

Marshall Memo 128

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

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Quotes of the Week

“... a high-minded excuse for paralysis.”

Samuel Freedman’s comment on Jonathan Kozol’s recent book (see item #9a)

“When students fail to learn, some teachers end up blaming the students, without an honest investigation of where student fault ends and teacher responsibility begins.”

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (see item #3)

“It doesn’t matter how well a lesson plan is written or how well the lesson is taught if students cannot clearly articulate the lesson’s content and purpose.”

Leslye Arbrutyn (see item #1)

“Ninety percent of classroom management happens before kids ever act out.”

Rick Smith, California consultant (*Education Update*, March 2006, Vol. 48, #3, p. 3)

“An astonishing variety of conditions and events can wreck a lesson. Some teachers seem resigned to this situation; they accept chaos as a natural part of school life. Others express sharp anxiety about these events and fret over them.”

Mary Kennedy (see item #4)

“Surely schools can find a way to convey announcements without interrupting learning. Surely if schools can afford telephones, they can afford answering machines.”

Mary Kennedy (*ibid.*)

1. Interviewing All Students to Gather Data for School Improvement

In this article in the March *Educational Leadership*, Leslye Abrutyn, the superintendent of a 3,400-student suburban Pennsylvania school district, describes an innovative data-gathering program that the district has been using for several years. The superintendent believes that this process has played a key role in significant gains in student achievement. Here's how it works:

- In August each year, a committee of teachers at each school looks at standardized test scores and identifies areas that need improvement. Each school then decides on *one* high-priority area (math problem-solving, for example) and generates questions to tap student understanding in that area. The questions are field-tested on a few students to make sure the wording is clear.

- Early in the fall, each school organizes a team of teachers, administrators, and invited community members to conduct 5-minute interviews with every student in the school. Desks are set up in the corridors and team members pull students out of their classrooms one by one until every student has been interviewed (students get upset if they are left out). If the school can sign up and train enough volunteers, the whole process can be completed within a single school day.

- Students are questioned on what's happening in their classes and what they know. If the focus is math problem-solving, students might be asked to name and describe as many math problem-solving strategies as possible; to identify the problem-solving strategies they would use for several sample math problems; or to actually solve a problem and explain the strategy they used. If the focus is reading comprehension, the interviewers might ask students to list and explain reading strategies they use and when they would use each one. If writing is the focus, the interviewers might ask students to share a model piece of writing from their portfolio, explain why this is the best piece, and discuss how it is organized.

- The teacher team then collects the data sheets; the committee usually meets the same day and tallies the data in an hour or two, either manually or using a computer.

- At the next faculty meeting, the committee reports on the results and presents its recommendations. This becomes the school's focus for the year, and teachers work on implementing the recommendations. Here are some examples from one school that focused on writing:

- Strength: All grades have improved their understanding of the writing process. Younger grades are particularly strong in prewriting and initial drafts.
- Need: Some students still lack an understanding of the writing process.
Recommendation: Post the steps of the writing process in all classrooms, continue teaching the model, and discuss the steps.
- Strength: students are able to verbalize the importance of details when writing and are able to look at a piece they have written and add more details.
- Need: Some students still associate content with length and are vague about how to use details. Recommendation: Use anchor papers to serve as models of proficient performance in this area.
- Strength: Younger students understand the concept of beginning, middle, and end.
- Strength: Students mention graphic organizers as a strategy to help with organization.
- Strength: Older students understand the importance of topic sentences and paragraph formation.
- Need: Younger students understand organization but need more practice.
Recommendation: Teachers should work on paragraph development and point out organization when students are reading passages.

- Principals from all schools in the district meet to share their data and learn from each other.

- The following spring, each school repeats the process, interviewing every student in the school, tabulating the results, and reporting to the staff – which is eager to see if progress was made on key indicators.

Abrutyn believes that these bi-annual interviews of students have “transformed our district’s schools by bringing into sharper focus not only what teachers are teaching but also what students are learning.” For schools, says the superintendent, the process “forever changes the lens through which it views learning. All eyes are on students – Do they understand the goals for the classroom? Can they verbalize them?”

The interviews also increase students’ investment in the learning process. “When a number of adults spend an entire day talking with them about their learning,” says Abrutyn, “students realize that school improvement revolves around them.”

Another key insight, says the superintendent, is that teachers and administrators realize, “It doesn’t matter how well a lesson plan is written or how well the lesson is taught if students cannot clearly articulate the lesson’s content and purpose. This epiphany,” Abrutyn continues, “has transformed administrators’ informal classroom visits. Rather than watch the teacher, the administrator will usually now look first at students to see whether they are engaged and actively participating in the learning. Next, the administrator will walk up to a student and ask, ‘What are you working on?’ followed by, ‘Why are you doing that?’”

Most important, says Abrutyn, the interviews produce “authentic, fresh, clear information that gives teachers immediate guidance about where they must direct their efforts. This information does not require advanced technology, data warehousing, or advanced

statistical skills. Yet it empowers students, teachers, and administrators, and as a result, the entire school.” It also provide grist for the year’s professional development.

Didn’t teachers feel threatened by having their students systematically interviewed? From experience, Abrutyn suggests the following: (a) send a delegation of teachers to a school that is using the process successfully; (b) start with a voluntary pilot program to build belief and enthusiasm; and (c) reassure teachers that data collected from student interviews will not be used to evaluate them.

“The Most Important Data” by Leslye Abrutyn in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 54-57), no e-link available. Abrutyn can be reached at labrutyn@yahoo.com.

2. Involving Teachers in Classroom Walk-Throughs

In this intriguing *Educational Leadership* article, California high-school principal James Bushman describes how he cut the following deal with his teachers: (a) he would stop going through the sham of formal “dog and pony show” evaluations; (b) teachers would join him on “walk-throughs” of classrooms within their department during their prep periods and give feedback to their colleagues in department meetings; (c) the principal would use information gathered from informal classroom visits to fill out teachers’ official evaluations.

Teachers have embraced the model, says Bushman. It didn’t cost a dime and has “led to dramatic changes in our collective understanding of instructional practice.” He quotes one teacher as saying, “The process we are now using has encouraged teachers to reflect and share. Teachers who have said little or nothing in department meetings are now expressing their thoughts on teaching. Evaluation for me will never be the same.”

Here’s how Bushman arrived at this innovative model. In 2002, he attended a workshop on walk-throughs and began making short visits to classrooms. He became proficient at stepping into classrooms and quickly sizing up teachers’ instructional objectives, the teaching decisions being made, and the level of cognition being asked of students. Through this new observation process, Bushman began seeing things that he’d been missing before: Teachers were teaching *around* the standards, not *to* them; teachers were not asking students to write regularly; overall, classroom activities were not challenging for all students.

But here was the problem: How could he get teachers to see what he was seeing – and change? He was sure that the conventional evaluation process, fraught with phoniness, defensiveness, and resistance, was not the right avenue. Besides, none of these teachers were unsatisfactory, so they could brush off any recommendations he made in his evaluations.

Bushman proposed his new deal to the math and science departments, and all but one teacher agreed. In the spring of 2003, he began scheduling teachers for walk-throughs to classrooms within their own department. Alone or in pairs, teachers came to Bushman’s office in their prep periods and got a quick briefing on the four things they would be looking for in classrooms:

- the lesson objective;
- the teaching methods used;

- the level of mental engagement required of students;
- evidence of instructional support on the classroom walls.

Bushman then accompanied the teacher or teachers on a series of short visits to 8-10 classrooms. After each classroom visit, they chatted about what they had seen with respect to the four focus questions and how it compared to their own teaching. “During the walk-through,” reports Bushman, “I had teachers’ undivided attention to discuss instruction in a non-threatening way, using other teachers as models. My goal was to help teachers become reflective and see examples of practices they could emulate or question.”

Initially, the follow-up department meetings were at teachers’ homes after school. Discussions were candid. “Gosh,” said one teacher, “as a department, we are good at teaching students to solve problems but not at teaching them how to *problem-solve*. I need to teach my students to be better thinkers.” This was just the kind of revelation Bushman was hoping for. “Such insights are hard to come by,” he said, “but they are important for facilitating instructional change.” At the end of these session, Bushman gave teachers their evaluations, which he had filled out based on his brief observations.

The next year, Bushman offered the math and science departments the same deal with a twist: math teachers would observe science classrooms and vice-versa. Every teacher agreed, and the insights they gained were even more valuable. Teachers said they were able to observe more objectively when they were in classrooms outside their subject area. One teacher commented, “Last year during the walk-through, I was not convinced that much could be learned about a class in a five-minute visit. This time around, I am realizing that a significant amount of information can be determined. It simply required me to be a more focused observer during the limited time.”

After the walk-throughs were complete, Bushman organized a joint math/science department meeting, this time during school hours. It was the first time teachers had met across department lines, and the discussion was highly productive, with many teachers gaining a new appreciation for the challenges their math and science colleagues faced.

The following spring, Bushman added English and social studies teachers to the program, with an additional twist: some teachers asked to do walk-throughs of teachers in their feeder middle school, so Bushman organized this, after prepping the teachers in the other school. Bushman also tweaked his procedure on final evaluations: this time, he gave teachers blank evaluation forms and asked them to do a self-evaluation. He then tabulated teacher and department results so he could have follow-up discussions in areas where teachers felt they needed improvement.

What was the impact of all this on the school? Bushman says that it transformed what had been an empty evaluation process into one that continuously promoted reflection and communication about teaching and learning. “We began to notice that teachers talked to one another more about instruction,” he says, “and that teachers had an easier time seeing the logic for pursuing reform. Teachers came to the school administrators to show us how they had added or modified lessons to make them more engaging or challenging for kids. We found that our process gave teachers the opportunities they had craved to visit other classrooms and see

what other teachers were doing, as well as guidance in knowing what to look for... For the first time, teachers from different departments could understand what instruction looked like in departments other than their own. Perhaps most important, teachers and administrators could talk to one another about instruction, knowing they had common understandings.”

Several points: Bushman doesn't use the walk-throughs with new teachers, whom he believes need individual follow-up talks with him. Some veteran teachers have opted out; they too want more individual feedback from the administrators. Bushman concedes that his process is demanding on the principal; it requires skill and creativity to know how to find talking points in short observations. “Most important,” he concludes, “the model requires administrators to engage and question teachers without being critical or demeaning to the teacher being observed.”

“Teachers as Walk-Through Partners” by James Bushman in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 58-61), no e-link available. Bushman can be reached at jbushman@visalia.k12.ca.us.

3. What Principals Can Do to Make Good Teaching Possible

In this March *Educational Leadership* article, Michigan State professor Mary Kennedy begins by emphasizing the importance of hiring good teachers (she suggests asking candidates to submit videotapes of themselves in action in the classroom) and then focuses on three conditions of daily classroom life that diminish the quality of teaching:

- *Dependence on lesson props* – Kennedy is distressed that teachers have to spend so much time creating materials (for example, for a lesson on the water cycle, a third-grade teacher brings in a hot plate, a saucepan, and some ice cubes so she can boil water to show evaporation and then put an ice cube on the lid to show condensation). “Why are teachers obliged to make all their own materials alone and from scratch?” asks Kennedy. “Why don't schools maintain storerooms with such supplies or ask volunteers to make them? Why don't teachers routinely share their own stores of materials with one another? Why has our school culture evolved in such a way that we tolerate this large investment of teachers' limited time?” Kennedy thinks that a much more productive use of teachers' time is reading students' work and reflecting on curriculum content. “Creating materials is not intellectual work,” she concludes. “It is busywork that distracts teachers from the conceptual core of teaching.”

Kennedy points out another problem with homemade lesson props: they often go wrong and derail the lesson they were designed to enhance (for example, a primary-grade teacher asks her students to fold a sheet of paper in half vertically and then into thirds horizontally to help them understand multiplication of fractions – but students don't have the coordination skills to do the second part of the folding and the lesson flops). Props go wrong quite frequently because of poorly-written teachers' guides and inadequate preparation time for teachers.

Kennedy appeals to principals to help teachers create or procure lesson props with much less expenditure of time and effort. The best way is to schedule same-grade or same-subject teacher teams to compare materials, create them together, share notes on how well they work, find ways to improve them, and learn from one another's experiences with them.

- *Unnecessary interruptions* – Lesson momentum is often killed by public address announcements, a teacher’s phone ringing in the middle of a class (no answering machine, of course), someone from the office dropping by with a trivial question (Did you fill out that form? Will you be at the meeting Thursday night?), or students being pulled out for special education, bilingual education, and other activities. “An astonishing variety of conditions and events can wreck a lesson,” writes Kennedy. “Some teachers seem resigned to this situation; they accept chaos as a natural part of school life. Others express sharp anxiety about these events and fret over them.”

Interruptions often steal twice as much time as the intrusion itself, since the teacher has to regroup and backtrack to regain momentum and student engagement. Reflecting on her study of daily classroom life, Kennedy says, “These interruptions were rarely necessary, and always disruptive. Apparently, the culture of our schools holds such little regard for teaching that interruptions like these are considered acceptable. Yet every teacher who was interrupted was upset by it.”

Kennedy believes that the constant barrage of interruptions contributes to a dumbing down of instruction. “If you can’t be certain that you will be able to carry on an uninterrupted and coherent dialogue for some length of time,” she writes, “you have little motivation to try to teach complex ideas.”

Kennedy pleads with school leaders to improve their standard operating procedures so as to protect classrooms from interruptions. “Surely schools can find a way to schedule students’ supplemental services and special classes that is not so disruptive to teaching,” she writes. “Surely schools can find a way to convey announcements without interrupting learning. Surely if schools can afford telephones, they can afford answering machines... Schedules should honor the main classroom and the lessons that occur there rather than require classroom teachers to accommodate everyone else’s needs.”

- *Disengaged and overly engaged students* – Dealing with behavior problems is a perennial challenge for teachers. But there are also challenges from students who become overly enthusiastic, ask out-of-left-field questions, and generate unexpected thoughts that are hard for teachers to handle. “Imagine trying to get a particular idea across to 25 students who are all veering off in different directions as they contemplate this new idea in their own idiosyncratic ways,” says Kennedy. She believes that schools need to focus professional development on the practical challenges like these, rather than “bromides and exhortations.”

“From Teacher Quality to Quality Teaching” by Mary Kennedy in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 14-19), no e-link available

4. Peer Assistance and Review for Teachers

In this article in the March *Educational Leadership*, New York professors Jennifer Goldstein and Pedro Noguera make the case for Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), a way of engaging teachers to help colleagues who are struggling – and if they don’t improve, moving through a process to remove them from the classroom.

Goldstein and Noguera start with the assumption that many principals are overwhelmed with their duties and don't get into classrooms nearly enough to do meaningful teacher evaluations. The result is that principals give very few ineffective teachers unsatisfactory evaluations.

Peer review originated in Toledo in 1981 and has been adopted in a number of districts across the country. Goldstein and Noguera say that PAR "reduces the burden on principals, the isolation of the classroom teacher, and sometimes even the antagonism and hostility between labor and management by involving teachers in the formal evaluation of other teachers and making them responsible for employment recommendations."

Districts that have started peer review programs have dismissed a much larger number of ineffective teachers – and also helped struggling teachers improve. In one district, 14 of 91 participating teachers were not renewed for employment during the first year of PAR – 11 out of 88 new teachers and 3 out of 3 veterans. In the second and third years, the number of teachers participating the program increased and the number not renewed stabilized at about 10 percent each year. Dismissing that percent of new and veteran teachers is virtually unheard of in other districts using conventional evaluations – and it happened without rancor or conflict.

Here's how PAR works: teachers with excellent teaching records are recruited as coaches and released from classroom duties for 2-3 years. The coaches work with a limited number of new teachers and veterans who are having difficulty, making numerous classroom visits followed up by one-on-one conferences. Coaches also run study groups focusing on particular areas of need. If a teacher is not improving after a certain period of time, the case is brought before a panel co-chaired by the union president and the district's director of human resources (teachers are a majority of the panel). The panel questions coaches about interventions that have been tried and can recommend termination at the end of the school year – or earlier.

Goldstein and Noguera concede that not every principal is willing to give up teacher evaluation, which is often seen as an important source of power and authority. But principals are wrong to take this position, say the professors. "Peer assistance and review," they write, "moves supervision beyond the factory model that puts the school principal in charge of a large number of workers to a professional model in which teachers hold one another accountable for quality practice. Rather than reducing the principal's power, this approach presumes that strong principals serve as effective instructional leaders when they use the strengths of those around them."

"A Thoughtful Approach to Teacher Evaluation" by Jennifer Goldstein and Pedro Noguera in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 31-37), no e-link available

5. Four "Pillar Practices" for Bringing Out the Best in Teachers

In this thoughtful article in the March issue of *The Learning Principal*, Columbia Teachers College professor Ellie Drago-Severson divides teachers into three categories:

- Teachers with an instrumental way of knowing – They see the world in very concrete terms and want to know, “What’s in it for me?”
- Teachers with a socializing way of knowing – Their primary question is, “Will the principal still value me?” Gaining the approval and acceptance of others is of utmost importance to them, and criticism and conflict are seen as a threat.
- Teachers with a self-authoring way of knowing – Their guiding question is, “Am I maintaining my own standards and values? Am I achieving my goals and being guided by my ideals?”

For principals who are able to sort their teachers into these three categories and differentiate professional development, Drago-Severson has specific suggestions for each (see her book, *Helping Teachers Learn: Principal Leadership for Adult Growth and Development*, Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2004). For principals who are formulating a strategy for supporting the growth of all teachers, she suggests the following “pillar practices,” which benefit all three categories in different ways:

- *Working in teams*: This helps teachers reflect on the school’s mission; think about ways to implement the school’s core values; reflect on approaches to teaching and learning; and make decisions collaboratively.

- *Assuming leadership roles*: When teachers are given some power and are asked to take part in decision-making, they often rise to the occasion, their consciousness is raised, and they are able to share their expertise and knowledge.

- *Collegial inquiry*: When teachers work closely with their colleagues (for example, on action research projects), reflecting on their practice, their assumptions, and their values, they gain a more complex perspective and grow as professionals, making more robust contributions to the school as whole.

- *Mentoring*: Whether they are working with university interns or colleagues within their school, this gives teachers a chance to share their expertise and leadership, examine their assumptions, and broaden their perspective.

“How Can You Better Support Teachers’ Growth?” by Ellie Drago-Severson in *The Learning Principal* (National Staff Development Council), March 2006 (Vol. 1, #6, p. 1, 6, 7), no e-link

6. Implementing a New Program: Dealing with 7 Stages of Staff Concern

The March issue of *The Learning Principal* advises school leaders on how to address seven predictable layers of staff resistance/response to an innovation that’s being introduced in their school:

- *Stage 0: Awareness concerns* (teachers not interested in or concerned about the innovation):
 - If possible, involve teachers in discussions and decisions about the innovation.
 - Share enough information to arouse interest, but don’t overwhelm staff members.
 - Emphasize that there’s no such thing as a stupid question and it’s quite reasonable for people to not know too much about the innovation.
- *Stage 1: Informational concerns* (teachers wanting to know more about the innovation):

- Provide clear and accurate information about the innovation.
- Share information verbally, in writing, and through available media
- Communicate in large groups, small groups, and individually.
- Help teachers see how the innovation is similar to and different from their current practices.
- *Stage 2: Personal concerns* (teachers wanting to know how the change will affect them):
 - Emphasize that it's okay to express personal concerns.
 - Use personal notes and conversations to encourage and reinforce personal adequacy.
 - Connect these teachers with others who feel more confident about the innovation.
- *Stage 3: Management concerns* (wanting to know how will this will work out in practice):
 - Clarify the steps and components of the innovation.
 - Answer specific "how-to" questions.
 - Show that you have practical solutions to the logistical problems that gave rise to teachers' concerns.
- *Stage 4: Consequence concerns* (wanting to know how it will affect students, the school):
 - Give teachers the opportunity to visit other schools where this innovation is being used or attend a conference where it is discussed.
 - Make sure these teachers aren't overlooked; give them positive feedback and the support they need.
 - Find opportunities for these teachers to share their skills with others.
- *Stage 5: Collaboration concerns* (teachers wanting to work with colleagues to help out):
 - Provide professional development for teachers to develop collaborative skills.
 - Bring together those from inside and outside the school who are interested in working collaboratively.
 - Use these teachers to help bring along other staff members who are less positive.
- *Stage 6: Refocusing concerns* (teachers with ideas for improving on the innovation):
 - Respect and encourage the interest these teachers have for finding a better way.
 - Help them channel their ideas and energies productively.
 - Help them find the resources they need to refine and implement their ideas.

"NSDC Tool: What a School Leader Needs to Know About 7 Stages of Concern" in *The Learning Principal* (National Staff Development Council), March 2006 (Vol. 1, #6, p. 4-5), no e-link available

7. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe Offer Nine Principles for Teaching

In this article in the March *Educational Leadership*, the gurus of *Understanding by Design* propose nine criteria for optimal student learning:

- *Fluent and flexible transfer is the goal.* This means that if we are successful, students should be able to successfully use their knowledge and skill on worthy tasks in meaningful everyday situations.

- *Student engagement and sustained learning are essential.* Kids need to see the value of their work and have a growing sense of efficacy in the face of real-world challenges.

- *Students need to understand the big ideas.* Otherwise, isolated facts, skills, and experiences will remain inert in students' minds.

- *Students need to come to understanding on their own.* Teachers can't give them understanding; teachers' role is to engineer learning experiences so kids see for themselves "how an idea can empower them to make sense of things."

- *Students need clear priorities.* They also need to know the work products and standards of excellence they must meet.

- *Students need regular, timely, user-friendly feedback on their efforts.* This is essential if they are to understand, produce quality work, and meet high standards.

- *Students need to reflect, self-assess, and self-correct.* This process is fed by regular assessments and feedback, and allows students to apply prior learning to new situations and tasks.

- *Students need to continuously refine and rethink their work.* "Being willing and able to rethink requires a safe and supportive environment for questioning assumptions and habits, as well as a curriculum designed to foster thinking," say Wiggins and McTighe.

- *Students need personalized instruction.* The best teaching "honors learners' interests, curiosity, strengths, contributions, and prior knowledge, making them feel that they are an important part of something larger than themselves."

These nine principles, say Wiggins and McTighe, "can serve as a vital touchstone and as a counterweight to bad habits that impede a school's mission... Without explicit learning principles – and clear course goals linked to standards – there will be no end to tiresome debates and disingenuous posturing about practice."

The problem, they say, is that "teachers can be remarkably thin-skinned when someone questions their methods or decisions, and many of us resist seeking or receiving feedback from students, parents, colleagues, and supervisors. When students fail to learn, some teachers end up blaming the students, without an honest investigation of where student fault ends and teacher responsibility begins."

The nine principles can come alive in well-run team meetings in which teachers look at student work (perhaps samples of the strongest and weakest tests students have just taken) and think carefully about what's working and what isn't. Teams are a forum in which teachers can escape isolation and get involved in looking objectively at student work and giving each other feedback.

One key to adult learning is to *depersonalize* feedback. "Without regular opportunities to consider, observe, and analyze best practice and receive helpful, nonevaluative feedback," say Wiggins and McTighe, "how likely are teachers to engage in continual professional improvement?" Here are several statements modeling this kind of feedback:

- "Nothing personal, but lecturing 80 percent of the time is inconsistent with the school's goal of engaging learners in making meaning for themselves."
- "Nothing personal, but widespread use of multiple-choice departmental exams is out of synch with our mission to teach and assess for understanding and transfer."

- “Nothing personal, but only one-quarter of your students, when surveyed, report that they find their classwork meaningful.”
- “Nothing personal, but many inservice experiences seem to be contrary to the learning principals. Staff members’ criticisms have reflected this for years. How can we make changes, on the basis of our learning principles and staff feedback?”

“Examining the Teaching Life” by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 26-29),

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=df75f993dac99010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=2ad5f993dac99010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

8. What a Teacher Learned by Becoming a Biology Student for a Year

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Virginia high-school physics teacher Deborah Waldron describes how she took on the role of a 9th-grade biology student in her own high school for a year (she did this to get up to speed on the subject matter). She learned a lot and loved the experience, and it gave her some important lessons for her own teaching:

- *Give students more time for creative projects.* Waldron found that she put off big projects till the last minute and didn’t do them justice. Even though she was an adult with pretty good time management skills, she found she needed more scaffolding and support from the teacher to do a good job completing complex projects.

- *Occasionally use short, straightforward assessments.* These more traditional tests can be quick probes for student understanding and provide both teacher and student with useful information on how things are going.

- *Reinforce ethics and clarify plagiarism policies.* Waldron found herself tiptoeing up to plagiarism as she rushed to finish a research project with a lot of online research. She felt she – and students – needed a firm reminder on what is permissible and what isn’t.

- *Change students’ seats often.* Waldron would have been limited to two or three neighboring friends if the teacher hadn’t mixed up the seating chart every few weeks.

“My Year as a High School Student” by Deborah Waldron in *Educational Leadership*, March 2006 (Vol. 63, #6, p. 63-65)

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=df75f993dac99010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=1e66f993dac99010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

9. Short Items:

a. Samuel Freedman on New York schools – In this interview in the March *Gotham Gazette*, *New York Times* education columnist Samuel Freedman and teacher Jessica Siegel talk about what’s happened in the New York City schools over the last 20 years, including the merits of small and large schools (it’s about small class size, they say, and maintaining school

newspapers, bands, and other extracurricular activities when large schools are broken into smaller schools).

Freedman believes that the current leadership in the Big Apple doesn't appreciate the talent within the system: "The superhuman efforts by a number of the teachers and the tremendous will on the part of many of the students to get to college, to have fruitful lives, to really become citizens in every sense of the word," he says, "that's unchanged and that's still the very best part of what goes on in the New York City public schools. It's sort of the everyday miracle."

When Freeman is asked about Jonathan Kozol's new book on the resegregation of American schools, he has this to say: "Kozol espouses a point of view you pick up in education schools. But it is a high-minded excuse for paralysis... [B]y saying nothing can ever change until poverty and racism are solved is like saying you can never have any effect – which is the worst message... Something has to be able to happen in the schools."

Spotted in *Education Gadfly*, March 16, 2006. For the full interview, go to:

<http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/education/20060314/6/1786>

b. 90/90/90 schools – Education Trust's website has a database for locating schools that have 90 percent children of color, 90 percent living in poverty, and 90 percent meeting rigorous state standards. Check out <http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/dtm/>

c. McREL advice on school change – Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has just released *Success in Sight*, a study of seven key school improvement "levers" and how school leaders can pull them to bring about meaningful change. The study is available at <http://www.mcrel.org/successinsight/Process/tabid/2373/Default.aspx>

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, March 16, 2006

d. High-school journalism contest – The Report It Now High School Journalism Contest invites high-school students to submit stories written for school newspapers or created for broadcast on school television or radio stations. Stories should be well researched and cover an issue important to the contestant, school, or community. The maximum prize is \$1,000, and the deadline is March 31, 2006. Contact <http://www.participate.net/cta/37/33>.

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, March 16, 2006

e. Working with a school from another country – All U.S. schools, public and private, are eligible to apply for Challenge 20/20, a program that brings together two schools, one from the U.S. and one from another country. Teacher-student teams from both schools work together throughout the fall of 2006 to come up with a solution to a global problem. The deadline for applying is April 15, 2006: <http://www.nais.org/resources/index.cfm?ItemNumber=147262>.

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, March 16, 2006

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

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

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 36 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

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- 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 Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
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Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice