Marshall Memo 269

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 19, 2009

In This Issue:

1. Teaching "outrageous" lessons
2. Using poetry to teach grammar
3. Changing low expectations about student learning
4. Four myths about Asian-American students
5. Supporting first-generation college-going students
6. Are good teachers made – or born?
7. A test for unconscious bias and unintentional racism
8. Short item: The Civil War in four minutes!

Quotes of the Week

"Are we white?"

> A white four-year-old to his mother on the day Barack Obama was elected president. The boy's father, James Bennet, reported this question in his editor's note in *The Atlantic Monthly*, making the point that white Americans' usual assumption that white is the norm, the "default mode for humanity," has been changed in recent months. (*The Atlantic Monthly*, February 2009, p. 14, no e-link)

"My parents told me to keep coming to school even if I am killed. The people who did this to me don't want women to be educated. They want us to be stupid things."

> Shamsia Husseini, 17, a student at Mirwais School for Girls in Afghanistan, whose face was burned with acid in a terrorist attack two months ago aimed at keeping girls from going to school. Despite the attack on Husseini and 14 other girls, 1,300 determined students attend the school every day. ("Afghan Girls, Scarred by Acid, Defy Terror, Embracing School" by Dexter Filkins, *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 2009, p. 1) http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/world/asia/14kandahar.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Afghan%20Girls,%20Scarred%20by%20Acid,%20Defy%20Terror&st=cse)

"[M]any 'problems' in teaching and learning are often the result of the failure of teachers and curriculum designers to be imaginative, weird, and bold."

> Stanley Pogrow (see item #1)

"My students' writing was stiff and unnatural, as if they were wearing a too-small suit."

> Linda Christensen (see item #2)

"What happens when students are treated as intellectuals instead of intellectually challenged?"

> Linda Christensen (*ibid*.)

1. Teaching "Outrageous" Lessons

"What do you do when students are bored?" asks San Francisco State University professor and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) creator Stanley Pogrow in this lively *Kappan* article. "While we have made great progress as a profession in how to employ scientific principles of psychology to teaching and learning," writes Pogrow, "we have made little progress in how not to bore students."

The solution? Teaching the occasional "outrageous" lesson – one that captures the Monty Python spirit of *something completely different* – that is so fascinating that students can't help but be drawn in and "hang onto every word and gesture."

Here's an example, taught by a high-school teacher named Dwight to a challenging sophomore class:

Dwight entered the class disguised in a bushy white beard, a large black hat, and overalls, and deposited a large tree stump on the floor. Students quickly realized who he was, but played along as Dwight delivered a car-salesman-like pitch for all the uses that stumps might be put to: you can scratch your back against it if you have an itch; you can burn it if your house is cold; you can sit on it if all your furniture is stolen; you can cut off a toothpick if you've got food caught between your teeth; you can confide in your stump if you have a problem; and you can hang socks and jewelry on your stump. For men, having a stump is a symbol of manliness; women look up to a man with a stump. And so on. Students titter but listen; they have no idea where their teacher is going with this.

Dwight then says that he can't sell his stump because it's his last one, but he's looking to hire a really top-flight salesperson to join his team and will give them a chance to compete for the job. "This is a chance of a lifetime for a great career," he says. He pulls a series of everyday objects out of a shopping bag – a comb, a large piece of cardboard, etc. – and gives one to the first student in each row. He tells each row to form a team and come up with as many reasons as they can why someone should buy their object. Each team must choose a spokesperson to present their ideas to the whole class. Students quickly get into their teams and start brainstorming ideas, with students who had previously been the most recalcitrant taking leadership roles.

Ten minutes later, each team makes a brief presentation, some spokespeople mimicking Dwight's flamboyant salesman style. When they are finished, Dwight says, "Before I announce the winner, I want everyone to write down the ideas that your team just presented for why someone should buy your product." Students start writing with no whining or wasted time;

they want to get their team's ideas down on paper. Dwight then has one student from each team read the list, which each does with confidence and panache. When they're finished, Dwight announces that *all* the groups met his criteria and will be hired as salespeople, and he's going to give every one of them an award.

In the last five minutes of the class, Dwight tells students what this was all about: writing a persuasive essay (one of the district's major requirements for promotion). He gives a definition of a persuasive essay and a few characteristics. "Hmmm," he says, "I don't understand why you found it so easy to write a persuasive essay when most students have so much trouble doing so. I wonder if the reason is something that you can use to continue to develop your essays. Let's try to figure that out in tomorrow's lesson."

"This lesson," says Pogrow, "demonstrates the latent talent, ability, and creativity that reside within our most academically resistant students… What is clear is that, when teachers apply their imagination to teaching, students will apply their imagination to learning." Dwight knew that a conventional approach to teaching students how to write a persuasive essay would have turned students off and would most likely have flopped (that's what was happening in other classrooms in the same school). "The ease and enthusiasm with which Dwight's students began to write creative persuasive essays demonstrates that many 'problems' in teaching and learning are often the result of the failure of teachers and curriculum designers to be imaginative, weird, and bold." Here's what Pogrow is looking for in outrageous lessons:

- Using a creatively authentic storyline as a hook;
- The teacher playing a role (versus going to the time and trouble of getting students playing roles);
- Keeping students guessing about what will happen next;
- Using highly dramatic methods as the primary way of teaching critical content, versus enriching a conventional lesson with dramatic frills;
- Only revealing the aim of the lesson in the last five minutes;

Dwight is a not-very-extroverted student teacher, and he developed this lesson following guidelines developed by Pogrow. This leads Pogrow to believe that any teacher can engage in outrageous instruction.

The best thing about this kind of lesson, he says, is that it's *efficient*. That's because it captivates students, allows for multiple, seamless transitions from one activity to another, and saves time ordinarily consumed by discipline problems and time-wasting slowdowns. "Generating student suspense and curiosity are the most efficient ways to increase and deepen learning," he says. Outrageous instruction also sets up students for more motivated learning in subsequent classes, even if they are more conventional.

Pogrow admits that teachers can't keep up this kind of instruction all the time. He advises cooking up an outrageous lesson for especially important material that students are likely to find boring or inaccessible, or where the teacher cares deeply about the topic and wants students to get similarly enthusiastic.

Some teachers may wonder if they can pull this off. *Will I be able to make the techniques work? Will I look foolish? Will I lose control of the class? That's not me*. But as

Pogrow has trained teachers in outrageous instruction in recent years, he's been amazed at how quickly teachers get over their initial fears, embrace being imaginative, playful, and weird, and come up with original and creative lessons. "I have never seen a teacher lose control of a class during an outrageous lesson," he says, "even when the lesson required the teacher to hide under a desk, to spend large parts of the period not looking at the class, or to run in and out of the room. It turns out that suspense is the most underused technique for maintaining classroom control. Indeed, the best form of classroom control and discipline is to surprise and fascinate students." Students see their teachers' antics as a sign of caring, of being willing to take risks and go the extra mile. Teachers don't have to be extroverts to do this kind of work. "The real personality key for teaching an outrageous lesson," says Pogrow, "is the attitude that *I will do anything to help my students learn*."

The best lessons emerge when teams of teachers brainstorm and push each other to add creative and humorous elements. Pogrow recommends setting a goal of each teacher on the team presenting one such lesson a semester and, over time, developing a good collection. As students encounter outrageous lessons in different classes, their attitude toward learning – and their learning – will change for the better.

"Teaching Content Outrageously: Instruction in the Era of On-Demand Entertainment" by Stanley Pogrow in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2009 (Vol. 90, #5, p. 379-383); the full article can be purchased for $5.00 at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm. Pogrow can be reached at stanpogrow@att.net.

Back to page one

2. Using Poetry to Teach Grammar

In this vivid article in *Rethinking Schools*, Lewis and Clark College (Oregon) writing expert Linda Christensen confesses that she herself still has problems with grammar and usage (how to use *lay* and *lie*, for example, and where to place some apostrophes), which helps her empathize with students who have similar lapses. As a rookie teacher, Christensen used grammar textbooks and worksheets, but even when students could fill in the correct answers on her end-of-chapter tests, they kept making the same mistakes in their essays. "My students' writing was stiff and unnatural," she says, "as if they were wearing a too-small suit." This made her increasingly disillusioned with the conventional wisdom of English teaching. "Too often," she says, "grammar study is the dull naming of parts of speech that students have difficulty remembering beyond the simple recitation… Well-meaning teachers, administrators, and parents who push the idea of high expectations for all students sometimes equate the naming of parts of speech to writing," hearkening back to the good old days when "kids knew what a verb was." Teachers insist that students memorize parts of speech and sentence types before they write papers, holding them hostage to a Sisyphean task to which they return year after year. "Real rigor is not memorizing terms isolated from their work in the world," says Christensen.

After pushing this rock up the hill and having it roll back down a few too many times, Christensen hit on the idea of using poetry to teach grammar and syntax. She found that poetry

gave students a better grasp of grammar skills – and made their writing much livelier: "When students warm up their tongues through poetry," she says, "they carry that language play into their essays and narratives." Using poetry as her entry-point, Christensen now urges students to dump everyday, shopworn words and use language that surprises, sings, provokes. Rather than dressing up boring verbs with adverbs and adjectives (one writer calls these "the potbelly of poetry"), she challenges them to use more powerful verbs. For example, the sentence *Bill walked slowly to class* was rewritten as *Bill limped to class* or *Bill flirted his way to class* or *Bill crept to class*. And she has students highlight and rethink words like *was*, *were*, and *are* and come up with more poetic language, for example, *It was a hot day* became *The day sweated*.

Christensen's technique is to have students read and create poems that help them understand what a powerful tool grammar is for writers. "Verbs are the workhorses of the sentence," she tells students. "They make your poetry (and essays) strut and dance, or they make your audience snore." She starts with poems like Quincy Troupe's "Poem for Magic" (http://saysomethingwonderful.blogspot.com/2005/04/poems-to-know-praise-poems.html, read by the author at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtyXZaW_xeo), first asking them what works for them in the poem, then giving them highlighters to mark the verbs and see how vividly they convey action on the basketball court. When students erroneously mark some adjectives and nouns, she has a teachable moment. She then asks students to highlight basketball terms (nouns like *lane, backboards, nets*) in a different color and contrasts their function to that of verbs.

Christensen uses other sports poems, including "Fast Break" by Edward Hirsch, "Analysis of Baseball" by Mae Swenson, and "The Base Stealer" by Robert Francis. "In each of these poems," she says, "I push students to examine how the writers have slowed the motion of action so they can see the extension of an arm, the slide of a hand, the rotation of a ball. They use verbs to take the reader through each step, each movement as they record it in the poem."

She then has students make a list of people (including themselves) who are really good at something – a sister who loves to dance, a nephew who is crazy about fishing, a father who makes wonderful Arabic coffee. Students then share their lists, getting ideas from others. From the collective lists, she has students brainstorm lists of verbs and nouns, pushing them to identify words that *move* their poem, for example in fishing, *toss, spin, cast, reel, catch, release, flick, drift*. Students then work on their own poems about a chosen person who is wonderfully good at something. Christensen's goal is to "find voice and passion and a way to show us their lives." As they revise their poems, she has them look back at the poems they've read for tips, for example, the way Quincy Troupe uses short, one-syllable words when he wants to quicken the pace.

Christensen has found that lists can be powerful warm-ups and creative devices in poetry and prose. She brings in other poems that use repetition as an effective device, including Patricia Smith's "Left Memories" (http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/aa061202b.htm, scroll down to the bottom for the "I can't…" segment). "When I give this assignment," she

says, "I tell students, 'If you are listing why you love your grandmother's buttermilk biscuits, go for it. Add as many items as you can to the list: sights, smells, butter dripping over the edge, the way they feel in your mouth. This is a love poem to those biscuits. Make us all want them. You can weed later. Get it all down now.'" Following her lead on lists and repetition, Andrew Kafoury, one of her students, included this segment in his college essay:

> I love acting. I love putting on costumes and becoming creatures I am not. I love my skin sweating as bright lights send heat soaking through my body. I love getting to know my cast, watching the drama behind the drama. I love the quick change, the blackout, the dry ice and stage combat. I love cranky stage managers and quiet co-stars. I love watching ego-stricken actors fall into decline while a new face emerges from the shadows. I love the monster special effects that steal the show, and that oh-so-precious moment when you, the actor, send the audience head over heels with laughter. I love the call sheet with my name on it, and the director who calls to say I'm perfect for the part. I love the shows that I wish would go on forever, and even the ones I can't stand till they're over.

"When I discovered that I could give up grammar ditto sheets," Christensen concludes, "I became a teacher. Instead of following mindless mandates and old-school rules, I started observing my students' writing, and I dared to say, 'What happens when students are treated as intellectuals instead of intellectually challenged?' Through poetry, students not only learn to harness their sassy, audacious playfulness into art, they learn a few parts of speech and ways to work with language along the way."

"Move Over, Sisyphus: Teaching Grammar and Poetry" by Linda Christensen in *Rethinking Schools,* Winter 2008-09 (Vol. 23, #2, p. 10-13), no e-link available; the author can be reached at lchrist@aol.com; she wrote *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (Rethinking Schools, 2000)

Back to page one

3. Changing Low Expectations About Student Learning

"[T]eachers' personal beliefs drive professional practice," say Texas State University/San Marcos professors Patricia Guerra and Sarah Nelson in this *Kappan* article. Unfortunately, all too many educators view students who are out of the cultural, linguistic, and economic mainstream as inherently flawed. Many school-improvement efforts, say the authors, operate on the naive assumption that teaching new classroom skills will change this deficit mind-set –in other words, that we can get teachers to act their way into a new way of believing. Nonsense, say Guerra and Nelson: "If school leaders believe, like many people do, that changed behavior will result in changed beliefs, they are mistaken. Research reveals that for lasting changes in behavior to occur, beliefs and assumptions must be brought to consciousness and the deep structures supporting behaviors must be addressed… [W]ithout addressing the

underlying deficit beliefs influencing educators' behavior, providing 'high-quality' or 'research-based' professional development does little to change practice once educators return to classrooms and close their doors."

Going this deep is not easy, say Guerra and Nelson, but they have developed a six-part process that they believe is effective:

• *Conduct a personal inventory*. School leaders need to ask themselves, "Am I the one to lead this effort?" This depends on how they answer these questions:

- Are your beliefs about diversity additive? Do you view cultural diversity as an asset to teaching and learning? Can all children achieve at high levels with the right kind of education?
- Do you have the cultural knowledge to know where you are going? This effort requires deep knowledge of the invisible aspects of culture – thinking and communication styles, power distribution, role expectations, and identity development.
- Do you have the facilitation skills to be successful?
- Are you comfortable leading this journey? The facilitator must be able to challenge deficit thinking in a dignifying manner so colleagues feel they are in a safe space to explore and reframe their ideas.
- Do you have the conviction to lead this journey? You have to believe that the system needs to be changed so that all students can learn at high levels.

If you're not the right person for the leadership role, they you need to find someone who is.

• *Raise the issue*. One approach is to put the data, disaggregated by SES and race, on the table, including information on test scores, discipline, special education, course failures, retentions, advanced class, gifted education, percent college-bound, and parent participation. Guerra and Nelson advise removing teachers' names so that nobody feels attacked, and spreading the discussion over several faculty meetings. Many teachers will react strongly to the disparities the data reveal; some will insist that the inequities confirm deficit thinking; some will remain silent. Rather than getting drawn into angry debates, the discussion leader needs to calmly present alternative interpretations and steer teachers toward success stories in similar schools (for example, *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jossey-Bass, 2nd Edition, 2009).

• *Assess readiness*. Teachers will react to the data in different ways; some need time to absorb it, others will be ready for action. "One thing we have learned through our work," say Guerra and Nelson, "is that you cannot force a teacher to move faster than she is willing to go. Force creates only resistance and fear, which slow the process." They recommend assessing teachers' readiness through cultural simulations like BANGA or Bafa Bafa, identifying teachers who seem most ready, and approaching them individually to lead differentiated professional development experiences for their colleagues – while continuing to read success stories and keeping the issue of cultural responsiveness on the table. As stories of improved student performance begin to percolate up from classrooms, these can become part of the training in the second and third year, at which point the principal should have a "frank discussion" with any teachers who are not on board about participating or leaving the school.

• *Increase knowledge*. The authors recommend starting voluntary study groups that use a variety of activities to explore hidden aspects of culture – values, beliefs, norms, role definitions, communication styles, and worldviews – being careful to keep things depersonalized so no teachers shut down because they feel defensive. When deficit beliefs surface, they should be handled in a non-confrontational way, addressing the beliefs as stereotypes and reframing them using the cultural knowledge and insights gained from previous discussions.

• *Challenge and reframe beliefs, change practice*. With the foundations built, Guerra and Nelson recommend having teachers look at their own students' data, disaggregated by ethnicity and SES. At this stage, teachers' deficit beliefs may surface. "Faced with this cognitive dissonance, teachers must rethink practices they once thought were color-blind and equitable," say the authors. While some will accept responsibility and express guilt over "harming" children, many others will counter with deficit beliefs, which should lead to a discussion. For example, a teacher who blames parents for not valuing education might realize that there are other explanations for parents not attending school meetings and learn how to change their practice to be more culturally responsive.

• *Build capacity and a culturally responsive school*. Once the initial group of teachers has gained a foothold with their colleagues, expand the network to include more and more staff members. Over three years, say Guerra and Nelson, there should be significant changes in classroom practices and school policies. "Once this occurs," they conclude, "do not stop the work. Transforming beliefs and practices is an ongoing journey, not a destination."

"Changing Professional Practice Requires Changing Beliefs" by Patricia Guerra and Sarah Nelson in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2009 (Vol. 90, #5, p. 354-359); the full article can be purchased for $5.00 at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm

Back to page one

4. Four Myths About Asian-American Students

In this thoughtful *Kappan* article, Michigan State University professor Yong Zhao and doctoral candidate Wei Qiu refute four myths about Asian-American students:

• *Myth #1: Asian-Americans have superior academic achievement*. The authors acknowledge that some subgroups of Asian Americans outperform other ethnic groups. Chinese Americans, for example, are overrepresented in elite universities and among National Merit Scholars and get higher SAT scores in math. But Asian Americans do less well in English, reading, writing, and public speaking, and their academic advantages seem to disappear in college. The error here is treating Asian Americans as a monolithic block; there are major differences among the two dozen Asian subgroups listed in the U.S. Census. Cambodian and Hmong students, for example, have higher dropout rates, as do young Chinese adults who were born abroad.

So what is the best way to categorize our very diverse Asian-American students? One way is to look at how long a student has been in the U.S. and how old he or she was upon arrival. But a better way, suggest the authors, is grouping them by which of the world's nine

civilizations they hail from. Asian countries include people from five: Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Japanese. A civilization-based framework better captures cultural differences; for example, Singapore, China, and Korea, although geographically and politically different, are similar in educational terms because they all belong to the same civilization.

• *Myth #2: Asian-American students are born smart, especially in math and science.* "The truth, of course, is that not all Asian Americans are good at mathematics and science," say Zhao and Qiu. Studies have found no innate differences between Asians and native-born Americans, making clear that innate ability is not the reason behind Asian superiority in math. "Studies show that Asian-American students benefit from such cultural factors as students' effort in and outside school, parental expectations and involvement, self-confidence in mathematics and reading, frequency of computer use for activities other than gaming, frequency of book use besides mathematics textbooks, the tendency for hard work, and deferred gratification, and the desire for intergenerational social mobility," say the authors. "An important implication is that educators and policy makers should seriously fight the tendency to attribute academic excellence to racial differences. Effort, not genes, matters in student achievement."

In addition, some Asian-American students do not excel academically, and they should not be treated any differently than other students who struggle in school.

• *Myth #3: Asian-American students are trouble-free kids*. Some believe that these are "super kids" who are free from psychological and social problems. Not so! At Cornell University, 13 of the 21 suicide victims since 1996 were Asian or Asian American, and Asian-American college students often show increased risk of depression and anxiety and higher rates of being in a sexually or physically abusive relationship. The "model minority" stereotype – along with cultural reticence to report psychological and learning problems – have a lot to do with statistics like these. "Schools, teachers, and the general public need to be aware of the psychological and educational needs of Asian students," say Zhao and Qiu. "Asian children not only face similar psychological and educational needs as their non-Asian peers, they also must deal with their own complicated issues, including the burden of being a model minority."

• *Myth #4: Asian-American students are good at everything*. On the contrary, say the authors, the single-minded devotion to academic achievement in Asian-American families leads to under-development in other areas essential for being productive in contemporary American society, including creativity and independent thinking. This explains why many Asian-American students lose their competitive edge when they get to college. So educators must refrain from over-generalizing and work to bring about more balanced achievement among Asian students – and all their peers

"How Good Are Asians? Refuting Four Myths About Asian-American Academic Achievement" by Yong Zhao and Wei Qiu in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2009 (Vol. 90, #5, p. 338-344), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v90/k0901zha.htm; Zhao can be reached at zhaoyo@msu.edu. See Marshall Memo 216 (articles #1 and 2) for more on this subject.

Back to page one

5. Supporting First-Generation College-Going Students

In this helpful article in *Rethinking Schools*, Lori Chajet of Brooklyn College and Sierra Stoneman-Bell of the Institute for Urban Education describe a program they have designed to support first-generation college-bound students as they make their way through the admission labyrinth, which often drains students' confidence and magnifies their fears. "Students need meaningful opportunities to explore college for themselves and build a bank of knowledge so they can make informed decisions," say the authors. Helped by their high schools, local colleges, and community-based organizations, students need to learn how to "break down their assumptions, voice their desires and fears, and begin to imagine how they would confront the barriers in their paths."

The process needs to start as early as 9th grade, say the authors. Students should gather information, visit colleges, and think through the application process as deadlines approach. One group of student leaders who went through this program collected their thoughts in a resource guide, *"Oh No! I Have to Apply to College!" How to Make the Process Less Scary* (available at http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/projectlcssb.htm).

Touring a variety of college campuses is a vital part of preparing to apply, say Chajet and Stoneman-Bell. Students are given these guidelines:

- Decide what you want to see when on campus.
- Talk to at least two students to get the real scoop.
- Meet at least one administrator and ask questions.
- Write down what you see, feel, and hear as you go.

Here are one student's impressions from a small private college:

- Small classes
- A lot of whites
- Students and professors are really friendly
- Expensive food
- $40,000 a year
- Good class conversations
- Relaxed community
- Artistic walls
- Students talk more than teachers

Here are impressions from a large public college:

- Very racially diverse
- Extremely low tuition
- Lunchroom food is great
- Lots of kids running to class
- Lots of events
- The classrooms are big
- The professor was over-talking
- Students don't ask questions in class
- Crazy schedules

Students also learn to be wary of being squired around the college exclusively by administrators, insisting on talking to students with backgrounds similar to their own. For example, a Latina high-school student voiced her worries about the small number of black and Latino students and said she wanted to go to a more diverse college, and a young woman who was herself a first-generation college student said she had felt the same way at first but argued that the small, interactive classes counterbalanced that disadvantage.

Chajet and Stoneman-Bell's program also deals with the challenges of understanding the admission process and all its terminology, for example: *What is a first-year? Need-based financial aid? TOEFL scores? CEEB/ACT codes? What if I don't have a Social Security number? What if I don't know what I want to major in? Do I have to put all of my siblings down – even if they didn't go to college? Should I put my father's name even if I don't live with him? What does subsidized mean? How do you find a Work Study job? When do you have to pay back loans? What if you go to college part-time? What is all this loan information – gross and net loan proceeds, lenders, Master Promissory Note? How do I fill out a FAFSA if I am in foster care? If I live with a family member who is not a parent? If my parents live in another country?*

The Resource Guide opens with this reassurance: "Are you feeling overwhelmed by this whole process? YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Are you feeling stressed out by this whole process? YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Are you feeling self-conscious about your grades, your test scores, or any of the personal information these people are hounding you for? YOU ARE NOT ALONE!"

The bottom line, say Chajet and Stoneman-Bell, is empowering students to make their own decisions – and giving them lots of support along the way.

"College for All?" by Lori Chajet and Sierra Stoneman-Bell in *Rethinking Schools* Winter 2008-09 (Vol. 23, #2, p. 41-45), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at lori.chajet@gmail.com and sierrasb@gmail.com.

Back to page one

6. Are Good Teachers Made – or Born?

A recent *New Yorker* article by Malcolm Gladwell compared the scouting of National Football League players and financial-services professionals to the challenge of recruiting public-school teachers who have the qualities needed to make a difference with students. The article prompted several letters. Excerpts:

• "Teaching is a delicate balance of subject-matter expertise, patience, firmness, discretion, and a genuine love of young people." Gray George, Los Angeles

• "The qualities that Gladwell identifies as critical for the success of teachers… – attentiveness to individuals in a group and skills in positive reinforcement – are routinely taught in other disciplines, such as social work and counseling. Rather than hire tens of thousands of untrained teachers in the hope of sorting out and retaining a few 'naturals,' let's try reforming teacher-education programs to develop the specific skills that evidence shows are most important." Karen Benker, Brooklyn (NY)

• "At its core, 'presence' [what Gladwell called 'with-it-ness'] could be defined as the ability to listen to everything of relevance that is happening in the room – and to respond flexibly and helpfully. This intense awareness and responsiveness, when combined with deep respect for others, radically alters the traditional student-teacher relationship, from one of control to one of collaboration. Whatever you call these qualities, it is hard to predict who will have them, but observing how people listen – and respond – may be a key to the puzzle." Steve Seidel, Cambridge (MA)

• "Teachers require the same kind of cultivation and focused attention as their charges. It may not be in the budget, but good teachers are made, not born." Philip Kay, New York City

"The Mail – Tackling Education" in *The New Yorker*, Jan. 19, 2009 (p. 5), no e-link available

Back to page one

7. A Test for Unconscious Bias and Unintentional Racism

In this *Kappan* article, University of Oregon professor/author Jean Moule describes an online tool, the Implicit Association Test (IAT), that was developed by Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji in the mid 1990s to detect unconscious bias and unintentional racism. Check it out at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit and http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/tutorials/04.html. People who have taken the IAT, says Moule, are often humbled by the hidden attitudes the it reveals – and find it helpful as they engage in the hard work of being citizens in a diverse society.

"Understanding Unconscious Bias and Unintentional Racism" by Jean Moule in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2009 (Vol. 90, #5, p. 320-326), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v90/k0901mou.htm

Back to page one

8. Short Item:

The Civil War in four minutes – This superb clip follows the battles of the U.S. Civil War, the shifting North-South border, and the death toll, accompanied by a haunting tune. Must viewing for Civil War buffs and for students who have a good grasp of the basic narrative of the war: http://www.maniacworld.com/civil-war-in-four-minutes.html.

"The Civil War in Four Minutes" by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum; for more background on the video, see http://www.lincolnlibraryandmuseum.com/m5.htm. Many thanks to David Marshall for spotting this item.

Back to page one

© Copyright 2009 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.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:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year. 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:

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
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
<u>ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews</u>
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
<u>Education Gadfly</u>
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
<u>New York Times</u>
<u>Newsweek</u>
<u>PEN Weekly NewsBlast</u>
<u>Phi Delta Kappan</u>
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
<u>Rethinking Schools</u>
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
<u>The Atlantic Monthly</u>
The Language Educator
<u>The New Yorker</u>
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal