

Marshall Memo 15

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 1, 2003

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5. How can schools of education better prepare tomorrow's teachers?
6. Short Items: NYC union work rules criticized; the bell curve lives on; parent tips

Quotes of the Week

"Honesty in October is the price of achievement in June."

Doug Reeves (see Marshall Memo 14, item 3d)

"[A] student's actually graduating from high school without becoming a reader is a tragedy."

Patricia Ingram (see item #3)

"Where it is evident that we as teachers are failing a group of students, new ideas and new approaches are called for."

Patricia Ingram (see item #3)

"A mistake in awarding tenure can be devastating, and its effects can endure for 40 years or more and affect thousands of young lives."

Paul Lehman (see item #4)

"The responsibility for instructional practice has drifted away from superintendents and principals. It has gravitated into the classroom, where individual teachers do isolated work that is largely unsupported – and that's a significant problem."

Richard Elmore, *Ed. Magazine*, Fall 2003

"Despite all our talk about the importance of education, in speaking with kids, adults regularly give the impression that school is more a minimum-security prison than a staging area for a successful life."

Paul Lehman (see item #4)

"If you love children, be a baby sitter. If you respect them, be a teacher"

Janet Sitter, professor at Blackburn College (*New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2003)

1. Lorraine Monroe at Harvard

These are the main points made by Dr. Monroe in her passionate 90-minute talk at Harvard last Monday:

- *Believe that schools can make the difference.* “A good school teaches all the kids to read, write, think, compute, love the arts, speak well on their feet, and behave in socially-acceptable ways so they can become economically independent, contributing members of society... Our product is successful children.” There could be another world leader in this school. You never know who it might be. So you’ve got to do it for all of them. Every day that a child comes into your school is a sacred day. Every day is precious. 180 days. The clock is ticking. Kids don’t need to come from middle-class homes, eat from the four food groups, to make it. To compete, it’s not about skin color, it’s about having a trained brain! Transcend the situation you’re in – be in charge of what’s in front of you. Teachers need to do this – and so do the kids. Schools have to do a lot for children at risk, including teaching table manners. Marriott Hotels will help with this, and the Plaza in New York will too! Referring to the No Child Left Behind legislation and the fear among many educators that higher-achieving students will move out, Monroe said “these kids have been left behind for us to teach.”

- *Take charge of discipline.* School is a sanctuary. When kids cross the threshold, they belong to you. “If you bring the street in here, I’m going to hurt you,” said Monroe when she was a principal. Kids are terrified when the street rules schools. They want it to be safe! Kids give you permission to rule them, tacit approval. She used to use the “Monroe death look” to calm misbehaving kids (and still does sometimes on the subway). She believes in “benevolent terrorism.” “I love you, but don’t mess with the program. If you do...” “I’m trying to save your life, and I won’t let you get in the way.” Monroe thinks that kids love crazy, passionate teachers. When they’re “outside themselves”, teachers go beyond what ministers do, changing kids’ minds, bodies, souls, futures. Her advice: use a quiet voice. Teachers who are classroom screamers make things worse. Sometimes parents get in the way of their children’s growth and the school must act. Monroe is now more focused on parent *development* than parent *involvement*. She told several stories about her school saving children from abuse and poverty and making a huge difference in their lives. They never forgot what the school did.

- *Have a first-rate curriculum.* The kids are not in charge. Don’t ask them what they want to learn. That’s why teachers and principals went to school! Within two weeks of

the beginning of the school year, school staff should know which kids are in danger of failing. There's no great magic to this. Make up your own test if the school district doesn't provide one. Then provide all students with a rich, rigorous curriculum. Monroe's school used private school curriculums and also offered fencing, tennis, and tai chi. She says that school has to be corny: it's about learning how to read and loving to read. She says that the nation depends on elementary schools to teach reading by fourth grade. Literacy is the power tool. If your brain is not damaged, you can learn it. Schools need to have assemblies regularly – and teach kids how to behave in them. Kids need to go to all kinds of museums, not just those with dinosaurs and Indians. Monroe uses Stanley Kaplan and Princeton Review approach with the underperforming schools she works with. She had mandatory tutoring sessions for students who were behind. As a result, all the schools she worked with got off the SURR (Schools Under Registration Review) list last year. Monroe believes in empowering teachers to do what it takes to get results. She told about her math teachers grouping the kids by achievement and teaching to their strengths, sometimes in groups of 64 students!

- *Require the BBC's (Blackboard Configuration).* Every teacher should have BBC's on the board when students walk in. They tell the kids that school is serious business and change the culture:

- Aim – What the kids will learn: specific, quantifiable, learnable in 45 minutes. Must relate to a diagnosed need, a standard, or a test question.
- Homework – Embeds the lesson of the day
- Do now – A 3-4 minute exercise that requires pen-in-hand work, no moving around the room, no talking, and primes kids for the upcoming lesson. Teachers should collect Do Now's occasionally.
- Agenda – The plan for the lesson.

- *Require that teachers actively teach the whole period.* The clock is ticking on kids' intellectual growth! Don't waste a second. Only go over homework that's pertinent to the lesson. Monroe feels that "frontal teaching" is a lost art. Explain to the kids how to do what they're supposed to learn. This is where you earn your money! Only then should kids do practice work at their desks, and not the whole damn period! Some teachers think the workbook and ditto sheet are the teacher. Walk around while kids are working, see if they're getting it, then re-teach if necessary. At the end, summarize, lead into the homework. Where's the magic and creativity in this structure? It's in all the components! She is scornful of "think, pair, share"

methodology: with children who are way behind, the group is not the guru; the teacher is!

- *Supervise teachers.* Principals must watch and monitor teachers every day! “If you don’t go, you won’t know.” You can never have a great school if you don’t do this! Look at the BBC’s. Do they make sense? Is that the same thing she had up two days ago? Teachers can lose the larger picture. You have to remind them. “Sanctify,” Monroe says to teachers, “Make it worthy. What did that 45 minutes have to do with getting all our kids into college? What does this have to do with saving children?” Move on ineffective teachers. Mediocrity is unacceptable! No turkeys on your staff! These teachers kill children, kill the love of learning. Never let a student get locked in with a bad teacher. Do something! Take the grievances. Get it done! “I’m about insanity,” she said. “It’s worked so far.”

- *Be the boss!* Monroe doesn’t like the term “leader.” She thinks of a leader as soft, into conciliatory management, working with groups. The BOSS is in charge and tells people clearly what needs to be done and then helps them get it done. Monroe says she never had a meeting where people didn’t leave with a clear sense of direction and support for achieving their goals. The boss needs to emanate intentionality. That’s what comes out of a leader. People know it when they see it. Monroe heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak once, and said that if he had asked, she would have gone with him to the South to join the movement. He was that compelling. Leaders have to compel their colleagues! She used to say to her staff: “We’re here to transform kids’ lives, so let’s get on with it.”

- *Keep your life in balance.* Balance is vital! You have to be insane about the work, about transforming kids’ lives. But you have to get away and have a life. “If you’re at the beck and call of the school when you’re at home, *there is no you!*”

Lorraine Monroe speech at the Harvard Graduate School of Education/Harvard Principals’ Center, November 24, 2003

2. Fourteen Ways to Track the Achievement Gap

A new study from the Educational Testing Service analyzes fourteen factors that are associated with K-12 student achievement and finds racial gaps in all fourteen and economic gaps in eleven. Some of the factors are under the control of schools, some are in the realm of the family and community. Paul Barton, author of the study, suggests that the fourteen variables should be tracked over time to measure progress, and he seems to have the agreement of an influential congressman in Washington:

Rep. John Boehner, the chairman of the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee. From the study itself (available online), these are the fourteen correlates of elementary and secondary school achievement, with a brief comment on each:

School-based:

1. *Rigor of curriculum* – This includes challenging learning expectations, an academic atmosphere, and an “academic press” (i.e., strong goals emphasizing student achievement).
2. *Teacher preparation* – This includes being certified in their field. Out-of-field teachers are much more common in high-poverty and high-minority schools.
3. *Teacher experience, turnover, and attendance* – Teachers with three or fewer years of experience are much more likely to be in high-poverty schools, and these schools have much higher teacher turnover and absenteeism.
4. *Class size* – The gap is not as pronounced in this area, perhaps because of Title I and other remediation programs, which reduce class size.
5. *Technology-assisted instruction* – The “digital divide” is real, especially in the use of high-quality software and effective exploitation of the Internet.
6. *School safety* – Minority and poor students are much more likely to attend classrooms and schools that are disorderly and feel unsafe.

Before and Beyond School:

7. *Parent participation* – This includes parent attendance at school meetings and participation in volunteering and school committees.
8. *Student mobility* – Moving from one school to another is more common among poor and minority children, disrupting academic continuity and relationships with peers.
9. *Birthweight* – Lower birthweight is associated with learning problems and is much more common among African-American children.
10. *Lead poisoning* – While this problem is being addressed and is generally receding, poor and minority children who grow up in older houses and apartments are more likely to be affected by lead poisoning, which affects cognitive performance, behavior, and development.
11. *Hunger and nutrition* – Black and Hispanic children grow up with two or three times the amount of “food insecurity” and hunger of white children; this has a direct effect on school achievement.

12. *Reading to young children* – Poor families have fewer books in the home, lower adult literacy levels, and fewer opportunities to read to children, all of which affect school performance.
13. *Television watching* – Black and Hispanic children are much more likely to watch six or more hours of television a day, which crowds out homework and leisure reading.
14. *Parent availability* – The much higher level of black and Hispanic households headed by only the mother, and the larger number of children in these households, means that children receive less parent attention.

Commenting on the study, Ron Ferguson of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government said, "These are all things that we have recognized in the past, but it is worth reminding ourselves frequently that we have to attend to them. The fact that we talk about them doesn't mean we're adequately addressing them."

"Study Probes Factors Fueling Achievement Gap" by Debra Viadero, *Education Week*, Nov. 26, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #13, p. 1, 12).

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=13ETS.h23>

The full study, *Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress*, is available online at <http://www.ets.org/research/pic/>. Note that this PDF takes a very, very long to print!

3. How to Hook Below-Level High-School Readers

Patricia Ingram, a high-school librarian in Austin, Texas, believes that the best way to boost the achievement of high-school students who are reading below grade level is to use unconventional literature to get them reading and writing. Ingram has found two kinds of books that are attractive to reluctant adolescent readers and seem to be effective.

The first is narrative poetry. Written in free verse, the whole book follows a narrative line, telling a story through the different perspectives and insights of characters in the story. Ingram recommends this genre because the books are short, each line is a single, compact thought, and they are an intense, direct expression of thought and feeling. All these features appeal to reluctant adolescent readers and can inspire them to write in a similar style. Examples include:

- *Jump Ball: A Basketball Season in Poems* by Mel Glenn
- *Foreign Exchange: A Mystery in Poems* by Mel Glenn
- *Split Image* by Mel Glenn
- *My Friend's Got This Problem* by Mel Glenn

- *Mr. Candler* by Mel Glenn
- *Back to Class* by Mel Glenn, photographs by Michael Bernstein
- *Witness* by Karen Hesse
- *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse
- *Learning to Swim: A Memoir* by Ann Turner
- Also titles by Sonya Sones, Sharon Creech, Cynthia Rylant, and Ron Loertge.

The second kind of book Ingram recommends is graphic novels. These include comic books, but also more sophisticated works on a variety of fiction and non-fiction topics. These books have the advantage of being short, graphic, and engaging to reluctant readers. Some examples:

- *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman
- *King* by Ho Che Anderson
- *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory* by Will Eisner
- *Fax from Sarajevo: A Story of Survival* by Joe Kubert
- *The Last Knight: An Introduction to Don Quixote* adapted by Will Eisner
- *Give It Up! And Other Short Stories by Franz Kafka* illustrated by Peter Kuper
- *The Cartoon Guide to Genetics* by Larry Gonick and Mark Wheelis
- *The Tale of One Bad Rat* by Bryan Talbot
- *The Amazing "True" Story of a Teenage Single Mom* by Katheine Arnoldi
- *Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned* by Judd Winick.

Some teachers blanch at the thought of using comic-format books in the classroom, but Ingram argues that such books can bridge the gap that kids see between their lives inside and outside school. Reading such books can also inspire students to write their own graphic novels, which will develop their reading comprehension and research skills.

Ingram concludes with these words: "Reluctant readers at any age are a difficult problem and a heartache for teachers, but a student's actually graduating from high school without becoming a reader is a tragedy. Where it is evident that we as teachers are failing a group of students, new ideas and new approaches are called for. These children have something to say. We need to provide a venue for them. Engaging students in writing, using formats that work for them, will lead these hard-to-reach students to a greater enjoyment of and participation in reading.

"Hooks for Reluctant Readers" by Patricia Ingram, *Education Week*, Nov. 26, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #13, p. 26) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=13Ingram.h23>

4. Ten Ideas on School Reform

In a commentary piece in last week's *Education Week*, Paul Lehman, a retired University of Michigan music professor, put forward these proposals for improving schools. He notes that some are costly and would involve changes in collective bargaining agreements, but others could be done today and one (the last on the list) would cost absolutely nothing:

- *Hire only very well-qualified teachers to begin with.* While this sounds obvious, Lehman says that too many districts rush to hire the first person who appears with the required certification.

- *Provide systematic and effective mentoring to new teachers.* Novice teachers should be phased into full responsibilities through a residency and an internship/ apprenticeship, with plenty of systematic help and support along the way.

- *Reform the tenure review process.* Tenure decisions "are unquestionably the most important decisions schools ever make." They should not be a routine or an automatic process!

- *Make it easier to fire incompetent teachers.* After genuine efforts have been made to help underperforming teachers, it should be possible to terminate a teacher who is still ineffective without a long, expensive, disruptive, painful, felony-level process.

- *Reorganize the school day.* Lehman draws on the 1994 report *Prisoners of Time*, which said that the traditional school year of 180 days, six hours per day, is "a fundamental design flaw in American education." Allocation of time should be based "not on how much time the students spend in his or her seat, but on how much he or she learns." Students should have at least 5-1/2 hours a day on the core disciplines (i.e., English and language arts, math, science, civics, history, geography, the arts, and foreign languages).

- *Improve teachers' working conditions and treat them as professionals.* This means giving teachers time to plan and time to reflect, opportunities to work with their colleagues to improve the curriculum and the school, time to observe the teaching of more experienced colleagues, and opportunities for professional growth. "Most important of all, teachers, need to be treated as professionals, not as hourly employees... they should be freed from the trivial or irrelevant duties that now consume much of their time. The school environment should support rather than demean teachers."

- *Base teachers' salaries on their effectiveness.* Who will decide on effectiveness? Lehman suggests that it can be done by groups of professional teachers.

- *Establish a system of tiered licensure based on professional development.* There would be several levels linked to demonstrated mastery of teaching. Each license would be valid for a limited period, should be renewed through a set process, and should require periodic assessment of teaching effectiveness.

- *Make greater use of differentiated staffing.* Lehman draws a parallel to medicine, where surgeons depend on the expertise of other professionals to perform a complicated procedure. He suggests greater specialization in schools, with people in different roles compensated at different levels.

- *Reform our own attitudes toward schools in speaking to kids.* Lehman is struck by how often adults say things to kids like “Aren’t you glad school is almost over?” or “I remember how I hated math in school.” It would be so much more positive if we said things like, “What are you studying in school? Have you learned about Lewis and Clark yet? What books are you reading? I used to love science.”

“Ten Steps to School Reform at Bargain Prices” by Paul Lehman, *Education Week*, Nov. 26, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #13, p. 36, 28)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=13lehman.h23>

5. Reforming Teacher Preparation

Ed. Magazine asked several leading educators what should be done to improve the preparation of teachers. Here are some highlights:

- *Jon Saphier* (President of Research for Better Teaching in Massachusetts) draws an analogy to medicine, which developed a common core of knowledge for medical schools in 1910. The result, Saphier says, is “a profession that today earns public trust and whose performance in the envy of the world.” Saphier advocates a common core of knowledge in education in several key areas:

- Skillful application of strategies on motivation, relationship building, confidence building, and the capacity to explicitly teach all students, especially disadvantaged students.
- Classroom management skills for setting up clear expectations, establishing routines and procedures, building a climate of psychological safety, risk taking, community building, and ownership.
- General and content-specific pedagogical knowledge in each academic discipline at every grade level
- The skills of collaborating with colleagues on analysis of student data, student work, and joint work on improving teaching.

Saphier says we should demand that all beginning teachers be exposed to this common core of skill and knowledge, and that their entry to the profession be structured in a way that gives them continued opportunities for development as they gradually assume more and more responsibility.

• *Joel Zarrow* (Director of School Services at Partners in School Innovation in California) says that peer review should be the norm for teachers. “Firefighters debrief after they put out a fire, doctors have grand rounds – even football players watch tapes of their plays after a game.” Teachers need to develop these kinds of professional learning communities and interact with colleagues in ways that may be new and uncomfortable at first. What prevents this from happening more are:

- chockerblock-full teaching schedules;
- a lack of collaborative time;
- ambiguity about what constitutes best practice;
- teachers’ own belief about their role and their identity as teachers.

Zarrow says that “teachers see themselves as teachers of children, which of course they are. However, they are much less inclined to see themselves as teachers of each other.” But he thinks that the best schools of education are beginning to build this type of training into their programs and internships. Zarrow urges them to provide this type of support to new teachers in their surrounding communities.

• *Jon Schnur* (CEO of New Leaders for New Schools) writes that schools of education need to develop “meaningful yardsticks to measure school success” and cited “a persistent national clash between an obsession to train students solely for high scores on multiple-choice tests and an angry disenchantment with measuring progress of public schools, educators, or education schools.” Schnur calls for collaborative work to develop meaningful targets and performance indicators for all public schools, including student proficiency measured by quality standardized tests, student performance in writing and oral presentations, student attitudes and culture, and attendance. Finally, Schnur urges schools of education to use the results produced by their graduates in the real world to restructure their programs for selecting and training future teachers and principals.

“The Making of a 21st-Century Educator” in *Ed. Magazine*, Fall 2003 (Vol. XLVII, #2)

6. Short Items:

- *New York City Union Work Rules Criticized* – In City Council hearings last month, the union work rules of New York City’s teachers, principals, and custodians were criticized and defended. Eva Moskowitz, head of the City Council’s education committee, branded the rules the “elephant in the room” and called witnesses to testify on their impact on education. Chancellor Joel Klein called the contracts “dysfunctional” and likened their processes to those in the former Soviet Union. His comments focused on provisions that limit principals’ ability to choose teachers, sometimes force principals to accept the most senior candidate for a job rather than the person of their choice, and necessitate a 2-3 year process to dismiss an incompetent teacher. Klein also criticized provisions that keep central office managers from transferring administrators and even restrict on the number of tiles a custodian can replace in a given month. Klein said, “The question to me is, is any provision helpful or hurtful to our kids, and to the teachers and principals who are trying to do the right thing?” Several principals testified, lambasting rules that keep them from telling teachers how to write lesson plans and direct professional development. “You have to work superhard to work around the system,” said Anthony Lombardi, a Queens elementary principal. “And many times you have to be extremely creative. But should it be that difficult to improve the day-to-day instruction in the building?” Teachers’ union president Randi Weingarten hit back, accusing Ms. Moskowitz of “demonizing” unions, saying that Klein is micromanaging instruction, and pointing to her union’s willingness to negotiate more flexible work rules in some schools and allow certain work rules to be waived by a vote of the faculty. Jill Levy, head of the principals’ union, said: “Good, mediocre, and bad schools all work under the same contract.”

“N.Y.C. Unions on Hot Seat at Hearing” by Jeff Archer, *Education Week*, Nov. 26, 2003 (Vol. XXIII #13, p.1, 10) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=13NYC.h23>

- *Very smart, sorta smart, kinda dumb.** We have a poster child for the long-standing American belief in innate intelligence! Bruce MacDonald, retired principal of Weston High School in Massachusetts, had this to say in a letter to the *Boston Globe* (November 24, 2003): “What cannot be improved is the innate capacity of a kid to learn, regardless of the most learned textbooks and expensive tutoring. Mother Nature distributes intellectual power in a predictable pattern, a pattern known as “the bell curve.” For every genius, there is a numbskull at the opposite end of the curve. In the

middle is the majority of students, whose capacity to learn varies from those who struggle to get passing grades to those who succeed in getting good grades without staying up all night. That's the way it is, folks: low populations at the extremes, and a large majority distributed on a symmetrical curve between them. Tinkering with standardized tests, lengthening the school year, decreasing class size, wearing a rabbit's foot, etc., none of these does much to change the innate capacity that a student brings to the classroom."

* This is Jeff Howard's ironic categorization of beliefs on innate ability.

- **Parent tips** – A new publication helps parents understand the information available to them as a result of *No Child Left Behind* and how to use the information to more effectively advocate for their children. Included are: Eight Tips on Reading a School Report Card; How Welcoming is Your School? 10 Tips for Parents Who Choose to Stay Put; 12 Things You Should Expect from Your Schools and Yourself; No Child Left Behind; What's In It for Parents? Closing the Achievement Gaps; and Parents and Teachers Talking Together. Available at <http://www.plassociates.org/eight.html/>

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should be covered, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education/Curriculum Update (ASCD)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Elementary School Journal
Harpers
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
New York Times
New Yorker
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Review of Educational Research
Rethinking Schools
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine
and occasional books, lectures, and websites.

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The Marshall Memo is published weekly (with occasional breaks), usually on Monday. Major support from Research for Better Teaching and New Leaders for New Schools makes it possible to offer individual subscriptions at \$50 a year. To subscribe, please contact Kim Marshall at kim.marshall8@verizon.net or at 222 Clark Road, Brookline, MA 02445 (617-566-4353).