Marshall Memo 245

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 4, 2008

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Quotes of the Week

"I understood what a tremendous act of will it is to continue to try when even your teacher has lost faith in you."
Jennifer McDaniel (see item #1)

"From the marrow of their bones, they sent us a message: Place your bet on me."
Leanna Landsmann on the best applicants for college scholarships (see item #2)

"Parenting to put kids on a path to college is a skill that can be developed."
Leanna Landsmann (*ibid*.)

"Good teachers understand the importance of keeping their cool in the classroom."
Bryan Goodwin (see item #6)

"We know from research that students need at least 12 or more meaningful encounters with new words to internalize the meanings."
Janis Wood and Janis Harmon (see item #4)

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1. Dangling on a Climbing Wall and Feeling Students' Pain

In this vivid *Education Week* article, Pennsylvania high-school English teacher Jennifer McDaniel describes how rock climbing helped her understand her students' classroom struggles. Before this, McDaniel couldn't fathom how some students failed to grasp what she was teaching. She herself had always excelled as a student. "When my 9th graders would look up from their books and announce that they 'didn't get it'", she writes, "my first response was inevitably to ask them to read it again. Surely, if they just slowed down and read the words a second time, the text would crack open, wholesale, like an oyster pried apart to reveal a pearl."

If that didn't work, McDaniel offered graphic organizers and asked leading questions, but almost always ended up impatiently supplying the answers herself. "The problem remained that I fundamentally couldn't understand how it was possible to read something and not understand it," she writes. "Sometimes my frustration built and I questioned my students' efforts. If one knew the words and their meanings, how could one *not* piece them together and understand? Maybe they simply weren't trying."

But McDaniel learned humility on the climbing wall. "Besides my general inexperience with ropes and harnesses and general climbing technique," she says, "I discovered I had a sort of aural dyslexia when it came to physical commands." The instructor had to tell her several times to bend her knees and raise her right leg, not her left leg. McDaniel struggled to remember which was her right hand and which was her left, and elicited snickers from her fellow climbers when she mimed the Pledge of Allegiance to jog her memory of which hand belonged over her heart. "If in theory I understood what the instructor's words meant," she says, "then why couldn't my body translate them into the appropriate action?"

The instructor got impatient with her failure to follow directions: "[H]e was telling me what to do as clearly as he could, and I still wasn't doing it. Was I even trying?" she writes. "When he corrected me in a tone that barely disguised his opinion that I was a hopeless case, I truly knew what it must feel like to be one of my students. I understood what a tremendous act of will it is to continue to try when even your teacher has lost faith in you."

McDaniel finally got to the top of the wall, lagging behind a 60-year-old grandmother in the class. "Now I understand the depth of the frustration and embarrassment my students must feel when they fail to understand what they read," she concludes. "I am more determined than ever to have them also experience the pride and exhilaration I felt when I finally succeeded in scaling the wall. I may not yet know all the best techniques to help them achieve at their greatest possible levels, but I will never forget how it feels to be one of them."

"In Their Shoes: How Rock Climbing Helped Me Understand My Students" by Jennifer McDaniel in *Education Week*, July 30, 2008 (Vol. 27, # 44, p. 27), available to subscribers only

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2. Mentors, Moxie, Motivation, and Moms – Four Keys to College

In this feisty *Education Week* article, New York activist/columnist Leanna Landsmann lists the four common ingredients she sees in high-achieving students from low-income schools who win college scholarships each year:

• *Mentors* – Successful students have a strong advocate within their school, a counselor or teacher who reminds them daily of their potential, supports them through the college application process, and organizes trips to campuses so kids can literally see college in their future. High-enrichment activities outside the school are also important, for example, Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America, Jeter's Leaders, Youth Bridge, the Summer Youth Employment Program, Building with Books, Prep for Prep, the Posse Foundation, ROTC, and programs associated with houses of worship. Mentors and programs like these are "force multipliers" for students, says Landsmann, "steering them between the Scylla and Charybdis of poverty's disadvantages and the anti-intellectualism of teenage culture."

• *Moxie* – "The students who won scholarships had a full-tilt combo of energy, determination, courage, and know-how," says Landsmann. "From the marrow of their bones, they sent us a message: Place your bet on me." They dealt handily with difficult questions during interviews, and boldly shared their poetry and plans for world peace.

• *Motivation* – A key to motivation is resilience, which is "inoculation from inside," says Landsmann. "Resilience helps kids bounce back from the most trivial of slights and the most horrible of traumas." The conventional wisdom on resilience is that you either have it or don't. Rubbish, says Landsmann. Resilience can be taught – "through goal-setting, planning for success, and developing confidence through real achievements. In other words, planning for success, and then succeeding, brings more success." Resilient students are motivated: they take tough courses, earn high grades, ask for extra assignments, and work at challenging jobs after school.

• *Moms* – Mothers, some of them with low levels of literacy, no English, living 10,000 miles away, ill or dying, had a powerful influence on successful students, pushing them to be the first in their family to attend college. High parental expectations, combined with an authoritative parenting style, overcame income, ethnicity, and educational attainment. Landsmann says that educators should spend less time trying to get parents up to school meetings and more on getting them to buy into the notion that high expectations for achievement trump everything. "Parenting to put kids on a path to college is a skill that can be developed," she says.

"Motivation, Moxie, and a Shot at College" by Leanna Landsmann in *Education Week*, July 18, 2008 (online commentary, no e-link available)

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3. Using Song Lyrics with Literature in a Middle-School Classroom

In this thoughtful article in *Middle Ground*, Westchester, NY teacher Jaime Marcus describes two phases he went through using songs in his eighth-grade English classes. The first was CLAQ – Connecting Lyrics and Quotes (to literature). Students analyzed a song or quote and connected it to what they were reading in class (for example, *Animal Farm*; the favorite song for this book was "Keep It Together" by Guster). CLAQ was a big hit with most of Marcus's seventh and eighth graders, helping them make connections between popular songs and books. "They started to 'get' common themes between a story and a song," he says.

On the last Friday of each month, students presented their CLAQs orally, without notes, to small groups of classmates. Some brought in the song and played it to enliven their presentations. "To this day," says Marcus, "many former students tell me that CLAQ was one of their most memorable activities." An additional advantage of CLAQs was that students who chose quotes of their own were better prepared for the New York State English Regents Exam, which asks students to analyze a quote and apply it to two texts they've read.

But two years ago, CLAQ began to lose its sizzle, perhaps because Marcus was getting a little tired of it and communicating less enthusiasm to students. Through a chance conversation, Marcus stumbled on a way to update and jazz up the idea. He called it *What's in Your iPod?* and says it the best activity he's used in his ten years in the classroom. With CLAQ, the class focused on a single song or quote. With *What's in Your iPod?*, students picked three songs of their own. They used one for the deep analysis, connected the second to literature, and used the third as a wild card – they could use it like the first or second, or they could connect it with a real person.

Before launching each year's *What's in Your iPod*?, Marcus made it clear that sexual or violent lyrics were forbidden (students who crossed the line got a zero) and spent a full week reviewing poetic devices, themes, messages, the lexicon of music, and the songwriter's purpose. Students practiced annotating the Dave Matthews Band's "Ants Marching", with all its metaphors and deeper meanings, and Marcus modeled converting annotations into analytical paragraphs. By the end of the week, he showed students how to connect a song to a piece of literature, using Jack Johnson's "Gone" and Guy de Maupassant's *The Necklace*. Finally, each class spent a period brainstorming songs with deeper meaning and their connections to literature they'd read.

Then, and only then, could students plunge into their own work, picking songs, analyzing them, and preparing for Listening Station Day. Before assignments were due, Marcus spent a class period and a few lunch periods meeting with students and reviewing six techniques for weaving in quotations. Here are the guidelines he gave students for annotating songs:

- Pick a song from a songwriter that you like and you know about. And if you don't know much about the lyricist, do some research!
- Read the lyrics twice or thrice.

- Keep asking yourself *why*. Why did this person write this? What was going on in his/her life when he/she wrote this? Is this person trying to say something bigger? Like a human truth?
- Be assertive; your close reading is your opinion stated as a fact. Don't write "I think" or "In my opinion."
- Analyze sections that you can explain.
- See if there are any literary or poetic devices (simile, metaphor, symbolism, personification, irony). If so, discuss what they mean in the song. Don't just write, "There's a metaphor in this song." Discuss why the metaphor is important; what does it mean?

Listening Station Day was the *piece de resistance* of *What's in Your iPod?*. Instead of presenting their work orally, students brought in their MP3 players and headphones (Marcus burned a CD for students who didn't own one and set up a CD player), put their player, their writing, and a blank sheet of paper on their desks, and circulated around the room with their own headphones, plugging into a new player every five minutes to listen to their classmates' three tunes, read their analysis papers, and write comments on each classmate's work. It took two 45-minute periods for everyone to make the rounds, and at the end Marcus collected students' writing and comments and read them all.

He's been using the *What's in Your iPod?* activity for two years now and says his students love it ("last year's students wouldn't shut up about it"). Beyond the sheer enjoyment, the benefits of high-interest literary analysis, and students' better-than-usual writing, there were social benefits. "Kids who barely spoke to each other – although they'd been together for nine years in the same class – began striking up conversations about music," says Marcus. "Students who were practically best friends began to see new dimensions of each other. I heard 'Wow, I didn't know how much you still thought about your grandma' or 'I forgot how much you loved the Beatles.'"

Marcus concludes by saying that in schools where fewer students have MP3 players, CLAQ is a perfectly good activity. "The academic value of both assignments is quite remarkable," he says, "but the intimacy and camaraderie *What's in Your iPod?* creates are priceless and well worth any teacher's time."

"What's in Your iPod? Mixing Music and Meaning" by Jaime Marcus in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 19-21), no e-link available; Marcus can be reached at MarcusJ@ArdsleySchools.org.

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4. Seven Principles of Effective Vocabulary Learning

In this article in *Middle Ground*, professors Karen Wood and Janis Harmon present a list of "absolutes" for K-12 vocabulary instruction – sure-fire, research-validated ways to help students learn new words:

• *Get students reading independently*. "Students who read more tend to have larger and more sophisticated vocabularies than those who read very little," say Wood and Harmon. In school and at home, the key is copious reading of a wide range of self-selected materials – novels, non-fiction, graphic novels, electronic texts, magazines, newspapers, etc. – appropriate to their level.

• *When necessary, teach significant words directly*. A graphic organizer or semantic web is helpful to introduce new words, explain and enrich them in context, and then return to them later.

• *Know when to teach words and when to lay back*. Since students can understand a passage in which 15 percent of the words are unfamiliar, teachers need to be strategic about which words they teach. The key questions are: How important is this word to understanding the passage? At what level must a reader know the word? What do students already know about the word? Are there familiar prefixes or roots? What type of word is it – a new label for a familiar concept (*arrogant* for *stuck up)* or a new label for an unfamiliar or more difficult concept (*economic* or *arbitrary*)?

• *Teach students how to figure out word meanings on their own*. "Merely providing a dictionary definition is not sufficient to ensure that students can assimilate the words into their existing vocabularies," say Wood and Harmon. An alternative is to have students read a passage, zero in on a difficult word (for example, *subsistence*), and use the context and other clues (*sub-* and *-tence*) to figure out the meaning.

• *Keep coming back to new words*. "We know from research that students need at least 12 or more meaningful encounters with new words to internalize the meanings," say Wood and Harmon. This means that just pre-teaching vocabulary barely scratches the surface; teachers need to draw attention to words in context, have students keep a vocabulary journal, come back to words in different contexts, and have students use the words in small groups, in presentations, and in their writing.

• *Teach independent word learning strategies*. These include developing word awareness, using available context clues, analyzing word structures, connecting to background knowledge, and using reference books and people who can help. Middle-school students crave independence, and any strategy the capitalizes on this has a leg up. One approach is having students pick two or three words within a content unit that they want to learn more about, keep a journal on the new words, noting where they found them, how they were used, their meaning, using them in a sentence, and sharing them with a group of peers.

• *Use rich, robust instruction that makes learning fun*. This means throwing out ineffective approaches like looking up words in a dictionary and memorizing lists of definitions and getting students actively involved in thinking about words, relating them to life experiences, and developing associations and relationships. Students should review new words by using them in conversation, in plays, in travelogues, in e-mail messages, and in videotaped skits.

"The Absolutes of Vocabulary Instruction" by Karen Wood and Janis Harmon in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 29-30), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at kdwood@uncc.edu and janis.harmon@utsa.edu.

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5. Learning How *Not* to Handle a Student's Annoying Question

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, John Lemuel describes an incident that took place in his first year as an assistant professor at a small mid-western college. He had just finished a class and was gathering his materials to get to his next lecture when a tall, jock-looking student with a cocky walk approached him, trailed by a sidekick. "Maybe you can help me," said the student. "See, reading's not my thing, and you assign a lot of it, so I was wondering, do you have any suggestions for me?" Stressed about being late, Lemuel blurted out that perhaps college was the wrong place for him, that he should *make reading his thing* or look into other career options. When the student persisted, the professor quickly suggested a few reading and time-management strategies and rushed off.

A week later, Lemuel got an e-mail from the student's mother, copied to the academic dean, complaining about the way her son had been treated. She wasn't fighting her boy's battles, she said, and wouldn't share the e-mail with him, but was upset about the way Lemuel had damaged her boy's psyche and failed to nurture him academically. She said that perhaps she had made a mistake sending her son to this college and was telling all her friends what she thought of the place.

Stung – and acutely conscious that his boss was reading the mother's e-mail – Lemuel phoned the student. "Think you could come to my office?" he asked. "Your mom sent me this e-mail, and I'd like to follow up with you." A much humbler young man appeared, with no swagger and no sidekick, and Lemuel said bluntly that students should take up professor problems with the professor first. "You acted like I was wasting your time," countered the student. Lemuel knew he hadn't handled the after-class conversation well and tried to recover. He suggested that the student see his adviser (who suggested using a highlighter with reading; astonishingly, this wasn't part of the student's repertoire), and urged him to drop by any time for advice and support. The student agreed to buckle down.

Lemuel then responded to the mother's e-mail, with a copy to the dean. He said that he *had* given her son some advice in the initial after-class talk (a detail that the student had omitted), described the follow-up meeting in his office, said he and her son had reached a meeting of minds, and promised not to hold her protest against her son. There were two between-the-lines messages in Lemuel's e-mail: To the parent, *Butt out*. To the dean, *Kids and their parents, huh?*

The mother responded the next day, without copying the dean, expressing gratitude and showing no signs of wanting to go another round. "She hadn't wanted her son involved," says Lemuel; "I hadn't wanted my dean involved." The dean supported him, saying he was impressed with how the situation had been defused. "Both sides came away from the

experience like most kids do emerging from a schoolyard fight," concludes Lemuel, "feathers ruffled but largely unscathed, a little sadder and a little wiser."

The student ended up passing Lemuel's course in good shape, and they maintained a wary but outwardly cordial relationship through the student's four years at the college. Lemuel met the parents at one point ("Oh, this is that professor," said the father), and he made sure they knew he had won a teaching award. "Sparring with an undergrad for self-respect seems appallingly petty," says Lemuel, "but at times it's felt like I've been doing just that, staying on my toes in case I have to dodge or throw a punch."

The professor's take-away from the incident: "For my own good as well as that of my students, I have resolved to take a breath and look beyond a dumb question before I let fly the left hook."

"The Four-Year Standoff" by John Lemuel (a pseudonym) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Aug. 1, 2008 (Vol. LIV, #47, p. 28-29), no e-link available

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6. Billy Beane's (Indirect) Advice on Hiring Teachers

In this *Changing Schools* article, McREL staffer Bryan Goodwin applies the lessons of Michael Lewis's book about baseball strategist Billy Beane – *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* – to the hiring and support of teachers. Beane argues that the metrics traditionally used by baseball scouts – batting average, height, and speed, for example – don't correlate well with players' contributions to winning games. Beane suggested focusing on different metrics, such as a player's ability to draw walks, as well as intangibles like self-confidence and an even temper (when he was a player, Beane's quick temper and self-doubt undermined his physical abilities). Using this approach, the Oakland Athletics were able to field a team on a par with the Yankees and Red Sox, which spent far more money on their players.

So what are the comparable metrics that educators should and shouldn't use to hire "winning" teachers? Goodwin lists three factors that are *not* correlated with success: licensure, credentials, and advanced degrees. Hiring certified teachers may be a requirement under NCLB, says Goodwin, but it doesn't guarantee high-quality instruction in classrooms. Three studies of elementary schools showed that having a master's degree was *negatively* correlated with student achievement. But in high-school science and math, students perform better with teachers who have a master's degree in their subject area.

On the positive side, Goodwin says the research points to nine look-fors when hiring teachers. Since very few candidates will have all of them, good hiring is the art of weighing several attributes and deciding which are the best fit for your team. To spot the intangibles, it's essential to watch candidates teach demonstration lessons.

• *Some experience* – Teachers improve rapidly in the first five years on the job, so it's definitely better to hire teachers who have taught successfully in other settings. Most teachers' learning curves flatten out after five years, and although some continue to develop throughout

their careers, on average, there's no great advantage to hiring a 15-25 year veteran over a teacher with 5-6 years of experience.

• *Subject-area expertise* – It is critically important, the research says, that teachers know their subject deeply, understand how children learn it, and master a range of teaching methods matched to what they are teaching – what's called pedagogical content knowledge.

• *Strong academic preparation* – Students do better with teachers who attended selective colleges; this effect is most pronounced with high-school and lower-income students.

• *Educational attainment* – A 2002 study showed that high teacher verbal and cognitive levels are twice as powerful at raising student achievement as poverty is at depressing it.

• *High expectations* – The research is clear about the influence of teachers' belief in students' ability to achieve.

• *Self-efficacy* – Teachers' confidence in their own ability to overcome challenges and build student achievement is also key. As Billy Beane discovered, "insidious self-doubts" can undermine formidable skills.

• *The ability to connect with students* – Effective teachers get to know students, listen to them, understand them, and care about them as individuals.

• *With-it-ness* – Effective teachers have "eyes in the back of their heads" and nip discipline problems in the bud.

• *Emotional objectivity* – "Good teachers understand the importance of keeping their cool in the classroom," says Goodwin. They deal with discipline without becoming emotionally involved or personalizing what students do.

"What Makes for a Good Teacher? Lessons from Billy Beane's Oakland A's and Research on Teacher Attributes" by Bryan Goodwin in *Changing Schools*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 58, p. 6-8) http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/teacherprepretention/0125NL_ChangingSchools_58_3.pdf . The author can be reached at bgoodwin@mcrel.org.

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7. Getting and Keeping Effective Teachers

In this article in *Changing Schools*, Gary Peterson and Bryan Goodwin summarize McREL's research on how to get the best teaching in every classroom:

• *Hire great teachers*. This means screening and interviewing carefully, hiring experienced teachers whenever possible, moving up the timetable so most teachers are hired before the end of April (one large district lost 60 percent of its most highly qualified applicants when the process dragged on into the summer), and giving principals a stake in the process (a New Teacher Project study found that 40 percent of teachers were "force-placed" in schools with no input from principals). Some districts have been able to overcome the barriers to these conditions, including Rochester, NY, Clark County, NV, and San Diego, CA.

• *Adopt a flexible yet consistent instructional program*. This means adopting non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction and having a common definition of what good teaching looks like and a common vocabulary of research-based instructional practices – for example, adopting a common planning template for planning curriculum units. "This approach

provides teachers with a model for what is expected," says Peterson and Godwin, "while allowing teachers flexibility to meet the needs of all of the students who walk through the classroom door."

• *Provide coherent staff development*. This doesn't mean having all teachers participate in the same activities. The most effective PD boosts subject-specific pedagogy, meets teachers' individual needs, and gives opportunities to improve through modeling and coaching.

• *Ensure that principals regularly supervise, coach, and evaluate teachers*. One study found that new teachers, on average, are evaluated only twice a year, and experienced teachers only every 3-5 years. To make matters worse, many observed lessons are unrepresentative "dog and pony shows" because the teacher knows in advance that the principal is coming. It's essential that principals make much more frequent visits to classrooms, unannounced, and speak to teachers afterward with helpful feedback. It's also essential that schools dismiss ineffective teachers. Peterson and Goodwin cite a 2003 Public Agenda study that found 90 percent of teachers support tougher evaluation of ineffective colleagues, provided it is fair and equitable.

"Great Teachers and Great Teaching: The District's Role" by Gary Peterson and Bryan Goodwin in *Changing Schools*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 58, p. 3-5)
http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/teacherprepretention/0125NL_ChangingSchools_58_2.pdf

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8. Three Keys to Improving Student Achievement

In this article in *Changing Schools*, McREL consultant Vicki Urquhart reports on the findings of McREL's multi-year study of effective classrooms, schools, and districts and of a 2007 international study by McKinsey & Company. The research indicates that more money is not the answer (Singapore spends less than most countries yet has high achievement); nor are extended hours (Finland has fewer school hours and yet ranks fourth internationally); nor are small, autonomous schools (the Gates Foundation has found that other factors outweigh school size). To get high achievement for all students, we need to:

• *Hire the right teachers* – Degrees are much less important than effective instructional practices and good relationships with students, says the research. It's vital to hire the very best by asking probing interview questions. It's also vital to streamline the hiring process to avoid scrambling to fill spots with "leftover" applicants late in the summer.

• *Develop the best possible teaching in every classroom* – This includes time for effective professional development overseen by senior teachers, resources and tools for successful teaching, time for teachers to plan instruction together and visit each others' classrooms, and a relentless focus on student learning results.

• *Intervene early and often* – Numerous studies show that effective schools support students who are falling behind and move quickly to close learning gaps. One such model is Response to Intervention (RTI), which helps struggling students with team problem-solving, changes in instruction, more intensive instruction, and progress monitoring.

Urquhart concludes by urging schools to model themselves after high-reliability systems that constantly drive themselves to eliminate failures, such as nuclear power plants, toxic chemical factories, and commercial aircraft maintenance. "[W]hat if we had fail-safe schools that treated the failure of a single child as equally tragic as a nuclear meltdown, chemical spill, or an airplane crash?" she asks.

"Three Musts for Bolstering Student Achievement" by Vicki Urquhart in *Changing Schools*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 58, p. 1-2)
http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/teacherprepretention/0125NL_ChangingSchools_58_1.pdf
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9. Hands-On Classroom Computer Projects

In this article in *Middle Ground*, technology expert Alan November describes seven ways to get students using computers more actively and productively:

• *Tutorial design* – Eric Marcos, a middle-school teacher in Santa Monica, CA, has his students create screencasted tutorials, recording themselves solving class problems on their computer screens. November suggests using Jing, free software that can record and capture what students are doing on their screens: http://www.jingproject.com. Marcos has built a new YouTube-like website – http://www.mathtrain.tv - which he and the rest of the school's math department use to share their students' screencasts.

• *Official scribes* – Darren Kuropatwa, a Winnipeg, Canada high-school calculus teacher, has a different student take notes and collect diagrams on a computer each day, creating the class's online calculus notebook. Kuropatwa says the culture of his classes has been transformed from individual students working on "their stuff" to a collaborative learning community. He says that students who never took notes before are doing so now, aware that their peers depend on them when it's their day, and students who were not proficient note-takers are getting better because they see high-quality models every day. Kuropatwa's website is at: http://adifference.blogspot.com/2006/11/distributed-teaching-and-learning_21.html

• *Instant researchers* – Rather than having one computer sitting idle at the back of the classroom, November suggests assigning a different student every day to be at an online computer and immediately search for the answer to any research questions that come up. Of course, students have to learn how to sort through all the nonsense on the Internet and find their way to the most reliable information – an important skill! The class can gradually build up a list of the most authoritative websites, perhaps compiling them using Google's Custom Search Engine creator: http://www.google.com/coop/cse/ .

• *Collaboration coordinators* – November suggests that by using Skype, a class can set up free communication with students in another part of the world to enrich a curriculum topic – for example, talking with a class of British students about the American Revolution from both countries' perspectives. A class could also establish contact with an expert in the field. Skype is at http://www.skype.com.

• *Contributing to society* – Websites like Kiva – http://www.kiva.com – open the door for making a difference internationally, for example, by making small loans to entrepreneurs in developing countries.

• *Curriculum reviewers* – Students can get involved in reviewing materials from different sources, combining visual and audio material to be posted online. One example is Bob Sprankle's class in Wells, Maine, which organizes, records, and edits their podcasts each week during their snack time and makes them available to a global audience. You can check it out at http://www.bobsprankle.com/podcasts/0506/rm208vodcast.mov.

"The Digital Learning Farm" by Alan November in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 10-13), no e-link available

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10. Busting Myths About Early Readiness

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Northwestern professor Carol Lee lists five "folk beliefs" for which schools need answers:

- If parents don't read books to their children before they come to school, the children are not likely to become competent readers.
- If parents don't engage in the kind of talk that we imagine goes on in middle-class homes, the children's vocabulary will be so limited that they can never catch up.
- If children haven't learned the alphabetic principles and how to count to 10 before they reach kindergarten, they will be behind forever.
- If children don't speak "the King's English," they cannot be taught.
- If parents don't come to school, they are not interested in their children's education.

"At best, such pronouncements are based on studies of white middle-class samples," writes Lee. "At worst, they reflect our stereotypes about poor people and their children… [presuming] a monolithic approach to teaching that does not create multiple pathways for reaching common goals."

"I want to see education researchers generate theories of learning that help us to understand how the exercise of power and the availability of resources can affect opportunity to learn," concludes Lee, "how socialization efforts can help youth learn to make sense of and resist those institutional structures and practices that constrain and impede their opportunities to learn. This kind of understanding, I think, is the essence of learning to be adaptive. And learning to be adaptive is indeed the name of the game called Life."

"The Centrality of Culture to the Scientific Study of Learning and Development: How an Ecological Framework in Education Research Facilitates Civic Responsibility" by Carol Lee in *Educational Researcher*, June/July 2008 (Vol. 37, # 5, p. 267-279), no e-link available; the author can be reached at cdlee@northwestern.edu.

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11. Short Items:

a. Science and current events website – The National Science Digital Library has a new website to help teachers include current events in their science lessons: "Connecting News to National Science Education Standards." Geared to students in grades 5-8, the site is refreshed every Thursday: http://expertvoices.nsdl.org/connectingnews.

"News to Use" in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 6-7)

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b. History website – The National History Education Clearinghouse has a central online location for high-quality resources in K-12 U.S. History education: http://teachinghistory.org.

"News to Use" in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 6-7)

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c. C.I.A. website – Believe it or not, the Central Intelligence Agency has a public website, The World Fact Book, with statistics about people and places around the world. Updated on a regular basis, the site has information about history, government, geography, demographics, economy, transportation, current issues, and many other categories. Check it out at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

"News to Use" in *Middle Ground*, August 2008 (Vol. 12, #1, p. 6-7)

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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).

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
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 Language Educator
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal