sometimes there's a teacher across the hall who has valuable insights that will work (see Positive Deviants in Marshall Memo 313, #2); and a lot of the time teachers need help from outside. What is the equivalent of the agricultural extension agent in U.S. education? Instructional coaches; instruction-savvy department heads, assistant principals and principals; district curriculum specialists; local education consortiums; universities; state departments of education; charter schools and other innovative greenhouses trying out new ideas. And there are scores of data crunching organizations spreading the best ideas from one place to another.]

"At this point," concludes Gawande on the health care crisis, with words that could well apply to education, "we can't afford any illusions: the system won't fix itself, and there's no piece of legislation that will have all the answers, either. The task will require dedicated and talented people in government agencies and in communities who recognize that the country's future depends on their sidestepping the ideological battles, encouraging local change, and following the results. But if we're willing to accept an arduous, messy, and continuous process we can come to grips with a problem even of this immensity. We've done it before."

"Testing, Testing" by Atul Gawande in *The New Yorker*, Dec. 14, 2009 (p. 34-41)
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/12/14/091214fa_fact_gawande

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2. Getting the Most Out of Instructional Coaches

In this *Kappan* article, author/consultant Jon Saphier and math expert Lucy West applaud the deployment of instructional coaches to support instruction but warn that if they're not used wisely, nothing will change. The mission of the school-based coach, they say, is to

raise the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom by building a culture in which:

- Educators watch each other teach and share rigorous feedback aimed at improving student learning;
- Planning for instruction is thorough and collaborative and digs deeply into the content;
- Interim and on-the-spot assessments of student learning are the focus of nondefensive conversations and questions among staff. We taught it, but did they learn it?

"The culture, in turn, is the soil in which seeds are planted in order to improve teaching and learning for both adults and students," say Saphier and West. And instructional coaches are ideally situated to build this culture because they have access to every classroom, are seen as helpers who work side-by-side with teachers, and don't carry the baggage of being formal evaluators. Here are some ideas for coaches:

• *Lead from strength*. Saphier and West recommend that coaches focus initially on the strongest teachers in their schools, using their classrooms as sites for peer observation and joint inquiry into effective practices. Strong teachers can provide a multiplier effect for coaches' work, spreading the word to colleagues and preparing, perhaps, to be coaches themselves some day. Focusing primarily on the weakest teachers is a mistake, say Saphier and West. This doesn't build capacity and perpetuates the idea that coaches are there mainly in a remedial role and that a visit from one of them means there's a problem.

• *Foster public teaching*. Coaches should recruit teachers who are open to having their classrooms observed and can serve as models, not necessarily of the best teaching but of nondefensive self-examination. "Once a few people begin to take a risk and find it valuable," say Saphier and West, "then teachers who are hesitant about all this 'professional culture stuff' will be more likely to participate in a productive planning and debriefing cycle hosted in the room of a lead teacher."

• *Use planning conferences*. Working individually with teachers planning lessons is one of the best entry points for coaches, say Saphier and West, and they believe it's a higher priority than lesson observation and feedback. "Especially during the early days of building a coaching relationship, planning conferences offer more potential for improving instruction," they say. "Many teaching problems begin when teachers don't anticipate student confusions, can't figure out how to scaffold needed prior knowledge, and don't carefully think out experiences that would allow students to access new knowledge." Good planning conferences can help teachers use the required curriculum more mindfully and have more success with students.

• *Lead teacher meetings*. Facilitating teams is another highly productive activity for coaches as teachers plan and debate lesson designs and instructional strategies. This, of course, requires that the principal has scheduled common planning time and made it clear that this kind of meeting is valuable.

• *Facilitate peer observation*. Saphier and West are strong advocates of public teaching – teachers opening their classrooms to observation by peers. It may take several years to get a whole staff comfortable with this idea, they say, but it's an important goal. One way to start is lesson study, with a team designing a common lesson, the coach teaching it while the team

watches (a good way to break the ice and gain credibility), and then revising the lesson and having others teach it.

• *Work closely with the principal*. This partnership is key, say Saphier and West. Coaches should build a close working relationship, plan where to begin and with which teachers, set up a weekly meeting to share insights and improvement strategies, and frequently attend teacher meetings where instructional substance is discussed. Coaches should observe lessons with their principal, building a common image of what good teaching looks like and sharing it with the whole staff, and also educating the principal in the finer points of pedagogical content knowledge in the coach's subject area.

• *Be part of a districtwide plan*. Saphier and West recommend that coaches report to a district curriculum director, not the principal, so they are members of a cadre aimed at bringing about systemic change. "Coaching is a strategy to improve schools across the district, not just to develop a few model classrooms or a lighthouse school," they say. "… Systems often get stuck at this plateau of improvement." This requires that district leaders have a clear vision and organize training and support so that coaches and principals work in harmony toward the goal, and coaches in different schools have weekly meeting time to share, plan, and collaborate. Another reason for having coaches report to someone above the principal is to prevent their time being hijacked by short-term, non-instructional duties within the school, or working on unproductive agendas like shoring up the least effective teachers.

"For a corps of coaches in a school district to significantly influence student achievement," conclude Saphier and West, "the role of the coach must be construed as a change agent and culture builder for professional learning of all adults in the building… The coach needs to focus on improved instruction and evidence of student learning of important ideas and rigorous content – the instructional core. Focusing just on pedagogy without content or just on content with pedagogy is insufficient."

"How Coaches Can Maximize Student Learning" by Jon Saphier and Lucy West in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2009/January 2010 (Vol. 91, #4, p. 46-50); this article can be purchased at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm

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3. Individual Merit Pay for Teachers: An Ideas Whose Time Has Not Come

In this *Education Week* commentary article, Kim Marshall acknowledges that the idea of paying teachers more for higher test scores sounds logical, which is why many Americans, including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, support the idea. But Marshall says there are nine reasons why this is an ineffective strategy for improving teaching and learning:

- It undermines teamwork by reducing the chances that teachers will share good ideas.
- The best teachers are already working long hours and there's no evidence that extra pay will make them work harder or smarter – or motivate mediocre teachers to improve.
- Tests are often "instructionally insensitive" – that is, they measure students' SES more than teacher impact.

- Tests in many states don't emphasize writing and critical thinking, so raising the stakes would have the effect of dumbing down the curriculum.
- Measuring September-to-May value added with better tests would seem to be the answer to the last two concerns, but experts say it takes three years of such data to render a fair judgment on a teacher's impact.
- Raising the stakes on tests increases the pressure on teachers to put a thumb on the scale.
- How can a merit-pay system calculate the compensation due to pullout teachers who contribute to students' improvement?
- Shouldn't merit pay be spread to previous-year teachers who contributed too?
- Finally, fully half of teachers work in grades and subjects that don't have tests. Is it fair that they're not eligible for merit pay?

"These concerns," says Marshall, "demolish the argument for individual merit pay." And yet the conversation in schools *should* be about student learning, not just teacher inputs. "So how can we accomplish this without creating knotty problems and perverse incentives?"

The answer, he says, can be found in our most effective schools: principals make frequent unannounced visits to classrooms and give informal feedback on what students are learning and how instruction can be improved; teacher teams collaboratively design curriculum units, give common assessments every 4-6 weeks, immediately confer to discuss the effectiveness of what they did, share best practices, reteach what wasn't mastered, and help struggling students. "By frequently checking for understanding and fixing learning problems before they snowball," says Marshall, "these schools draw on teachers' and administrators' collective wisdom and keep everyone's focus on the most important questions: Are students learning, and, if not, what's our next move?"

Great schools make this process look easy, but it's tricky to replicate, especially fostering the kind of professional culture in which productive collegiality flourishes. "Just as important as shifting the conversation in a school to results," says Marshall, "is keeping the assessment process informal and low-stakes, so that teachers feel safe admitting when things aren't working and will listen to ideas from colleagues."

Are we therefore stuck with paying teachers by seniority and credentials? Not necessarily, concludes Marshall. Additional pay should go to master teachers who mentor colleagues and serve as skilled curriculum planners, trainers, and team leaders. Districts should also offer higher pay to attract highly effective teachers to challenging assignments and hard-to-staff subject areas. In addition, districts should consider rewarding entire staffs for well-documented, multi-year gains in student achievement.

"Is Merit Pay the Secret Sauce for Improving Teaching and Learning?" by Kim Marshall in *Education Week*, Dec. 16, 2009 (Vol. 29, #15, p. 28, 22)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/12/16/15marshall.h29.html?tkn=RRVFE3Js53maOxHL6mya6GT5aMzARTAfKA08&print=1

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4. Using Performance-Based Rubrics to Evaluate Teachers

In this *Education Week* article, Stephen Sawchuk reports on several districts' attempts

to work with performance-based teacher evaluation systems, mostly using 4-3-2-1 rubrics designed by Charlotte Danielson and others. The districts include Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Chicago, and Montgomery County. "Emerging evidence suggests that observational ratings according to such standards do, in fact, correlate with improved student achievement," he writes. But many questions remain unresolved:

- Who should conduct classroom evaluation visits?
- Should classroom observations be announced or unannounced?
- How many observations are needed to get a meaningful sense of instruction?
- Why do principals generally give higher ratings than other observers?
- How can a district achieve inter-rater reliability?
- Can districts afford more frequent teacher evaluations that involve additional evaluators?
- What rating scale is most effective? Washington, D.C. has recently adopted this four-point scale: *Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective,* and *Ineffective*.
- How should different factors be weighted? For example, Washington, D.C. proposes to evaluate teachers in tested grades thus: 50% on the teacher's test-score value-added, 40% on classroom observation ratings, 5% on total school test-score value-added, and 5% on the teachers' participation in collaborative planning and local initiatives. Teachers in non-tested grades and subjects are evaluated 80% on classroom observation ratings, 10% on a measure of student growth other than a standardized test, 5% on total school test-score value-added, and 5% on the teachers' participation in collaborative planning and local initiatives.
- Will teachers accept performance-based evaluations as reliable and fair?
- How can districts avoid the grade inflation documented in a recent New Teacher Project study of teacher-evaluation systems in several cities?
- Should teachers' salaries be based on performance ratings?
- Alternatively, should ratings determine teachers' level on a career-ladder system?

"Performance-Based Evaluation Systems Face Obstacles" by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, Dec. 16, 2009 (Vol. 29, #15, p. 1, 12); this article can be purchased at http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/12/16/index.html

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5. Detecting Problems Early and Intervening

In this *Education Week* article, Catherine Gewertz reports on Diplomas Now, an early-warning and intervention program being implemented in Philadelphia school and in several other urban districts. The brainchild of researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the Philadelphia Education Fund, the program focuses on the "ABCs" – Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance – three key indicators that signal future academic trouble as early as the sixth grade. Diplomas Now, which costs $400,000-$500,000 per school each year, is showing some impressive results: last year one Philadelphia elementary school reduced the number of students with less than 80 percent attendance by 52%, reduced the number of students with

three or more negative behavior marks by 45%, and reduced the number of students receiving an F in math by 83% and literacy by 80%.

Part of what produces these results is relentless tracking of data, led by a full-time on-site coordinator. A conference area outside the principal's office in the Philadelphia elementary school has a display of every student's attendance, behavior, and course-failure data, reading and math levels, state test scores, and six-week interim assessment results. Information is color-coded: Green means on track, yellow means "sliding off track", and red means off track.

Another part of the formula is social workers who do individual and group counseling and are ready to help and refer to outside agencies when a student is in crisis. Finally, City Year corps members build school spirit and follow classes through the day, giving individual encouragement and support to struggling students.

Allie Mulvihill of the Philadelphia Education Fund had this to say about Diplomas Now: "I've been in the education game for a long time, and this particular venture has got the goods."

"'Naggers and Nurturers'" by Catherine Gewertz in *Education Week*, Dec. 16, 2009 (Vol. 29, #15, p. 16-18); this article can be purchased at
http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/12/16/index.html

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6. Diagnosing Struggling Students' Vision Problems

(Originally titled "Beyond 20/20")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Washington elementary principal Pete Hall and California optometrist Leanne Liddicoat say that vision problems are the primary cause of early reading difficulties. Amy, for example, was a student whose academic achievement plummeted in third and fourth grade. Conventional eye-chart tests said her vision was 20/20, but a complete eye exam found that her eyes were not focusing correctly when she read and her eye muscles had difficulty moving in a systematic, coordinated way. Hearing the diagnosis, Amy started to cry. "Honey, don't worry, I'm sure the glasses will look fabulous on you," reassured her mother. "It's not about the glasses, Mom," said Amy. "I'm just glad I'm not stupid after all."

Vision disorders are the fourth most common disability in the U.S., affecting 10 million children. More-comprehensive screening and treatment are essential, addressing the four elements of the visual system:

• *General eye health* – Children often don't report problems like dry eye because they don't know what's normal.

• *Refractive error* – Children may be born with myopia (nearsightedness or difficulty seeing at a distance, often manifested in squinting at the board); hyperopia (farsightedness or difficulty seeing up close); and astigmatism (blurry vision at any distance; only glasses or contact lenses can provide clarity for these children).

• *Binocular coordination* – In most children, the muscles that control the eyes learn how to coordinate the two eyes and get them tracking together by age 6. But in some children

this doesn't happen and reading is a very challenging task. Lack of coordination between the eyes makes it difficult to move accurately from one word to the next or from the end of one line to the beginning of the next, and it's difficult to maintain a sharp image for an extended period of time. More than 85 percent of children who are supposedly learning disabled have one of these kinds of vision impairment.

• *Visual processing skills* – This is the ability to interpret, analyze, and remember visual images – recognizing and recalling words, sorting, classifying, and matching symbols, and left-to-right directionality. Students with visual processing deficits have to rely on listening to survive in classrooms and testing situations.

"An undiagnosed or untreated vision disorder clearly leaves a child behind in the classroom," say Hall and Liddicoat. "In fact, Maples (2003) concluded that factors related to a student's vision are significantly better predictors of academic success than is race or socioeconomic status." So what can schools do? The authors recommend using this checklist to indentify students who should have a full vision screening:

- Difficulty holding the head still while tracking;
- Dizziness or nausea while reading;
- Eye pain or discomfort;
- Redness or watering eyes;
- Rubbing eyes often;
- Headaches after visual work;
- Losing their place when reading;
- An aversion to reading;
- Eyes "bounce around" while reading or performing close-up work;
- Good comprehension but resistance to reading aloud;
- Frequent omissions, substitutions, or careless errors;
- Avoiding close-up work;
- Getting "lost" when looking from the board to a paper and back to the board.

"Beyond 20/20" by Pete Hall and Leanne Liddicoat in *Educational Leadership*, December 2009/January 2010 (Vol. 67, #4, online only) http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/dec09/vol67/num04/Beyond_20~20.aspx; the authors can be reached at PeteHall@EducationHall.com and lml@surewest.net.

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7. Wellness Education in a Massachusetts School

(Originally titled "A Place for Healthy Risk-Taking")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Massachusetts middle-school teacher Laura Warner describes how she begins her wellness course by asking students to take their place in one of three concentric circles according to whether each prompt is comfortable, a stretch, or a risk:

- Eating pizza
- Playing basketball

- Talking with your parents about drugs or alcohol
- Talking to your parents about sex
- Eating sushi
- Telling a close friend you disagree with him or her
- Running a mile for fitness testing
- Getting sweaty in class
- Taking basketball free throws
- Swimming in the ocean
- Playing soccer

"Early adolescents are often described as developmentally egocentric," says Warner, "meaning that they struggle to differentiate between their own thoughts and the perspectives of others and often feel as though they are on stage, being constantly watched and judged by their peers. So seeing this visual demonstration of the differences in how their classmates perceive risk and comfort can be especially powerful." Afterward, she asks students what they noticed – and in which circle they think learning happens best. This introduces them to one of the central concepts of the course – the zone of proximal development.

All grade 7-10 students at Warner's school have wellness four times a week – a combination of health, physical education, games, and fitness: floor hockey, soccer, rock climbing, yoga, walks, capture the flag, and flying trapeze. The curriculum draws on Project Adventure (http://www.pa.org); some activities are competitive, others build skills in novices. Twice a year, students complete a one-mile run to assess cardiovascular fitness. "I've heard them say things like, 'I'm not good at gym,' or 'I'm just not athletic,'" says Warner. "I've always felt that my mission was to dispel those assumptions. For me, physical activity classes have become less a place for students to learn to throw a softball well, and more a place for them to learn to throw aside some assumptions about themselves and practice taking risks… Before self- or peer-assigned labels like 'jock' or 'geek' become entrenched in adolescents' emerging sense of identity, we should challenge their notions of what they can and cannot do."

Middle-school students "still need to be able to relax, be silly, and act like kids," she continues. "If adolescents naturally play by searching for novel and exciting experiences that make them feel alive and that bring them closer to their peers, doesn't it make sense to try to channel this developmental need into positive activities at school?" The school's wellness teachers work at the margins of risk, challenging students and shielding them from embarrassment. In a game of kickball, for example, one girl asked a classmate to kick for her. The teacher allowed this substitution, but talked to the girl afterward about why she didn't want to kick (she was afraid she might stub her toe, miss the ball completely, look stupid, and get laughed at). With some encouragement and practice, this girl finally stepped up to the plate and kicked, and no one laughed when her initial efforts weren't entirely successful.

Debriefing is a regular feature at Warner's school. Teachers ask students to reflect on which role they played: Captain (leadership), Crew (working to help the group succeed), or Passenger (just listening or going along for the ride). The discussion makes it clear that not

everyone can be a Captain, and students who habitually take the Passenger role need to mix it up.

Modeling healthy risk-taking is important, concludes Warner. “We don’t all need to fly through the air or jump out of airplanes to demonstrate our willingness to take risks. We can be silly, sing in public, laugh at ourselves, and simply let our students see us try out new lessons we aren’t sure will work. Kids know when we let ourselves be vulnerable, and although it’s almost guaranteed that they won’t congratulate us at that moment, they will remember – and they will be more likely to let themselves be vulnerable in the future.”

“A Place for Healthy Risk-Taking” by Laura Warner in *Educational Leadership*, December 2009/January 2010 (Vol. 67, #4, p. 70-74); this article can be purchased at http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership.aspx. Warner can be reached at lauraw@parker.org.

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8. The Best Motivator Is…

What makes employees enthusiastic about their work? Business professor Teresa Amabile and writer/researcher Steven Kramer explored the question in this *Harvard Business Review* article. Asked to rank-order things that motivate the troops, more than 600 corporate managers said it was recognition (either public or private) for good work. “Unfortunately,” say Amabile and Kramer, “those managers are wrong.” Not only that, but the correct answer, based on a multi-year study of the emotions, motivation levels, and day-to-day activities of hundreds of knowledge workers, is the one the managers ranked last!

The key ingredient? *Progress*. “On days when workers have the sense they’re making headway in their jobs, or when they receive support that helps them overcome obstacles, their emotions are most positive and their drive to succeed is at its peak,” say Amabile and Kramer. The most discouraging and demotivating event was a setback. “On days when they feel they are spinning their wheels or encountering roadblocks to meaningful accomplishment, their moods and motivation are lowest.” Incentives were rarely mentioned as important to motivation.

The authors believe their findings are good news for business leaders [and presumably educational leaders as well]. “The key to motivation turns out to be largely within your control,” say Amabile and Kramer. “What’s more, it doesn’t depend on elaborate incentive systems… Managers have powerful influence over events that facilitate or undermine progress. They can provide meaningful goals, resources, and encouragement, and they can protect their people from irrelevant demands.” Here are their specific suggestions:

- Clarify overall goals and don’t autocratically change them.
- Be decisive and don’t be a bottleneck.
- Cultivate a culture of helpfulness and ensure that people’s efforts are properly supported.
- Roll up your sleeves and pitch in.
- Don’t exert time pressure so intense that minor glitches are perceived as crises rather than learning opportunities.

- Keep in mind that negative events have greater emotional impact than positive ones.
- Proactively create both the reality and the perception of progress.
- Celebrate progress, even incremental progress. Yes, recognition is a motivator, but only if it's genuine and based on real accomplishments.

"What Really Motivates Workers: Understanding the Power of Progress" by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2010 (Vol. 88, #1, p. 44-45), no e-link available

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9. Resilience in a Crisis

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, business professor Joshua Margolis and consultant Paul Stoltz say that it's difficult for managers to respond effectively after a serious setback because they are paralyzed by fear, anger, confusion, and a strong desire to blame others. Too often, leaders endlessly dissect what went wrong instead of looking forward and figuring out what to do next, given the new realities.

Margolis and Stoltz recommend a "resilience regimen" – several pointed questions that help managers replace negative responses with creative, resourceful ones. The key, they say, is shifting one's mind-set from cause-oriented to response-oriented thinking in four areas:

- Control:
  - *Cause-oriented thinking*: Was this adverse event inevitable, or could I have prevented it?
  - *Response-oriented thinking*: What features of the situation can I (even potentially) improve?
- Impact:
  - *Cause-oriented thinking*: Did I cause the adverse event, or did it result from external forces?
  - *Response-oriented thinking*: What sort of positive impact can I personally have on what happens next?
- Breadth:
  - *Cause-oriented thinking*: Is the underlying cause of this event specific to it or more widespread?
  - *Response-oriented thinking*: How can I contain the negatives of the situation and generate currently unseen possibilities?
- Duration:
  - *Cause-oriented thinking*: Is the underlying cause of this event enduring or temporary?
  - *Response-oriented thinking*: What can I do to begin addressing the problem now?

"How to Bounce Back from Adversity" by Joshua Margolis and Paul Stoltz in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2010 (Vol. 88, #1, p. 86-92), no e-link available; the authors are available at jmargolis@hbs.edu and paul@peaklearning.com.

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10. An Evaluation of Three School-Reform Programs

In this *Education Week* article, Debra Viadero reports on a 13-year study by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) on the effectiveness of three school-reform programs: Accelerated Schools, America's Choice, and Success for All. The researchers found that Accelerated Schools had the least impact on what teachers did in their classrooms and student achievement; Success for All had the most impact; and America's Choice was somewhere in between. It also appeared that the more prescriptive the program was and the higher the fidelity of implementation, the greater the impact on student achievement.

"Researchers Probe 'Black Box' of School Improvement" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Dec. 16, 2009 (Vol. 29, #15, p. 9) http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/12/16/index.html

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11. Short Item:

Neuroscience for Kids website – This site has multiple resources for helping students understand how their brains work: http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/neurok.html

Spotted in "How to Teach Students About the Brain" by Judy Willis in *Educational Leadership*, December 2009/January 2010 (Vol. 67, #4, online only) http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/dec09/vol67/num04/How_to_Teach_Students_About_the_Brain.aspx

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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 effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 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 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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- 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 Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal