

Marshall Memo 140

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 12, 2006

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Quotes of the Week

“A school committed to learning will bring teachers together to make certain they provide a consistent answer to the question, ‘Learn what?’”

Rick DuFour, Becky DuFour, Damon Lopez, and Anthony Muhammad (see item #1)

“Anyone can be a critic. Good teachers do something much harder: They look for the precise moment at which a writer stumbles onto her true topic. They listen for that first whisper of the writer’s voice, no matter how faint. They listen for the word or phrase too good to replace, for the rhythm of sentences that falls just right on the ear. Teachers hear the deer in the forest.”

Vicki Spandel (see item #3)

“No single assessment can ever be regarded as ‘the truth.’ Assessment at its best offers support and insight, not judgment.”

Vicki Spandel (*ibid.*)

“Whatever they do, teachers have to make decisions based on the real children in front of them.”

Mary Ann Smith (see item #4.)

“A teacher’s time is most effectively spent teaching skills and strategies rather than correcting papers.”

Mary Ann Smith (*ibid.*)

“I feel safe asking for help. I share my theories, I ask questions, I offer what I know.”

A teacher, speaking of her writing support group (see item #4)

“For young Americans in 2006, world history must no longer be seen as an elective subject. Everyone needs to be conversant with the history, culture, and geography of the flattening world they inhabit.”

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation report on world history standards (see item #6)

1. “Professional Learning Communities” Produce Results

In this inspiring *Journal of Staff Development* article, consultants Rick and Becky DuFour and two principals, Damon Lopez and Anthony Muhammad, describe the process that boosted the student achievement in two schools to extraordinary levels.

Lopez’s elementary school in San Diego was the lowest-achieving of 21 schools in his district, and staff members had convinced themselves that students’ economic, social, and language challenges meant that high achievement was impossible. Yet by 2005, the school was one of the highest-performing in California and had earned national awards for excellence. Muhammad’s middle school outside Detroit was challenged by high turnover and disparities in achievement that staff attributed to social class, race, and family history. Yet by 2005, the percentage of students meeting state English language arts standards more than doubled to 87%, well above the state average, and math achievement surged to equal the state average.

How did these two schools close the achievement gap? Each school’s trajectory was slightly different, but both embraced the DuFours’ principles of “professional learning community.” The authors outline seven key steps:

- *Face the brutal facts.* Each principal led staff to look at state test data and confront the truth: many students were not academically successful. When staff acknowledged this fact, the leader was able to make the case for change.

- *Create a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students.* “A school committed to learning,” write the authors, “will bring teachers together to make certain they provide a consistent answer to the question, ‘Learn what?’” Lopez and Muhammad had teacher teams clarify the specific knowledge and skills that students needed to learn by the end of each grade and course.

- *Monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis.* Teacher teams wrote common interim assessments to answer the question, “How do we know if each student is learning?” Teachers also agreed on common criteria for assessing student work. “Students learned,” explain the authors, “that their work was judged according to the same assessments and specific, agreed-upon standards, rather than the idiosyncrasies of individual teachers.”

- *Create teams that work to achieve learning goals.* Teachers in both schools collaborated in grade-level or course teams. In Lopez’s school, team meeting time was created in two ways: (a) by a staff agreement to extend the teaching day by 15 minutes four days a week and then dismissing students an hour early every Tuesday, creating a one-hour block of

time to be used only to clarify curriculum expectations and monitor each student's learning; and (b) once a month, two grade-level teams work together for 70 minutes while the principal and support staff supervise students in a comprehensive physical education rotation or character education assembly. Muhammad took a different approach in his school: he used a provision in the contract that required teachers to pull a daily 25-minute supervisory duty. He declared that time to be collaborative team time, and teachers were happy to trade hall or cafeteria duty for meetings with their colleagues.

- *Team meetings focused on issues of student learning rather than managerial tasks.* “Teachers were not told merely to ‘go collaborate,’” write the authors, “but were given specific parameters, structures, and responsibilities to guide their work.” Both principals gave teams templates for recording essential learning outcomes, common assessments, and team analysis of results, and required teams to submit regular reports using these forms. In addition, both principals actively participated in team meetings discussing struggling students. The authors point to the key characteristic of both principals’ instructional leadership: “Their personal attention to the question, ‘Was it learned?’ rather than ‘Was it taught?’ and their close monitoring of the products teams created helped teachers stay focused on the right issue.”

- *Use evidence of student achievement to guide professional practice.* Teacher teams used the results of each interim assessment to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses and catalyze a discussion on the best ideas, methods, and materials to improve their individual and collective practice.

- *Provide additional time and support for students having difficulty.* Many schools proclaim that they have high expectations, but the real test is what happens when students are failing. Lopez’s and Muhammad’s schools ensured that struggling students got extra time and support through structured, systematic, schoolwide interventions. It was not left to chance. Three times a year in Lopez’s school, substitutes cover three grade-level teams’ classes while teachers have a two-hour meeting with the principal to develop a specific plan to ensure success of every student who is not achieving up to standards.

These steps explain *how* the schools improved. But there was another component: *why* they improved. “In both situations,” write the authors, “these school leaders challenged staff members not merely to complete steps in a process, but to rally around a compelling moral purpose.” For Lopez’s school, it was “to create opportunities for high education and economic advancement in families that had been locked in poverty for generations.” For Muhammad’s school, it was “to close the achievement gap and demonstrate the ability of black students to achieve at high levels.”

Both schools went beyond articulating the rhetoric of mission statements and noble intentions and made the following promises to students:

- You will acquire the same basic knowledge and skills as the other students in your course or grade level no matter which teacher you have.
- Your learning will be carefully monitored, and you will be given plenty of chances to show what you have learned.

- If you have trouble learning anything, you will receive extra time and support right away.
- Your teachers will tell you up front the standards they will use to grade your work and will show you samples of what good work looks like.
- Your teachers will work together to find and use the best ways to help you learn at high levels.

“Clarifying the assurances an entire staff is prepared to make to every student entrusted to them,” conclude the authors, “is a powerful strategy both for improving practice and creating a sense of community that can transform a school.”

“Promises Kept” by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Damon Lopez, and Anthony Muhammad in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 53-56), no e-link available

2. Using Interim Assessments to Improve Writing

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, Missouri staff developers Julie Blaine and Marcia Haskin describe the process they use to work with schools to improve students’ writing:

- They gather data on writing performance from the state assessment and in-school assessments.
- They talk at length with the principal and lay the groundwork for the initiative.
- They work with the principal to identify 90-to-120-minute blocks of time each month for grade-level teacher teams to meet. If team meetings are not already built into the schedule, the principal arranges for substitute coverage or pays stipends for after-school time.
- The principal asks teachers at each grade level to decide on a common prompt that reflects the curriculum and have students write to the prompt.
- Teachers meet each month to score and discuss their students’ writing. The overall goal is to work toward common expectations, vocabulary, and level of understanding about their students’ writing. Blaine and Haskin report that the first time teachers meet with the facilitator, they often have excuses for not bringing any student writing or have negative things to say about the writing they bring. Facilitators are trained to build teacher trust by assuring that they don’t know which pieces of student writing come from which teacher’s classroom.
- Teachers are given the option of scoring their students’ writing using Missouri’s grade-level rubrics (see below for a sample) or developing their own rubrics.
- Teachers use a “blind score” system, with each group of 10-12 student papers scored by 2-3 teachers, each writing the scores in the right-hand column of a scoring sheet and folding the sheet over when they are finished so the next scorer can’t see what previous scorers wrote. The final scorer is the students’ homeroom teacher, who unfolds the scoring sheet and looks with his or her colleagues at the scores each student received.
- Teachers look for student papers that received the same score from all teachers and use those papers as exemplars at the 4, 3, 2, and 1 level of performance. The facilitator leads a

discussion about any discrepancies in scoring between teachers, modeling writing terminology that can be used in teacher-student conferences.

- Homeroom teachers count the number of students scoring at the 4, 3, 2, and 1 level, getting a snapshot of students' performance. Teachers look for common strengths and weaknesses in students' writing across all classes at that grade.

- Teachers then discuss common areas of weakness and set an instructional goal for the month of teaching before the next assessment. The key question is what classroom approaches will stand the best chance of improving students' performance. If there is sufficient trust in the team, teachers may admit to gaps in their expertise, for example, "This paper has no organization, but I'm not sure I know how to teach organization." This kind of statement is a wonderful opening for colleagues to share best practices and for the facilitator to organize some professional development.

- After each monthly assessment during the year, teachers or facilitators repeat the process, graphing the improvements in students' 4-3-2-1 performance percentages on each of the seven traits on the rubric. For example, in one school in which Blaine and Haskin worked, students' proficiency in "awareness of audience" went from 23% proficient to 48%. By the end of the year, the third graders in this school, which had been targeted for its low reading achievement, met all AYP targets and were 5.6% above the state average.

Grade 3 Missouri State Writing Scoring Guide

4 – Advanced

THE PAPER:

- Has an effective beginning, middle, and end;
- Contains a clear controlling idea;
- Clearly addresses the topic and provides specific and relevant details/examples;
- Contains words that are specific, accurate, and suited to the topic;
- Consistently uses complete sentences;
- Clearly shows an awareness of audience and purpose;
- Contains few errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling.

3 – Proficient

THE PAPER:

- Has a beginning, middle, and end;
- Contains a controlling idea;
- Addresses the topic and uses relevant details/examples;
- Contains some words that are specific, accurate, and related to the topic;
- Generally uses complete sentences;
- Shows an awareness of audience and purpose;
- May contain some errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling that are not significantly distracting to the reader.

2 – Needs Improvement

THE PAPER:

- Has evidence of a beginning, middle, and end;
- Contains a general sense of direction, but may lack focus;
- Generally addresses the topic, but may contain some details that are not relevant;
- Uses words that tend to be repetitive, imprecise, and ordinary;
- Contains some incomplete sentences that may be distracting to the reader;
- Shows some awareness of audience and purpose;
- Contains errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling that may be distracting to the reader.

1 – Does Not Meet Standards

THE PAPER:

- May lack evidence of a beginning, middle, and/or end;
- Is difficult to follow and/or lacks focus;
- Attempts to address the topic, but lacks development;
- Uses words that are consistently repetitive, dull, and colorless;
- Includes incomplete sentences that are distracting to the reader;
- Shows little or no awareness of audience and purpose;
- Contains repeated errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization and/or spelling that may be distracting to the reader.

(<http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/ModelCurriculum/writingsg3.doc>)

“Student Work Drives High-Quality Professional Development” by Julie Blaine and Marcia Haskin in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 22-29), no e-link available

3. Advice on Nurturing Student Writers

In this eloquent *Journal of Staff Development* article, writing guru Vicki Spandel (who helped develop the widely-used 6-trait rubric) advises teachers on the most effective ways to develop students’ writing to high levels of proficiency.

For starters, she says, it’s essential to show students the rubrics that will be used to evaluate their writing – along with samples of proficient writing. “Students have a right to see samples of what we want from them as writers,” says Spandel.

Second, student writers need to learn how to self-assess. “Whereas we assess to grade and to coach,” says Spandel, “they assess to understand and to revise... They will be skilled assessors if, like us, they are avid readers and practiced listeners. They will be skilled assessors if, like us, they write every day so that thinking like a writer becomes a habit. They will be skilled assessors if, like us, they continually think about what it is they value in writing.”

Spandel says teachers can help students assess their own writing by:

- Creating checklists with students and constantly revising them.

- Talking about literature as the work of writers and using every book, article, story, or essay as a lesson about how to write well.
- “Treat each piece of problematic writing,” advises Spandel, “as a lesson specially packaged just for you and your students, asking them, ‘If this were your piece, what would you do to make it stronger?’”
- Having students read their writing aloud, more than once, asking, “Does this make sense? Is this text pulling me in or pushing me away?” Hearing one’s own writing is essential to self-assessment, says Spandel.

Third, our feedback to students should be *useful*. “I do not mean useful to data gatherers eager to report on perceived growth, decline, or stagnation,” says Spandel. “Rather, I am talking about its usefulness to the people assessment should be designed to serve first and foremost: student writers. In this spirit, we must ensure that assessment at every level helps students to identify not only the needs to be addressed but, even more important, strengths to build on.”

Fourth, it’s important to go beyond rubric scores and give students authentic, encouraging feedback on their writing. Grades and numbers are not what students want, says Spandel. “They need our voices and our hearts. They need to know their writing has touched us in some way... In the end, what matters most in the world of writing is immeasurable. So student writers have a right to assessment that is not just about numbers, but also includes room for a smile, a laugh, a sigh, applause, and the honest and passionate response that all writers hunger to hear.” In other words, says Spandel, our feedback to students should be “not only passionate, but compassionate as well. Anyone can be a critic. Good teachers do something much harder: They look for the precise moment at which a writer stumbles onto her true topic. They listen for that first whisper of the writer’s voice., no matter how faint. They listen for the word or phrase too good to replace, for the rhythm of sentences that falls just right on the ear. Teachers hear the deer in the forest.”

The whole point of assessment is to uplift writers, says Spandel. “So much of assessment is about identifying problems. But courage is what writers need most. Therefore, encouragement, or the bolstering of that courage, is what we as teachers and writing coaches ought to provide. If I am trying to push a large rock up a hill, the last thing I need is for someone to tell me I probably won’t make it – or by how many feet I will miss the mark. For many student writers, the hill feels steep, and the rock is growing heavier by the minute. In that situation, courage is all that stands between that student and giving up.”

Finally, teachers should remember that no matter how sure they feel about their own assessment of a piece of writing, another teacher may have a different opinion. “No single assessment can ever be regarded as ‘the truth,’” says Spandel. “Assessment at its best offers support and insight, not judgment.”

“Assessing with Heart” by Vicki Spandel in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 14-18), no e-link available

4. Keys to an Effective Writing Program

In this article in the *Journal of Staff Development*, Mary Ann Smith of the National Writing Project distills the approaches and principles that she and her colleagues have found lead to successful student writing in classrooms:

- *Make time for writing.* The key skills of writing “cannot be picked up from a few minutes here and a few minutes there, all stolen from more ‘important’ subjects,” writes Smith.

- *Write in the content areas.* Writing should be woven into every subject in every part of the school day, says Smith. This improves the level of content-area rigor and thinking and prepares students for college-level work.

- *Get students involved in choosing what to write about.* Writing proficiency is hobbled if students are dependent on teachers for topics – especially if they are fed a steady diet of gimmicky story starters. Students need to take responsibility for choosing and developing their own topics – with solid guidance from their teachers. A NAEP study of 4th- and 8th-grade classrooms found that effective teachers:

- Engage students in reflection, analysis, and synthesis. For example, asking students to read a story and compare the motivation of two characters is better than asking students to describe one character.
- Provide a framework (not a formula) for developing and organizing ideas. For example, this typical fourth-grade assignment, *Describe your bedroom, using specific details*, doesn’t give students enough structure. A better assignment would be to ask students to write for a specific audience (perhaps a classmate) with a purpose in mind (give enough detail so the classmate will know your interests and what’s important to you).
- Have students write about an area of expertise not shared by their readers.
- Offer choice without leaving all the decisions to students. For example, an effective assignment for fourth graders would be: *Interview an older person at home and write the results of the interview in paragraphs, including facts about the person’s childhood, young adulthood, and mature adulthood and how the interviewee had fun at each stage.*

- *Respond to writing.* “Don’t throw anything out,” advises one writing expert. Keep writing folders in chronological order, and at various points during the year sit down with each student and help him or her articulate what’s being learned and what the challenges are. For example, a student might say, “Right now, I know I am really good at using ‘describing’ words, but I need to make my stories longer.” By being systematic about this process, says Smith, “Writing becomes intentional rather than some kind of happy or unhappy accident.”

- *Teach writing (in addition to just assigning it).* “A teacher’s time is most effectively spent teaching skills and strategies rather than correcting papers,” says Smith. This means teaching purposeful mini-lessons (about ten minutes long) that focus on specific strategies drawn from areas that students are struggling with in their own writing – for example, capital letters and periods, or finding alternatives to using the word ‘and’ between sentences.

“Teaching writing is not an easy task,” says Smith. “Whatever they do, teachers have to make

decisions based on the real children in front of them. Genuine teaching and learning is intensely personal, not scripted.”

- *Stay involved with a professional community.* Teachers benefit enormously from collegial support in study groups, institutes, and retreats focused on what’s working in teaching writing. The key is establishing a climate where teaching and learning can flourish. Teachers need to be able to say (in the words of one practitioner): “I feel safe asking for help. I share my theories, I ask questions, I offer what I know.”

“Immersion in Writing” by Mary Ann Smith in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 10-13, 20-21), no e-link available

5. Deepening Literacy Instruction

In this letter to *Education Week* responding to E. D. Hirsch’s recent article on teaching reading comprehension (see Marshall Memo 134), Massachusetts reading specialist Susan Hauptman agrees with Hirsch’s argument that teaching “main idea” and “sequence” doesn’t improve student’s comprehension skills. “Teaching a student about the main idea of one passage will not transfer to comprehension of another,” she writes. “Having a student restore a passage’s sequence does little to effect deeper understanding.”

She goes on to suggest two ways to improve students’ understanding within the parameters of existing curriculum materials:

- *Guiding students’ reading of appropriate, well-written fiction and interesting non-fiction.* “We must prepare them before they read, stop them often to check their comprehension, ask good questions, and teach students how to ask good questions of themselves. If they are missing the point, we must show them the sections in the text that make that point. We cannot allow students to proceed without making sure they understand.”

- *Broadening students’ background knowledge by reading to them often on a wide range of topics.* “By being read to aloud,” says Hauptman, “students learn new concepts and new content, and hear new vocabulary used in meaningful contexts. Too many collect bits of information without becoming knowledge-builders. Students must connect new information to old, or there is little long-term understanding. Reading aloud is an extraordinarily powerful way to impart knowledge.”

“Through meaningful discussions and reading aloud frequently,” Hauptman concludes, “we must continue to teach students about alligators, Aristotle, and the Appalachian Trail... Not only will we be preparing students for the inevitable standardized tests, but we also will be teaching them that knowledge provides the fertile terrain on which ideas grow.”

“Alternative Strategies to Build Comprehension” by Susan Hauptman, a letter in *Education Week*, June 7, 2006 (Vol. 25, #39, p. 38), no free e-link available

6. World History Standards: A Critical State-by-State Report

A new analysis by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation rates the quality of world history standards in all 50 states. These states earned a solid A: California, Massachusetts,

Virginia, Indiana, Georgia, New York, Minnesota, and South Carolina. Another four states got B's: Arizona, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Jersey. Another four got C's: Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and West Virginia. The rest got D's and F's. The full report and grades are at: [http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/Social%20Studies%20Standards%20\(12\).pdf](http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/Social%20Studies%20Standards%20(12).pdf).

“For young Americans in 2006, world history must no longer be seen as an elective subject,” writes Walter Russell Mead, the author of the report. “Everyone needs to be conversant with the history, culture, and geography of the flattening world they inhabit.” The report found that geography standards were quite strong, perhaps because of the National Geographic Society’s work in this area. And some world history tests were solid, especially the Advanced Placement (AP), SAT II, and New York Regents exams. The Fordham report gave especially high marks to the course description that accompanies the AP World History exam. Here’s a link to this comprehensive and useful document:

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/ap/students/worldhistory/ap-cd-worldhist-0607.pdf.

Why such weak standards in so many states? Writing world history standards is difficult, Mead concedes: there’s so much material to cover that standards writers must make difficult choices. The problem is that many states chose poorly. These were the main weaknesses in the low-scoring states, according to the Fordham report:

- Little or no historical content;
 - Or, in other cases, so much content that teachers couldn’t possibly cover it all;
 - An excessive focus on modern European history, slighting non-Western cultures;
 - Or, in other cases, an “extreme multiculturalism;”
 - Burying standards in the “murky non-subject of ‘social studies;”
 - Providing no logical timeline, relying instead on trendy “themes without regard to the story of history.”
- Standards that are far too sweeping. Two examples: Alaska: “Understand the forces of change and continuity that shape human history by examining the major developments in societies, as well as changing patterns related to class, ethnicity, race, and gender.” Michigan: “Identify major decisions in the history of Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, and Latin America, analyze contemporary factors contributing to the decisions and consider alternate courses of action.”

What should teachers and school leaders in low-ranked states do to give their students a college-track world history curriculum? The Fordham Foundation suggests the following stopgap measures while their states get their standards act together:

- Go to the websites of A-scoring states and use their standards.
- Use the AP World History exam course guide (see link above) to build the course.
- Require students to pass a rigorous world history test as a graduation requirement.

“World History, Lost in Translation” by Chester Finn and Martin Davis, *The Education Gadfly*, June 8, 2006 (Vol. 6, #23), <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/index.cfm>

7. Tips for Meeting Facilitators: Paraphrasing with Skill

Paraphrasing is a vital skill for those facilitating meetings. In this thoughtful column in the *Journal of Staff Development*, Robert Garmston gives some pointers:

- *Why are we here?* At the beginning of a meeting, it's extremely helpful for the facilitator to restate the problem that has been placed before the group and the processes by which the group will work – what some call TAGTAU: Task as Given, Task as Understood.

- *Clarify the purpose of each agenda item.* As the meeting proceeds, it's a good idea for the facilitator to paraphrase each item as it's taken up. This means studying the agenda beforehand and staying “in the moment” during the meeting.

- *Keep a balcony and on-the-ground view.* “Skilled athletes have this capacity,” says Garmston. “Like an extraordinary quarterback, see what is happening on the entire playing field, and within that perspective, choose and execute moves in the moment.”

- *Paraphrase important comments as they are made.* “Too often,” says Garmston, “ideas stay vague or disconnected, a loss to all. Paraphrasing... helps groups hear the meaning of what is said.” Some examples:

- “Three ideas seem to be emerging...”
- “Students are not showing respect for one another.”
- “So you want students to take responsibility for their learning.”
- And it's often helpful to add, “Does this seem a fair statement about where you are?”

- *Avoid five errors.* Garmston points out ways that facilitators sometimes mess up their paraphrasing:

- Saying “I think I hear you saying...” This is soooooo sixties and can annoy people and distract from the clarification that's being attempted.
- Using the wrong pronoun. “‘I’ is the wrong pronoun for starting a paraphrase,” says Garmston. “‘I’ carries the message that this is about the facilitator's listening, not about the speaker's ideas. Instead, signal your intention to paraphrase with the pronoun, ‘you’: You are wondering... You are feeling... You're confused about... You're pleased with...”
- Using the wrong voice. Paraphrases should “curl up” at the end of the sentence, conveying tentativeness and inviting listeners to chime in and improve or clarify (“No, that's not quite what I'm trying to say”).
- Too many words. “If a paraphrase is so long the speaker must take a breath,” says Garmston, “it is too long to be tracked and understood. Go for simplicity and few words. Sometimes a simple facial expression or one word lets the speaker know he or she is understood.”
- Too often. Some novice facilitators paraphrase too much, which slows down the process and detracts from the content.

“Skillful Paraphrasing Allows Groups to Examine What Is Being Said” by Robert Garmston with Carolyn McKanders in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 65-66). All of Garmston's columns can be found at <http://www.nsd.org/library/authors/garmston.cfm>.

8. Just-In-Time Worrying and Other Leadership Pointers

“Educators live at a frenetic pace that gets the job done but limits how much we can really learn in the fast lane of real time in school,” writes William Sommers, president of the National Staff Development Council, in this catchy piece in the *Journal of Staff Development*. He suggests a few principles that have helped him when he’s “tired, frustrated, or just plain mad:”

- *Just-in-time worrying* – “If I worry too soon, I have to worry twice,” says Sommers, which “diverts my energy and attention.” He advises planning prudently but putting off worrying until the last minute.

- *Zapping versus sapping* – “Some people sap me of my energy and send me into a downward spiral,” notes Sommers. Of course educators can’t always choose whom they spend time with, he concedes. “But you can limit the time you spend with people who sap you and spend more time with people who zap you.”

- *Inner terrorism* – Sommers tries to avoid “scaring myself with things I can’t control.” Instead, he advises, we should zero in on what we can control or are responsible for doing. “I can’t make everyone else change,” he writes, “but I can still make a difference for others.”

- *Radiate optimism* – American Indian chief Wilma Mankiller had a necklace with a two-headed wolf, each head facing in the opposite direction. One represented the positive side (I can do anything) and one the negative side (it’s not possible). Asked which side was stronger, Mankiller said, “Whichever one I feed the most.” Sommers quotes Robert Marzano’s finding that optimism is one of the three most important attributes of effective school leaders (along with honesty and considering all factors), and concludes, “We want to be agents of hope. People want to be around others who are optimistic.”

“Reflection is Crucial to Improving Work and Life” by William Sommers in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2006 (Vol. 27, #3, p. 7), no e-link available

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo,

please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 36 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 scores of articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Jimmy Kilpatrick
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
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
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice
Times Educational Supplement