Marshall Memo 218

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 21, 2008

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Perhaps at no point in U.S. history has it been more important that school physical education programs be effective. Next to smoking, lack of physical activity has been the major contributor to a growing epidemic of chronic and preventable disease in the United States."
Judith Rink and Tina Hall in *Elementary School Journal*, January 2008, p. 207

"Physical activity in adults appears to be positively associated with four aspects of childhood: enjoying physical activity, acquiring competence, gaining confidence, and opportunities to try out a variety of activities."
Katherine Thomas Thomas and Jerry Thomas (see item #1)

"Learners tend to think they know more than they do."
Carla Thomas McClure (see item # 3)

"Teachers, teachers, teachers, when will they learn. I have the attention span of a raisin."
A middle-school student (see item #8)

"One attribute of a great teacher is the almost insane willingness to be obsessed with the success of your students… You feel it's your problem, not just the kids' problem."
Herbert Kohl in an interview in *District Administration*, January 2008, p. 31

"Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?"
A gym teacher's response when students curse (*Middle School Journal*, Jan. 08, p. 20)

"The bottom line is superintendents can talk until their tongues fall out about learning-centered leadership, or instructional leadership, but if they evaluate principals on criteria and standards that are different from that, principals are going to gravitate to the reality, not the language."
Joseph Murphy, Vanderbilt professor, quoted in *Education Week*, Jan. 16, 2008, p. 1,11

1. Insights on Effective Physical Education Programs

In this exceptionally thoughtful *Elementary School Journal* article, Iowa State University professors Katherine Thomas Thomas and Jerry Thomas present four principles of elementary physical education: first, children are not miniature adults; second, elementary-age boys and girls are more alike than different; third, good things are earned; and fourth, no body (nobody) is perfect – and then examine how these play out in terms of: (a) physical growth and maturation, (b) motor skills, (c) physical activity, (d) psychological factors, and (e) developmental skill acquisition.

• ***Children are not miniature adults***. (a) In terms of physical maturation, children's body proportions are quite different from those of adults – for example, a baby's head is about 25% of total body height, while an adult's is about 12%; a baby's legs account for about 30% of total height, while an adult's legs are half or more of height. These proportions change gradually as children grow, but having comparatively larger heads and shorter legs makes balancing and jumping more challenging for children. This means physical education teachers need to select activities and equipment accordingly.

(b) When it comes to motor skills, young children don't run, jump, or throw like adults – they gradually become more proficient as their bodies develop. Physical education teachers have to teach different skill levels at different grades (for example, younger children learn to throw without a target, while older children throw at a small target or to a partner) and differentiate within each grade level.

(c) When it comes to physical activity, adults have greater endurance than children and can build their cardiovascular efficiency through regular training. "In contrast," write Thomas and Thomas, "children's systems for delivering oxygen are continuously operating at levels that are much closer to their maximum capacity. Accordingly, they reach their maximum more quickly, fatigue more rapidly, and do not acquire the same training benefits from repeated short bouts of exercise." This means that an elementary physical education class shouldn't look like a fitness center; it should be made up of enjoyable activities that keep students active and teach them skills. Enjoyment is one of the most important attributes, say the authors: "While having fun, children will be breathing hard, sweating, improving their levels of fitness, learning skills, and preparing the dispositions required to sustain the lifelong habit of vigorous physical activity."

(d) Psychology is a key factor in physical education, and it works differently for children than for adults. Children's motivation to learn and master skills depends on the

answers to two questions: *Am I getting better?* and *Am I normal?* (i.e., as skillful as most other classmates). Children who get positive answers to these questions are likely to continue practicing and learning. The opposite is true of children who don't get positive feedback from adults or feel they are doing worse than their peers. "Children who regard themselves as consistently unsuccessful either avoid self-evaluation in the future or select tests that are not challenging," say Thomas and Thomas. It's therefore crucial that physical education teachers select tasks that are appropriately challenging for the variety of children in each class, have children evaluate themselves on the basis of personal improvement, not in comparison to their peers, and get an ongoing sense of progress and success in return for effortful practice.

(e) In terms of acquiring developmental skills, young children need lots of help remembering multiple steps and then executing them. At age 5, children do not repeat directions unless told to; by age 7, some children will spontaneously repeat them; by age 11, adult-like memory strategies begin to emerge. Physical education teachers can help students remember by using mnemonic strategies, for example, BEEF for basketball free throws: Bend knees, Eyes up, Elbows in, Feet still.

• ***Elementary-age boys and girls are more alike than different***. (a) Before puberty, girls' and boys' bodies are much more similar in terms of height and leg length than they will be as adolescents and adults. But there are lots of differences *among* children. This points to grouping students by physical size, level of skill, and previous experience, not gender. Grouping by sex creates heterogeneous groups that are much more challenging to teach effectively.

(b) At the elementary level, motor-skill differences – e.g., in running, jumping, and swimming – are greater among boys and among girls than between boys and girls, whereas among average adults, the male-female performance gap can be as large as 57 percent. Why are these adult differences so much greater? It's clearly not just post-puberty divergence in muscle strength and leg length: among world-class athletes, male-female differences are only about 10 percent. "Opportunity, practice, and encouragement are the prime environmental variables that explain gender-based motor performance differences in the average population," say Thomas and Thomas.

A classic example is "throwing like a girl" – i.e., not stepping forward with the opposite foot, pushing the ball straight ahead with an arm motion like throwing a dart versus whipping around at the end of the arm, and keeping the torso motionless versus rotating it – which results the ball taking an arching trajectory or traveling only a short distance. When a father notices his young daughter throwing this way, the most common reaction is, "Well, she's a girl." But if he sees his son doing the same thing, he'll almost certainly get to work teaching the specific attributes of a more effective throwing motion. "Impoverished opportunities and low expectations during childhood surely have negative consequences for many females as they reach puberty," say Thomas and Thomas. "The decrease in physical activity observed among adolescent girls has its origins in culture rather than biology. High-quality elementary school physical education is organized so that all children have an equal opportunity to practice important motor skills and the encouragement required to master them."

(c) With regard to physical activity, elementary-age boys and girls have similar muscle strength and can perform similarly in sit-ups, vertical jumps, and grip strength. There are differences in the number of pull-ups girls can do, but Thomas and Thomas say this is largely due to lack of practice, not innate factors.

(d) Psychologically speaking, boys and girls are both motivated to engage in physical activity if it is fun, lets them be with friends, and helps become more skillful. Although elementary-school boys are somewhat more motivated by being with friends and girls by having fun, the end result is the same. "Experiences in physical education that meet children's needs for fun and accomplishment within a social context will encourage future participation," say the authors.

(e) In terms of developmental skill acquisition, the same two factors apply to boys and girls: feedback about performance allows them to identify and correct errors, and reinforcement helps consolidate correct performance and sustains motivation.

• ***Good things are earned***. (a) As children develop, say the authors, weight-bearing physical activity is important to building bones and reducing fat. About 1.5 hours of such activity a day is necessary to assure a more robust skeleton, increased bone mineralization, slightly increased height, more muscle, and less fat. Regular weight-bearing activity also helps instill habits and attitudes that prevent children from becoming overweight or obese when they hit puberty. Physical education teachers need to provide warm-up and fitness activities that all students can perform – for example, if some children can't do a pull-up, a modified or assisted pull-up should be substituted.

(b) Motor skills become increasingly complex and demanding as children grow older – think of the difference between learning to walk versus learning to strike a golf ball – and skilled instruction and practice are essential to becoming proficient in individual and team sports, dance, gymnastics, swimming, rollerblading, and numerous exercise activities. "For many children, especially low-income students," write the authors, "physical education may be the only opportunity to learn these skills."

(c) "Physical activity in adults appears to be positively associated with four aspects of childhood," write Thomas and Thomas: "enjoying physical activity, acquiring competence, gaining confidence, and opportunities to try out a variety of activities." In other words, inactive children usually grow up to be couch potatoes. Perhaps the most important concept that children learn in physical education classes is that they can become more skilled by practice.

(d) The psychology of attribution is all-important in children's motivation in physical education. When elementary-age children are successful, they usually attribute it to:

- Hard work and practice (effort)
- Good luck
- Innate ability
- The easiness of the task

Physical education teachers have the power to influence children's thinking in the right direction. They can teach them to attribute success to *effort*, not the other three, which do not support engagement and effort because they are out of children's control. Teachers are at their

best when they structure their classes so that children focus on *performance goals* (which emphasize individual improvement and task mastery), not *ego goals* (which emphasize comparisons with peers, winning, and personal recognition).

(e) In terms of acquiring skills, a widespread misconception is that some children are naturals, possessing special talent. "The research suggests that a more appropriate way to describe the child who is a particularly proficient performer would be 'hard worker'," write Thomas and Thomas. In addition, children who are a little older then their peers tend to have an advantage, and that advantage is amplified over the years as these better-performing children get more practice, encouragement, and playing time, giving them an increasing amount of skill and knowledge of what to do, when, and how. The challenge for physical education teachers is to keep the playing field level and ensure that children who don't look like naturals get the same amount of practice and encouragement; many of them may blossom into highly proficient performers when they are older.

• ***No body (nobody) is perfect***. (a) As people develop, there are three broad types of physique: endomorph (pear-shaped), mesomorph (muscular), and ectomorph (linear). Many of us have a mixture of these types, and children can move through different types as they develop (for example, early-maturing girls tend to be endomorphs, early-maturing boys tend to be mesomorphs, and later-maturing children tend to be ectomorphs). "Because maturation is inherited," write Thomas and Thomas, "individuals have little control over the broad outlines of their physique. It is physical activity and healthy eating that allow us to make the most of the bodies we inherit." Physical education teachers can help children find activities that are enjoyable and well-suited to their physical attributes, as well as helping them understand that "there is no ideal body shape, that we are more alike than different, and that all of us can have healthy bodies."

(b) As children develop motor skills (e.g., kicking a soccer ball, throwing a baseball), there are increasing variations in their proficiency – and an unfortunate tendency among peers and adults to attribute differences to innate ability – "talent." Actually, say Thomas and Thomas, differences more commonly stem from differences in opportunity for instruction, practice, and feedback.

(c) In terms of physical activity, the authors believe that overemphasizing the body mass index – the weight-to-height ratio – can be a distraction. Using weight is misleading, since muscle weighs proportionately more than fat and a muscular person can appear to be "overweight" on the BMI. Focusing on weight can also lead some vulnerable individuals to fall into unhealthy eating habits in an effort to be "too thin." The important thing is whether the child is engaging in regular, vigorous physical activity. "In terms of health outcomes," say the authors, "it is more important to be physically fit than to be of precisely normal weight."

(d) Psychologically, competition can be bad for children who consistently lose. This distorts their expectations for success, produces anxiety, can hurt performance, and decreases willingness to participate. It's therefore very important, say Thomas and Thomas, for physical education teachers to "monitor practice and competition with great care so that no child is exposed to consistent failure." Physical education teachers are often asked, "Who won?" Here

are some good responses: “Did you see improvement?” “Did you have fun?” “Did everyone play fairly?” “How would you change the rules?” “Were there examples of good sportsmanship?” and “Give me an example of how cooperation helped to make the team successful.”

(e) In terms of developmental skill acquisition, body type can play a part – for example, height gives an advantage in basketball while short stature is helpful in gymnastics. But opportunity, encouragement, instruction, and practice are more important, say Thomas and Thomas. “No more than a moderate level of skill is required to enjoy most forms of physically vigorous exercise,” they say, “and, certainly, one does not have to be an expert to enjoy participation in recreational sport and activities.”

“Thus,” conclude Thomas and Thomas, “the task for elementary physical education is to provide all children with a solid foundation of basic movement skills, plus an introduction to a wide variety of activity-specific performance skills. All that must be accomplished in a learning context that allows the joys and satisfactions of movement to permeate the class experience. The end objective is to produce a learner who is confident in his or her individual capacities and positively disposed to discover and master new ways of remaining physically active throughout life.”

“Principles of Motor Development for Elementary School Physical Education” by Katherine Thomas Thomas and Jerry Thomas in *Elementary School Journal*, January 2008 (Vol. 108 #3, p. 181-195), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at ktthomas@iastate.edu and jrthomas@iastate.edu.

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2. How Can We Get Elementary Students To Be More Physically Active?

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, San Diego State University professors Thomas McKenzie and David Kahan say that physical inactivity is a serious public health problem in the U.S., linked to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Elementary schools can play a vital part in combating these problems, say the authors – and not just in physical education classes. Their recommendations:

- Students should participate in at least 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each school day, including physical education classes, recess, extracurricular activities, and community programs after school.
- Physical education classes should meet national standards, spend at least half of each class on moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, and teach students the motor and behavioral skills needed to engage in lifelong physical activity.
- Physical education classes should be taught by certified and highly qualified teachers.
- Students should have 150 minutes a week of physical education.
- Students should have access to additional physical activity through clubs, lessons, intramural sports, and sports with other schools.
- Schools should promote walking and bicycling to school, ensuring that students have safe routes.

- Students should have at least 30 minutes of recess each school day.

"Physical Activity, Public Health, and Elementary Schools" by Thomas McKenzie and David Kahan in *Elementary School Journal*, January 2008 (Vol. 108 #3, p. 171-180), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at tmckenzi@mail.sdsu.edu and dkahan@mail.sdsu.edu.

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3. Research on Boosting Teaching and Learning

This *District Administration* article summarizes the findings of a recent U.S. Department of Education study on effective strategies that help students learn, remember, and apply academic skills and concepts:

• *Use deep-level questions* (this finding is supported by strong research evidence). Prompt students to pose and answer questions that require them to explain an answer and the thinking behind it. Deep-level questions often begin with *Why…*, *How…*, *What if…*, *Compare…*, and *What is the evidence for…*, which force students to go beyond factual knowledge and describe causal relationships between facts or concepts. Teachers can also promote higher-level reasoning by asking questions that challenge common assumptions – for example, "Why are periodic forest fires a good thing?"

• *Use formative and interim assessments with feedback* (strong research evidence). When students are required to retrieve what they have learned at spaced intervals throughout the year and given immediate feedback on how they did, long-term retention improves. This is true of in-the-moment classroom assessments and short-answer, fill-in-the-blank quizzes, which require active recall of specific information. Assessments like these are more effective than simply reviewing or rereading content.

• *Space learning over time* (supported by moderate evidence). When content is reviewed in homework, quizzes, and exams several weeks or months after it was introduced, retention improves.

• *Alternate between having students look at examples of solved problems and having students solve problems themselves* (moderate evidence). Research on math and science learning supports this back-and-forth approach.

• *Use graphics to illustrate key points* (moderate evidence). This is especially important when explaining scientific processes. A caveat: don't ask students to look at a graphic illustration while simultaneously listening to an oral explanation; this can overload visual processing capacity.

• *Connect and integrate abstract and concrete representations of concepts* (moderate evidence). For example, point out the links between variables in a math function to a word problem.

• *Teach students to assess what they have learned and allocate study time accordingly* (experimental evidence not gathered in classrooms). The problem is that most people can't accurately assess what they know and don't know. "Learners tend to think they know more than they do," says McClure – what psychologists call the "illusion of knowing." It takes

focused training to get students to honestly and accurately assess what they have learned and make a plan to address their weak areas.

"Strategies to Increase Learning" by Carla Thomas McClure in *District Administration*, January 2008 (Vol. 44,#1, p. 26-27),
http://www.districtadministration.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1359 . For the full report, *Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning: A Practice Guide*, go to:
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/20072004.pdf

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4. Ideas on Improving Teacher Evaluation

"The troubled state of teacher evaluation is a glaring, largely ignored problem in public education," says Thomas Toch in this *Education Week* article. "It's a lever of teacher and school improvement that's being squandered." Toch is co-author of a soon-to-be-released report calling for major reforms in what he says has become "superficial, capricious, and often meaningless." Toch agreed with other panelists at a recent conference that evaluating teachers based on a single classroom visit is ridiculous. Somehow, they said, teacher evaluation has to assure competence and build capacity – functions that have been separated in the past – and consider both teachers' classroom performance and student learning.

Conference attendees discussed whether peer evaluation should be part of the process, and also argued over using students' test scores to evaluate teachers and determine compensation. Christopher Cerf, deputy chancellor in New York City, said test scores are the heart of the matter, since they are so strongly correlated with lifetime income and health. But others said that standardized tests measure low-level skills and half of classroom instructors teach grade-levels and subjects in which students do not take standardized tests.

Toch's forthcoming report says that an exemplary teacher evaluation system must specify what good teaching looks like, present standards and descriptions, use several measures of performance (some conducted by different evaluators), and measure teaching improvement. He believes that the controversy on using student achievement to evaluate teachers can be finessed by inspecting specific classroom behaviors that have been correlated with test scores.

"Drive On to Improve Evaluation Systems for Teachers" by Bess Keller in *Education Week*, Jan. 16, 2008 (Vol. 27, #19, p. 8)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/01/16/19evaluation.h27.html

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5. Jay McTighe on Making Classroom Assessments Effective

(Originally titled "Assessment at the Heart of Schooling")

This *Education Update* article reports on Jay McTighe's major points in an October 2007 speech. Classroom assessments can enhance learning, said McTighe, if:

- They include clear, worthy learning targets – desired performances and understandings;

- They are accompanied by rubrics showing the criteria for excellent work, and exemplars against which students can compare their own efforts;
- Teachers pre-assess to see what students know before instruction ("Don't lay good knowledge on bad knowledge," advises McTighe);
- Assessments require students to explain what they have learned (i.e., support, justify, theorize, or defend);
- Teachers follow up with specific, descriptive feedback to students;
- Students have several opportunities to make revisions and improve their work before final grades are given;
- Assessments measure achievement and improvement.

All this is distinct from test prep, said McTighe. Relying on test prep is like an coach having athletes do only "sideline drills" – practicing and testing discrete skills in a decontextualized way – rather than applying skills and knowledge in an authentic performance. "For many kids in many subjects," said McTighe, "school is an endless stream of sideline drills with no opportunity to play the game with knowledge."

"Assessment at the Heart of Schooling" by Laura Varlas in *Education Update*, January 2008 (Vol. 50, #1, p. 2-3); to order a copy of this ASCD newsletter, go to http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.ab1d8e6fc42e2ffcdeb3ffdb62108a0c/

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6. Student Humiliation in Middle Schools – and What to Do About It

In this richly detailed *Middle School Journal* article, San Diego State University professors Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher ask, "If terrorists act, in part, based on humiliation, how do middle school students act when they experience this emotion?" They conducted in-depth interviews with ten young adolescents and ten teachers in large urban middle schools and found that humiliation was very much on students' minds in three arenas:

• *Bullying* –Many students were fatalistic. "It just happens; you gotta deal with it," said one. "You know how kids are, they can be mean," said another. The ability to "take it" was seen as a necessary skill. "Never let 'em see you sweat," was the watchword. Both students and teachers were inclined to feel that bullies were popular and had high social capital, while their victims were perceived as less likable.

But bullying caused hurt and fear. One boy described a group of loud, profane, physically aggressive eighth graders who called him a "little faggot" and knocked his books onto the floor. A girl confessed that she and her friends stopped talking to a friend she had known since second grade because "she's just so weird" and "it's embarrassing to be around her." Teachers said they intervened with physical bullying but were reluctant to get involved in relational conflicts for fear of creating "teacher's pet" problems for the victim.

• *Teacher behavior* – Nine out of ten students remembered times when a teacher had humiliated a student in front of a class. One teacher had a nickname for every child in the class, including "Funeral" for a girl who, the teacher said, always looked like she was coming from

one. Students remembered students being "busted" in front of their peers for failing a test. "Who wants to work harder for someone who embarrasses you that way?" asked a girl. Asked about teachers' motivation, one student said, "They want to be cool, like it's funny," and another said, "Making fun of kids in the class is just what they do." The impact was dramatic: the more sarcasm and humiliation teachers used, the less likely students were to ask for help when they needed it.

• *Remedial reading and math* – "Everyone knows who the dumb kids are," said one seventh grader. "All you have to do is look around at who's not [in elective classes]. They're all in reading mastery." In this school, students below a cut point on state tests were required to miss electives and enroll in extra reading and math classes – "double dosing." One of the students in remediation, said, "I hate it. We're all the stupid kids. Everyone knows it." Some students with disabilities were acutely aware of the names directed at them by other students: *Retard, Sped, loser, spaz,* and *window licker*.

Frey and Fisher says all this is made worse by research evidence (Slavin 1993) that remedial classes are ineffective. Although they concede that the jury is still out on "double-dosing", they are not optimistic that it will be any better than other forms of remediation, because students who are behind often engage in self-handicapping strategies such as giving up and refusing to study. One student said, "Nobody even tries in my [remedial] class. It's like, if you do, you're trying to make yourself look better than you really are. No offense, but it's 'acting white'. People just sleep in class. You know, pull their hood up."

Frey and Fisher believe humiliation is closely linked to increases in drug and alcohol use, attendance problems, dropping out at the earliest opportunity, early pregnancy as a strategy to escape school, and suicide. "Everybody I know has thought about suicide," said one student, "but the one who did it was bothered all the time by other kids and no one did anything."

The authors have these recommendations for reducing humiliation in middle schools and dealing with its effects:

First, assess the school climate. One good instrument is the California Healthy Kids Survey, which has questions that should pick up bullying and humiliation.

Second, do away with achievement grouping and rethink pullout remedial classes. This, of course, requires good professional development in differentiated instruction.

Third, make an anti-bullying curriculum part of the school's culture. Frey and Fisher say that the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is among the most respected (http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/content.html.

"The Under-Appreciated Role of Humiliation in the Middle School" by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher in *Middle School Journal*, January 2008 (Vol. 39, #3, p. 4-12), http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/MiddleSchoolJournal/Articles/January2008/Article1/tabid/1569/Default.aspx
Fisher can be reached at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu.

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7. Student-Led, Teacher-Supported Parent Conferences in Anchorage

In this *Middle School Journal* article, literacy support teacher Amy Goodman describes how the Anchorage, Alaska schools implemented student-led parent conferences spread over two days. District leaders took a number of steps to support the initiative: increasing the amount of early-release time available for conferences from 61/2 hours to 13 hours, training teachers in half-day workshops, and systematically preparing students for their new role. Each school set up blocks of time for the conferences, during which core-subject teachers circulated and elective and physical-education teachers provided information on students' performance in their subjects.

From the beginning, the conferences were billed as *student led* and *teacher supported*. Here were the responsibilities communicated to teachers, students and parents:

• Teachers:
- Help students compile a final portfolio with 3-4 work samples for each core subject.
- Show students how to use sticky notes to write insightful "talking points" for each work sample.
- Have students write goals in each subject area (and revisit these later in the year to measure progress).
- Have students complete behavior and/or work habits checklists.
- Provide an agenda for students to follow during the actual conferences to help with time management.
- Provide class time for students to rehearse for their conference.
- Make sure all teachers discuss student progress with each family during the actual conferences.
- Offer parents the opportunity to sign up for an additional conference if they prefer meeting with teachers by themselves.

• Students:
- Choose work samples that reflect your progress in each core subject area, as well as some weak areas.
- Use sticky notes to append "talking points" for each sample that help explain your learning; avoid "show and tell."
- Set serious goals for improvement in each subject area.
- Be honest about your behavior and work habits in each core subject.
- Use your agenda to help pace yourself during the actual conference.
- Practice for the conference with a partner, making sure your portfolio is organized.
- When teachers drop in during the conference, pause politely and let them speak.
- Encourage your parents to sign up for an additional conference if they want more information.

• Parents:
- Request a conference time that fits your work schedule; if a conflict arises, reschedule with your team.

- Bring your child with you; the student leads this type of conference with support from all the teachers.
- Listen carefully to what your child has to say about his/her work samples; ask clarifying questions.
- Expect your child to synthesize his/her learning; this is not "show and tell."
- Review your child's goals carefully; offer specific support your family can provide.
- Behavior/work habits are critical to success at middle school; analyze these carefully.
- When teachers drop in, ask them questions to help you better understand your child's progress in each subject area.
- Schedule another conference if you need to meet privately with the teachers.

Goodman concludes with data on the first year of implementation, including parent attendance rates ranging from 65% to 91% (with increases between 7% and 21% from the previous year) and very positive reactions from parents, who rated the conferences as valuable and informative, said their children were well-prepared, felt they had a much better understanding of what was being studied in each subject area, and knew more about how their children learned, their child's effort, study skills, and classroom behavior. In addition, parents complimented the school on the way all teachers circulated during the conference time and the way elective and physical education teachers provided information on their subjects.

In a sidebar to her article, Goodman shares a chart from Thousand and Villa (1995) on the prerequisites to successful implementation of complex change:

Vision + Skills + Incentives + Resources + Action Plan = Change

If Vision is missing, the result is Confusion.

If Skills are not developed, the result is Anxiety.

If Incentives are not provided, the result is Resistance.

If Resources are not there, the result is Frustration.

If there is no Action Plan, the result is a Treadmill.

"Student-Led, Teacher-Supported Conferences: Improving Communication Across an Urban District" by Amy Goodman in *Middle School Journal*, January 2008 (Vol. 39, #3, p. 48-54), no free e-link available; the author can be reached at Goodman_amy@asdk12.org.

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8. Middle-School Students Give Advice to Their Teachers

In this *Middle School Journal* article, educators Nancy Doda and Trudy Knowles report on more than 2,700 free-writes they have gathered from middle-school students in answer to the question, *What should middle-school teachers know about middle-school students?* "A dominant theme in the letters," say Doda and Knowles, "was the desire to have positive relationships with teachers who were seen as helpful, kind, happy, encouraging, patient, respectful, and non-judgmental. Students observed that they needed teachers who truly knew them as people and as students, genuinely enjoyed them, and were committed to working with them to make success happen."

Clearly this was not always the case, and many students told about teachers who fell short of the mark – while taking some of the blame themselves. One student wrote, "Teachers, teachers, teachers, when will they learn. I have the attention span of a raisin. I need to be kept busy with things that are fun. Teachers need to find out what interests kids and what stuff they like to do. So for a less whiny, annoyed, and temperamental class, make it fun."

Doda and Knowles sorted the letters into categories and drew these general messages for middle-school educators:

- Know us as people and as learners.
- Respect us as people/learners with important ideas and contributions.
- Understand our developmental nature and associated challenges.
- Know that development does not diminish us.
- Find ways to make the learning engaging.
- Teach us in different ways so we can all learn.
- Listen to us.
- Let us know you.
- Be kind.
- Be honest.
- Be hopeful and encouraging.
- Enjoy us!

"Listening to the Voices of Young Adolescents" by Nancy Doda and Trudy Knowles in *Middle School Journal*, January 2008 (Vol. 39, #3, p. 26-33), no free e-link available. The authors can be reached at ndoda@teacher-to-teacher.com and tknowles@wsc.ma.edu.

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

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- 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