

Marshall Memo 236

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 26, 2008

In This Issue:

1. [Why are all the newbies teaching ninth grade?](#)
2. [An analysis of three effective high-school reform models](#)
3. [Findings from the business world about implementing ideas effectively](#)
4. [A Georgia “core knowledge” school struts its stuff](#)
5. [Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe on teaching for understanding](#)
6. [Douglas Reeves on not using grades to leverage attendance](#)
7. [How are Millennial teachers different from Gen-X and Boomers?](#)
8. [Teacher book groups enrich professional practice](#)
9. [A deaf tutor’s advantages teaching English](#)
10. [The treatment of Islam in ten world history textbooks](#)
11. [What are the most important factors in pre-school classrooms?](#)

Quotes of the Week

“If you want to reshape high school, start by changing ninth grade.”
Billie Donegan (see item #1)

“The way to ace a reading test is by being exposed to a coherent, sequenced, broad, rigorous curriculum.”
Linda Bevilacqua (see item #4)

“There are no magical overnight solutions to reading comprehension because reading comprehension depends on knowledge and vocabulary. It’s an organic and cumulative process – that’s why you need an organic and cumulative curriculum.”
E.D. Hirsch (*ibid.*)

“If you expect them to learn rigorous content, I don’t see why they can’t learn it.”
Rob Herrin, Georgia third-grade teacher (*ibid.*)

“Biases persist. Silences are profound and intentional.”
Gilbert Sewall in a critique of how history textbooks treat Islam (see item #10)

“To teach English, you have to talk. And so we talk. And out of the talking, I’ve become a sort of confessor. They leave here feeling better. And when I have a good day, I leave here walking on clouds.”
John Kuhlman, 84, who tutors immigrant adults in English (see item #9)

1. Why Are All the Newbies Teaching Ninth Grade?

(Originally titled “The Linchpin Year”)

“If you want to reshape high school, start by changing ninth grade,” says Colorado consultant Billie Donegan in this hard-hitting *Educational Leadership* article. Why? Because more students fail ninth grade than any other year. Because discipline referrals and absentee rates spike. Because the dropout rate is highest between ninth and tenth grade. Because the first year of high school is crucial to students’ adjustment and achievement.

Yet too many high schools address these deep challenges with “time-consuming, glitzy programs that often yield little result” – freshman ropes courses, advisory programs, character education, “a caring adult advocate,” a career plan.

Donegal believes the heart of the matter is classroom instruction, which is driven by staffing and scheduling. She asks principals:

- *What is the student/teacher ratio for each grade?* It’s usually lowest for seniors, highest for freshmen.
- *Which courses have the top-notch teachers?* Typically honors classes.
- *Where are first-year teachers assigned?* Typically, ninth grade.
- *If you have tracking, who teaches the lower tracks?* Typically, the newbies.

“In the medical field,” says Donegal, “the mark of a top professional is the ability to problem-solve the hard cases. So why do so many top teachers wind up working with only top students, avoiding the hard cases altogether?” Why do veteran teachers get the “best” students – those who are easy to teach?

Solving the freshman problem “depends on wise staffing and scheduling decisions, on getting the right people into the places that most need quality.” Donegal’s suggestions:

- *Change staffing.* “I hand-pick who gets to teach ninth grade,” says Ninia Aldrich, principal at Kamehameha School in Hawaii. Make clear that ninth-grade assignments are for the best and brightest; don’t take no for an answer.

- *Orchestrate effective freshmen courses.* Offer high-impact math and English electives with state-of-the-art materials taught by top-notch teachers to help low-achieving ninth graders catch up. “A chance to enjoy and excel in at least one class should decrease frustration and boost enthusiasm for school,” says Donegal.

- *Schedule for support.* Arrange for interdisciplinary teacher teams to work with the same group of ninth graders and provide personalized support and innovative instruction. But

Donegal advises schools not to embark on cross-disciplinary curriculum units until all teachers are solid in their own discipline and all practitioners in the same content area are in synch.

“The Linchpin Year” by Billie Donegan in *Educational Leadership*, May 2008 (Vol. 65, #8, p. 54-56); article available free at <http://www.ascd.org/infocon>; the author can be reached at billiedonegan@yahoo.com.

[Back to page one](#)

2. An Analysis of Three Effective High-School Reform Models

(Originally titled “Lessons from Leading Models”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, MDRC researcher Janet Quint describes her 2006 synthesis of what she and her colleagues learned about three impressive school-reform models, which are collectively used by about 2,500 U.S. high schools:

- *Talent Development* – Initiated in 1994 by Johns Hopkins, this model emphasizes support for academically struggling ninth graders. Freshmen have their own small learning community called Ninth Grade Success Academy in which they take math and language arts. The curriculum aims to prepare all students for college-level work.
- *First Things First* – Designed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education and first implemented in 1998, this model involves professional development for teachers and 200-300-student communities that take core classes together for all four years and have a personalized advisory system.
- *Career academies* – First piloted in Philadelphia in 1969, this model involves schools-within-schools, an integrated academic and occupational curriculum, and employee partnerships.

Quint identifies five key success factors in these programs:

- *Creating a sense of belonging at school* – Small learning communities of 120-350 students share core classes and core teachers, who meet regularly to discuss students’ progress. Quint doesn’t think small learning communities in and of themselves boost attendance or achievement, but in conjunction with other factors they may produce better student outcomes.

- *Helping freshmen with weak academic skills* – “Revamping instruction to assist ninth graders who enter school with weak reading or math skills appears to be one of the most productive reforms high schools can make,” writes Quint. All three of these programs address freshman learning needs.

- *Preparing students for post-secondary success* – The programs showed improved post-secondary results through downstream research on graduates.

- *Improving instruction* – Well-planned professional development in these programs helped teachers make classes more challenging and interesting – and helped them implement curriculum packages prepared by others. Quint noted that it often took an administrative presence at team meetings to get teachers focused on instruction (versus field trips and individual students), and recommended that besides meeting with their learning community colleagues, teachers should meet with subject-area colleagues to plan and align curriculum and look at student results.

- *Stimulating change and making it stick* – Quint draws the following lessons on how change happened, and didn't happen, in these programs:
 - Introducing change is not a one-person job. Principals need support from their superiors, and from a committed leadership team within the school.
 - School leaders need realistic expectations. Seemingly small improvements can be important; large-scale change is rare.
 - It takes time for the effects of reforms to become evident. “Leaders need to avoid the temptation to jump from one ‘next big thing’ to another,” says Quint. They need to give the reform effort a chance to work.
 - Reforms that combine structural and instructional changes may be most effective.
 - Reform initiatives should single out ninth graders with academic deficits for special support, says Quint, “given that success or failure in ninth grade is a pivotal indicator of whether or not a student drops out.”

“Lessons from Leading Models” by Janet Quint in *Educational Leadership*, May 2008 (Vol. 65, #8, p. 64-68); article available free at <http://www.ascd.org/infocon>; the author can be reached at janetquint@mdrc.org; the full report is available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/full.pdf>.

[*Back to page one*](#)

3. Findings from the Business World About Implementing Ideas Effectively

A brilliant strategy is not enough, say business consultants Gary Neilson, Karla Martin, and Elizabeth Powers. Effective execution is what makes the difference between success and failure. In this *Harvard Business Review* article, the authors share their insights from a survey of 26,000 employees in 31 organizations in a number of countries, rank-ordering the top traits of companies that are the most successful at executing their strategies. The authors concluded that it's almost entirely about good communication, clarity of decision-making roles, and motivation of employees. Below are their top eleven traits; do these carry over to the world of education?

- Everyone knows the decisions and actions for which he or she is responsible.
- Important information gets to decision-makers quickly.
- Once made, decisions are rarely second-guessed.
- Information flows freely across organizational boundaries.
- Field and line employees usually have the information they need to understand the impact of their day-to-day choices.
- Line managers have access to the metrics they need to measure the key drivers of their work.
- Managers up the line get involved in operational decisions.
- Conflicting messages are rarely sent to customers.
- The individual performance-appraisal process differentiates among high, adequate, and low performers.

- The ability to deliver on performance commitments strongly influences career advancement and compensation.
- The organization can more accurately be described as “persuade and cajole” than “command and control.”

“The Secrets of Successful Strategy Execution” by Gary Neilson, Karla Martin, and Elizabeth Powers in the *Harvard Business Review*, June 2008 (Vol. 86, #6, p. 60-70), no e-link available. The authors can be reached at neilson_gary@bah.com, martin_karla@bah.com, and powers_elizabeth@bah.com.

[Back to page one](#)

4. A Georgia “Core Knowledge” School Struts Its Stuff

In this *Education Week* article, Kathleen Kennedy Manzo reports on her visit to the New Holland Core Knowledge Academy, a Georgia elementary school where “content is king.” Ninety percent of its students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, 27 percent are English language learners, and 85 percent are meeting benchmarks on state tests in math and reading. Jill Goforth, the principal, attributes this to the school’s embrace of the content-rich Core Knowledge curriculum since it opened five years ago. She believes beefing up content is especially helpful to less advantaged students. “If your parents can take you to Washington, D.C., to see the monuments, or to the Grand Canyon, or museums, wonderful, but most of our students don’t have [those] kinds of opportunities,” she said. “This is a good curriculum for all children, but it’s really helped to level the playing field for children who don’t have the kinds of experiences that some others do.”

But is the Core Knowledge curriculum just a “bunch o’ facts”, as Alfie Kohn and other critics contend, pushing students to rote memorization and low-level thinking? Not so, says New Holland third-grade teacher Rob Herrin. The curriculum “gives them the content they need to think critically and go beyond the state standards... Core Knowledge enriches the required content. It’s all about expectations. If you expect them to learn rigorous content, I don’t see why they can’t learn it.”

Motivation is another factor in a content-rich curriculum, say New Holland teachers. They have found that students are engaged in lessons about Egyptian pharaohs and pyramids, adventures of the early explorers, the lives of George Washington and the early founders, the Underground Railroad, how light and sound travel, and the music associated with the historical events they are studying. “It makes the learning more interesting when you connect the content across subjects, and build on their knowledge,” says Beverly Robinson, a literacy coach in the school.

University of Virginia professor E.D. Hirsch, who started the Core Knowledge movement twenty years ago, believes that building children’s content knowledge from kindergarten through eighth grade is a key to improving reading achievement. “The way to ace a reading test is by being exposed to a coherent, sequenced, broad, rigorous curriculum,” says Linda Bevilacqua, the president of Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Foundation. Hirsch adds: “There are no magical overnight solutions to reading comprehension because reading comprehension

depends on knowledge and vocabulary. It's an organic and cumulative process – that's why you need an organic and cumulative curriculum... There's been demonstrated improvement in reading in Core Knowledge schools in just the way the theory would predict: After one year, it's not measurable; after two, it's striking; after three or four, it's tremendous.”

“Learning Essentials” by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, May 21, 2008 (Vol. 27, #38, p. 23-25), article available to subscribers only

[Back to page one](#)

5. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe on Teaching for Understanding

(Originally titled “Put Understanding First”)

In this thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe say that too many high-school students are victims of boredom, passivity, apathy, and superficiality as they march through textbooks – and often can't apply what they learn in new situations and standardized tests.

Ideally, students should (a) acquire important information and skills; (b) understand the content; and (c) be able to transfer what they learn to novel situations. The problem is that many schools concentrate on (a), believing that students need to learn the facts before they can engage in higher-level thinking. Not so, say Wiggins and McTighe: students can do all three at once; they should be constantly puzzling over genuine problems, making meaning of their learning, and applying content in a variety of contexts. That makes school more exciting – and produces higher achievement.

To pull this off, teachers need to wear three instructional hats: direct instructor, facilitator, and coach; only by combining all three will students learn at high levels:

- Direct instruction – Learning information through lectures, multimedia presentations, demonstrations, modeling, guided practice, convergent questioning, and feedback.
- Facilitation – Understanding through analogies, graphic organizers, divergent questioning, probing, simulations, problem-based learning, Socratic seminars, reciprocal teaching and student self-assessment.
- Coaching – Applying knowledge and understanding via clear performance goals, models, conferencing, self-assessment and reflection, personal feedback, and just-in-time teaching and corrections as needed.

Wiggins and McTighe use a high-school math unit on measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode, range, etc.) as an exemplar. In a conventional classroom, students would typically be asked to: (a) define the terms; (b) give examples illustrating each kind of measure; (c) solve about 15 problems independently; and (d) apply the skills in several hypothetical word problems. By contrast, here's a backwards-designed unit:

- *Begin with a “hook” problem.* Students get the individual finish times of 122 students in four classes in a one-mile race, work in small groups to decide which class won, and present their results.

- *Introduce essential questions.* Have students discuss and develop tentative answers to some provocative questions: How might mathematics help determine what is fair and unfair? What do we mean when we say that the rules of a game of chance are not fair? When is a majority vote fair, and when is it unfair? Is it fair to factor in degree of difficulty in diving competitions? How about weighted grades in school?

- *Preview the culminating performance task.* Students will be asked to decide which measure of central tendency – mean, median, or mode – should be used to calculate their quarterly grade in mathematics.

- *Provide direct instruction,* giving real-world examples. This will link back to the initial “hook” scenario and the essential questions.

- *Provide practice.* Students do textbook problems to practice calculating mean, median, and mode, and take quizzes.

- *Orchestrate further discussion.* Small and large groups discuss questions like, When is it most useful to know the “average” (salaries, home prices, batting average, price of a new car)? When is it misleading? What other information do we need to act wisely?

- *Provide an application task.* Have each student take a data set, calculate the mean, median, and mode, and decide when it’s appropriate to use each one. Put students in pairs and have them share questions and answers and offer feedback.

- *Lead a whole-class discussion.* Pose questions about how important range and trend are, using examples of national sports team ranking systems, scores in diving competitions, stock market performance, etc. Should one be rewarded or penalized for consistency or inconsistency?

- *Provide a small-group application.* Ask groups to decide and present to the class the fairest method for assigning quarterly grades. Should all grades be averaged? Should zeroes be factored in?

- *Revisit the original unit hook problem.* Have students rethink their initial answers to which class won the one-mile race in light of what they have learned.

- *Assign the final performance task.* Have students review their own scores and grades for the quarter (quizzes, tests, homework, class work, their math journal, etc.), determine which measure of central tendency will yield the fairest grade, and write a short note justifying their conclusion.

- *Have students reflect on the unit’s essential questions.* They do this in their math journals and in paired and whole-class discussions.

“Put Understanding First” by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in *Educational Leadership*, May 2008 (Vol. 65, #8, p. 36-41); article available free at <http://www.ascd.org/infocon>. The authors can be reached at grant@authenticeducation.org and jmctigh@aol.com.

[Back to page one](#)

6. Douglas Reeves on Not Using Grades to Leverage Attendance

(Originally titled “Improving Student Attendance”)

In this *Educational Leadership* column, Douglas Reeves recommends uncoupling grades from attendance. The Minnetonka, Minnesota schools used to dock students’ quarterly grades for absence, tardiness, skipping classes, and late assignments. “Logically, one would think that the threat of reducing a student’s grade would work,” says assistant principal Jeff Erickson. But it didn’t.

So the district tried this: Any time a student missed a class, a parent was immediately notified, and within 36 hours a staff member met with the student. Every unexcused absence resulted in an after-school detention. The results were dramatic: unexcused absences dropped 42 percent, disciplinary referrals 64 percent, and suspensions 37 percent. This intervention was much more effective than docking grades. “Last year I could skip and nobody cared,” said one student. “This year, if I skip once I’m taken to the woodshed.”

Minnetonka officials had difficulty persuading stakeholders to try this change, and took risks to get it off the ground. Reeves’s advice: “If, as a school leader, you wait to improve grading policies until you have total buy-in from the school community, then your school will be the last to change.”

“Improving Student Attendance” by Douglas Reeves in *Educational Leadership*, May 2008 (Vol. 65, #8, p. 90-91); article available free at <http://www.ascd.org/infocon>; the author can be reached at DReeves@LeadandLearn.com

[Back to page one](#)

7. How Are Millennial Teachers Different from Gen-X and Boomers?

In this *Tools for Schools* article, National Staff Development Council communications director Joan Richardson lists the ways that the Millennial generation of teachers (those born after 1977) are distinct from Generation X (1965-1977), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), and Traditionalists (before 1945):

- *Millennials think they’re pretty special.* “These are children who received trophies for finishing in eighth place,” says Suzette Lovely, a California deputy superintendent who co-authored the book, *Generations at School* (Corwin, 2007). “They were very loved at home and we differentiated for them at school,” says Jennifer Abrams, a consultant who specializes in generational issues. “We told them how special they were – and they believed it.” This poses challenges for school leaders, since constant praise is not the M.O. of most schools. “Many support systems for newer professionals working in schools are not set up to provide the responsiveness and positiveness they expect,” says Abrams. School leaders should look for ways to provide a boost to new teachers: brief bios and photos in the school’s newsletter and on its website, a welcoming breakfast or lunch, informal classroom visits with follow-up, by-name greeting and eye contact, learning more about their outside lives – and certificates, which may mean more to Millennials than to older teachers.

- *Millennials tend to be comfortable with their parents’ values and not as rebellious as earlier generations.* “Millennials are anxious to be mentored by older, experienced teachers,”

says Richardson, which is different from way earlier generations of teachers saw mentoring. One-on-one coaching is also appreciated – with lots of immediate praise and feedback. Electronic mentoring is a good second-best.

- *Millennials have a high tolerance for change, innovation, and learning.* They don't expect to stay in the same career for 30 years, which means tenure has much less meaning for them, but they place a high value on continuing to learn and moving ahead quickly. "Packaged with this," says Richardson, "is a higher level of assertiveness and confidence in their own abilities." They may think that three or four years of teaching is plenty of time and then they're ready to become a principal or take on another role in the field. "Millennials are poised to become the first true generation of lifetime learners," say Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman in *When Generations Collide* (HarperBusiness, 2002). School leaders should hook Millennials up with professional development and a variety of career options and encourage their growth and development.

- *Millennials love being on teams.* "They were nurtured in environments that emphasized cooperative learning and team sports," says Richardson. And at home, Millennials were more part of day-to-day negotiations and were asked to contribute and collaborate from an early age. So grade-level and subject-area teams are a natural for young teachers. "If the dynamics are right, if they are brought in as equal partners, they will flourish," says Jennifer Abrams. Millennials also have a strong desire to develop friendships with colleagues at work, says Suzette Lovely. "Schools that provide for the social aspects of work as well as develop a team approach to learning, will find Millennials reluctant to leave them." This suggests that school leaders should involve Millennials in all sorts of teams – grade-level, decision-making, hiring, etc. – and use photos of teacher teams in publications and websites. Leaders should also use structured protocols to ensure equal participation in teams.

- *Millennials are expert multitaskers who don't want to miss out on opportunities and also expect a lot of themselves.* "This generation grew up as the overscheduled children of the Baby Boomers," says Richardson. "They learned how to juggle AP classes with before-school choir practice and after-school sports. They listened to music and watched television while they did homework." Abrams adds, "They want their experiences to be recognized. They don't want to be patronized." School leaders and mentors should help Millennials slow down a little, prioritize, and learn to balance the demands of professional life.

- *Millennials are not afraid of accountability.* "This is a group that had to pass a high school exit exam to graduate from high school and a state test to get certified to be able teach," says Lovely. "Accountability is what they expect." So Millennials will probably feel quite comfortable developing common assessments and looking at student results with their colleagues. "If older teachers are resistant to this practice," advises Richardson, "consider finding ways to tap into the interest of newer teachers to introduce this practice."

- *Millennials love technology!* "This is the Facebook generation," says Richardson, "and technology is in their DNA. They are never unplugged." They can find anything on the Internet and communicate well by e-mail. As a corollary, Millennials respond well to staff development that is experiential, especially if they can come up with their own solutions.

School leaders can take full advantage of these strengths by offering just-in-time staff development, using short, YouTube-style videos, and allowing beginning teachers to access information on their own time. Make good use of websites and blogs, and combine teamwork with technology. But school leaders also have to set limits. “It is, for example, appropriate for a teacher to communicate with students via Facebook?” asks Richardson. “Is it appropriate to text message during a staff meeting? Acceptable-use policies may have to be updated to include language about acceptable professional practices.”

“Tune In to What the New Generation of Teachers Can Do” by Joan Richardson in *Tools for Schools*, May/June 2008 (Vol. 11, #4, p. 1-6), no e-link available

[Back to page one](#)

8. Teacher Book Groups Enrich Professional Practice

This *Education Week* article by Bess Keller reports on how groups of teachers in schools around the country are using book study groups to hone their skills, broaden their knowledge base, and help figure out how to apply ideas in their classrooms. When small groups of teachers read a book and meet to discuss it, even the most guarded teachers can have new insights, says Michigan kindergarten teacher Wendy Rothman. “They have their own private learning experience with their group, [where] they don’t expect to be judged by colleagues and they hope to learn from them.”

“I am a big believer in the need for both bottom-up and top-down change,” says North Dakota teacher mentor Laurie Stenehjem. “Book studies are wonderful because they build this bottom-up direction.” Building collegiality is an important byproduct of study groups. “We have really gotten to know each other as teachers and friends,” said Heather Ferris, a rural New York teacher. She believes this makes it more likely that teachers will “share their ideas and questions about what they are teaching.”

Many schools provide professional time for teachers to have their discussion. Some schools provide a list of books from which groups can choose, in an attempt to keep them on a schoolwide theme. Here are some of the books that teacher groups are reading (brief annotations on each book are available at the link below):

- *The Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades K-8: Behaviors and Understandings to Notice, Teach, and Support* by Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas
- *Young Mathematicians at Work* by Catherine Fosnot and Maarten Dolk
- *Creating Great Schools* by Phillip Schlechty
- *The Art and Science of Teaching* by Robert Marzano
- *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne
- *Classrooms Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right – Using It Well* by Rick Stiggins, Judith Arter, Jan Chappuis, and Stephen Chappuis
- *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Oliver Keane and Susan Zimmerman
- *Why Are All the Black Kids Talking Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum

- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck
- *School of Dreams and Overachievers* by Alexandra Robbins
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- *Differentiated Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms* by Carol Ann Tomlinson
- *The Daily Five: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser
- *The Broken Letter: Divorce Through the Eyes of Children* by Carl Lawrence
- *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult

“‘Book Study’ Helps Teachers Hone Skills” by Bess Keller in *Education Week*, May 21, 2008 (Vol. 27, #38, p. 1, 15); http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/05/21/38teach_ep.h27.html.

[Back to page one](#)

9. A Deaf Tutor’s Advantages Teaching English

In this moving *New York Times* article, education columnist Samuel Freedman describes how 84-year-old John Kuhlman, a retired college professor who is functionally deaf, does unpaid one-on-one tutoring with adult English language learners from Mexico, Thailand, Ecuador, China, El Salvador, and Ukraine.

Kuhlman, who has a cochlear implant and is proficient at lip-reading, finds that he can understand most of what his pupils say – but they have to speak clearly and not slur their words or use slang. He has come to believe that his hearing impairment may be an asset. “A deaf person, a person with damaged hearing, is exactly like a Spanish speaker or a Chinese speaker in a room full of English speakers,” says Kuhlman. “If I’m in a room for a cocktail party, I can hear everything, but I can’t understand a word. So I’m pretty good at understanding their problem. I’ve got empathy, sympathy, patience.” For the teacher, says Freedman, there is “a sense of the shared struggle to apprehend all those elusive words.”

Students use conventional materials in Kuhlman’s tutorials – workbooks, vocabulary lists, fill-in-the-blank sentences, and short essays. But each day’s impromptu conversations are what make him special as a teacher. Kuhlman knows that Jose Cordova’s daughter just graduated from nursing school, that Adriana Gloria drops her children off at school just before each lesson, and that Raul Funes fights sleep in class because he works an overnight shift and attends a morning class at a local technical college. “To teach English, you have to talk,” says Kuhlman. “And so we talk. And out of the talking, I’ve become a sort of confessor. They leave here feeling better. And when I have a good day, I leave here walking on clouds.”

“Nearly Deaf Professor Teaches English Literacy, One Student at a Time” by Samuel Freedman in the *New York Times*, May 21, 2008 (p. B6); available (with free registration) at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/education/21education.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Nearly%20Deaf%20Professor&st=cse&oref=slogin

[Back to page one](#)

10. The Treatment of Islam in Ten World History Textbooks

In this scathing May 2008 American Textbook Council paper, Gilbert Sewall examines the way in which ten widely used junior- and senior-high world history texts deal with Islam.

His conclusions:

- “History textbooks present an incomplete and confected view of Islam that misrepresents its foundations and challenges to international security,” writes Sewall.
- The most serious problem in the textbooks “is the presence of disputed definitions and claims that are presented as established facts.”
- Some textbooks have not corrected pre-2001 errors in more recent editions. “Instead of making corrections or adjusting contested facts,” writes Sewall, “publishers and editors defend misinformation and content evasions against the record. Biases persist. Silences are profound and intentional.”
- In some cases, publishers have engaged in self-censorship, removing controversial material.
- “Islamic activists use multicultural and ready-made American political movements, especially those on campus, to advance and justify the makeover of Islam-related textbook content,” he writes. True, many other political and religious groups try to use the textbook process to their advantage, but “the deficiencies in Islam-related lessons are uniquely disturbing.”
- Junior-high textbooks contain more misinformation than high-school books.

“Particular fault rests with the publishing corporations, boards of directors, and executives who decide what editorial policies their companies will pursue,” concludes Sewall.

These are the textbooks he reviewed:

Junior High World History:

- *Medieval and Early Modern Times* (Glencoe, 2006)
- *Medieval to Early Modern Times* (Holt Rinehart Winston 2006)
- *World History: Medieval and Early Modern Times* (McDougal Littell, 2006)
- *Medieval and Early Modern Times* (Prentice Hall, 2006)
- *History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond* (Teachers’ Curriculum Institute, 2005)

High School World and American History

- *World History: The Modern World* (Prentice Hall, 2007)
- *World History: Modern Times* (Glencoe, 2006)
- *America: Pathways to the Present* (Prentice Hall, 2003, 2005, 2007)
- *The American Vision: Modern Times* (Glencoe, 2006)
- *The Americans: Reconstruction to the Twenty-first Century* (McDougal Littell, 2006)

“Islam in the Classroom: What the Textbooks Tell Us” by Gilbert Sewall, The American Textbook Council, May 2008 (spotted in *The Education Gadfly*, May 22, 2008 (p. 7).

The full report is available at <http://www.historytextbooks.org/islamreport.pdf>

[Back to page one](#)

11. What Are the Most Important Factors in Pre-School Classrooms?

This *Education Week* article by Linda Jacobson summarizes a University of Virginia study of 671 pre-school classrooms in 11 states. Researchers found that the most important factors in children's academic and language development were teachers giving them feedback on their ideas and encouraging them to think in more complex ways. The most important factors in children's social development were teachers showing positive emotions and being sensitive to children's needs. The conclusion, according to lead author Andrew Mashburn: "[Y]oung children's learning in pre-K occurs in large part through high-quality emotional and instructional interactions with teachers."

The study found that these factors were more important than the teacher/pupil ratio, teachers' level of education, and teachers' field of study. Robert Pianta, one of the study's authors, stressed that these basics must be present to have a high-quality pre-school program. But, he said, "Once you have those things in place, you still have a long way to go." Pianta has conducted other studies showing that when teachers are warm, sensitive, and positive, even high-risk children with behavioral and social difficulties performed at levels almost identical to those of children without a history of behavioral problems.

"Teacher-Pupil Link Crucial to Pre-K Success, Study Says" by Linda Jacobson in *Education Week*, May 21, 2008 (Vol. 27, #38, p. 9); article available to subscribers only. The study was published in the May/June 2008 issue of *Child Development*.

[*Back to page one*](#)

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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,

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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 School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Atlantic Monthly
Catalyst Chicago
Commonwealth Magazine
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
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 (online)
Teachers College Record
TESOL Quarterly
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal