Marshall Memo 249

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 1, 2008

In This Issue:

1. Jay McTighe on using assessments for learning
2. A Georgia district orchestrates three levels of interim data analysis
3. Student-led conferences in a California middle school
4. A teacher reflects on the pluses and minuses of e-mail
5. Writing as a key to college-bound student achievement
6. Four ways to promote adult learning in schools
7. Is this the best way to get high-school students to love reading?
8. Using videotapes of classes to improve teaching
9. Why aren't more young women becoming engineers?
10. Researchers' doubts about Open Court and Reading Mastery
11. Short items: (a) Online comparison of state standards; (b) Teacher leaders blog

Quotes of the Week

"Just as every teen magazine my students read preaches 'don't break up with someone via e-mail,' so too must teachers remember that sensitive issues call for face-to-face discussions."

Aliza Libman (see item #4)

"If you told a doctor, 'I want you to treat me but I do not want you to take my temperature, I don't want you to take any blood samples, I don't want you to do any diagnosis, just treat me,' the doctor would be at a loss to know what to do."

Joel Klein, New York City school chancellor, on the importance of early assessments, *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 2008, p. B1, B5)

"It's not that they're not engineers because they don't want to take math. They're not taking math because they don't want to be engineers."

Janet Hyde, University of Wisconsin psychologist (see item #9)

"American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom."

A 2003 report on the importance of writing (see item #5)

---

1. Jay McTighe on Using Assessments for Learning

In this interview with Judith Richardson in *Principal Leadership*, author/consultant Jay McTighe focuses on during-the-year assessments as a key to improving teaching and learning. Some highlights:

• *Clarity on manageable learning goals* – "The clearer teachers and administrators are about what they're trying to achieve and what they want students to learn," says McTighe, "then the better they will be able to identify the most appropriate assessments of that learning." Since most state standards encompass much more than teachers can cover in a year, it's essential to establish priorities.

• *Questions for teachers and department heads* – McTighe says that school leaders should ask their front-line troops:

- What are the most important things you want your students to know and be able to do?
- How will we know that students have learned what's been taught?
- What's the evidence that our students are learning?
- How are we addressing students' weak areas?

Responding to these questions requires teacher teams to sort state standards into essential knowledge and skills, enduring understandings (the underlying concepts, principles, and processes that are central to the subject or topic and help students make sense of facts and skills and transfer their learning to new situations), and lower-priority nice-to-know stuff – and then decide how to assess the most important material. "The rubber meets the road with the assessments," says McTighe. "It's one thing for a department team to agree on what they want students to understand or be able to do; it's another thing to specify what they will accept as evidence of that understanding or proficiency." If teachers don't agree on this, they could be teaching with significantly different emphases, leading to uneven student learning outcomes.

• *Deep, not superficial learning* – "It's important for principals to remind teachers of the big picture and not become seduced by test prep," says McTighe. Drilling slavishly for state tests is like a person practicing for a doctor's physical. The best way to "do well" on an annual physical is to lead a healthy life – exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep, not smoking, etc. Similarly, the best long-range strategy for getting good student results on state tests is in-depth learning of the tested content.

• *A variety of assessments* – While summative state tests provide important information, says McTighe, "there are usually some important educational goals that aren't easily assessed in a large-scale, standardized way… Moreover, a once-a-year snapshot of learning does not

provide sufficient feedback necessary to help educators improve student achievement." This points to the need for a "photo album" of assessments to measure everything that needs to be measured – in a timely manner.

• *Shared assessments are key* – "I'm a strong advocate of having departments agree on common assessments," says McTighe. "… Indeed, principals and department chairs need to manage the school's curriculum not by the *inputs* (standards identified, teachers' use of particular strategies, student seat time) but through student learning *outcomes*, and we need common assessments to monitor the *results* of curriculum and instruction." Some teachers will resist common assessments, believing they impinge on "academic freedom" (being able to do one's own thing) or because they fear being held accountable for student learning. McTighe says that administrators need to stick to their guns, because shared assessments are essential to improving teaching and learning.

• *Assessments should match content* – One size doesn't fit all, says McTighe. If a social studies team wants to find out if students have learned the names of capital cities around the world, it can use a multiple-choice, matching, or fill-in-the-blank test. But if the team wants to see if students understand why political boundaries change over time, an open-ended question scored with a common rubric is the way to go. McTighe notes that there's a tendency to test what's easiest to test. An important question for teacher teams as they craft assessments is, "Are we assessing what we most value or only those things that are easiest to test and grade?" Principals should review tests and see if they are truly measuring the most important material.

• *The textbook isn't the curriculum* – Having decided on the most important and enduring ideas and the essential knowledge and skills, teachers should treat textbooks and other materials as resources, using them selectively rather than letting them become the curriculum.

• *Follow-up on interim assessment results* – McTighe says that after every common assessment, teacher teams should meet to look at the results and samples of student work, zero in on areas of strength and weakness, identify noteworthy misunderstandings, misconceptions, or skill errors, and look for patterns. "Such patterns invariably arise when you look at student work across classrooms," he says, "and they provide invaluable information for adjusting instruction." McTighe says that principals should do everything they can to facilitate and support these data meetings, including scheduling uninterrupted time and fostering a sense of results-oriented teamwork.

• *Anchor papers* – When teacher teams are scoring open-response questions with a common rubric, it's important to identify student papers that can serve as exemplars for scoring, and also can be used in classrooms to show students what good work looks like. McTighe notes that exemplar papers are also helpful to novice teachers, who might otherwise spend several years calibrating their instruction to the appropriate level of proficiency.

• *Troubleshooting guides* – McTighe suggests that educators build lists of specific strategies, techniques, and resources to address common, predictable problems that students encounter as they learn each body of material.

• *What to look for in classrooms* – McTighe says that when principals visit classrooms, they should ask themselves:

- Is the teacher focusing on standards-aligned learning priorities?
- Is the teacher using pre-assessment data to fine-tune instruction? “Prior knowledge is the most significant predictor of future learning,” says McTighe.
- *Is the teacher checking for student understanding as instruction proceeds and putting insights to work to modify instruction?* McTighe says athletic coaches do this all the time: “They don’t wait until the game, the summative assessment, to see how kids are doing. Effective coaching involves ongoing assessment and needed instruction, and so does the most effective teaching.”
- Do students understand the learning priorities and how they will be assessed? A principal might stroll around and ask students questions like these: *What are the important goals in this unit that you’re doing right now? How will the teacher know that you’ve learned the things that are most important? How will your work be judged?* and *What do you have to do to get an A versus a C?*

“Evidence of Learning: A Conversation with Jay McTighe” by Judith Richardson in *Principal Leadership*, September 2008 (Vol. 9, #1, p. 30-34), no e-link available

Back to page one

2. A Georgia District Orchestrates Three Levels of Interim Data Analysis

In this helpful *Journal of Staff Development* article, Lissa Pijanowski, associate superintendent in the Forsyth County Schools in Georgia, reports on her district’s impressive student-achievement gains, which she attributes to “focused, collegial conversations” about interim assessment results. Pijanowski says the key was organizing three levels of reflection on interim assessment results, with teacher leaders involved at every stage of the process:

• *Level 1: Individual teachers* – Classroom teachers look at their interim assessment item analyses and ask themselves these questions:

- Which items did my students miss most frequently?
- What standards was each of these items assessing?
- How did my students’ results compare to school performance on each item?
- Why did most of my students choose the incorrect responses they did?
- What will I do now to reteach the most problematic missed standards?
- Which individual students need additional help based on these results?

“These questions lead teachers to delve deeply into the standards they teach and to reflect on their instructional practice in a low-risk environment,” says Pijanowski. “Teacher understanding of their own performance data must precede conversations within a professional learning community.”

• *Level 2: Grade-level or content teams* – Having done their individual reflections, teachers meet in same-grade or same-subject teams and ask these questions:

- What are our team strengths based on these results?

- What are our team challenges?
- What factors in our curriculum and instruction do we feel influenced these results?
- How can we collaboratively modify instruction and reteach standards that our students had the most difficulty learning?
- How will we know if our students have mastered each standard?
- What remediation and intervention will be most effective for individual students with low performance?
- Is there additional professional development and learning support that we need as a team to help us achieve our goals for student learning?

"The team sessions continued the learning of the individual teacher reflections," says Pijanowski. "Teachers analyzed their results even more intensely and took actions they may not have otherwise considered in isolation."

• *Level 3: Schoolwide dialogue* – Finally, school leaders got the whole staff together to focus on interim assessment results and other schoolwide data, answering these questions:

- Do the results show we are making progress toward meeting our school improvement goals?
- How did we perform on the reading/English language arts and math target areas we identified for improvement this year?
- How did our subgroups and at-risk students perform?
- Are there strategies and actions in our school improvement plan that need to be modified based on these results?
- Are our remediation and intervention strategies closing the achievement gap?
- Do we need to modify our professional learning plan to provide additional support?
- What resources do we need to accomplish the curriculum and instructional changes we have identified?

"Striking a Balance: Georgia District Adds Assessments and Transforms Classroom Practice" by Lissa Pijanowski in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2008 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 43-46), no e-link available; the author can be reached at lpijanowski@forsyth.k12.ga.us.

Back to page one

3. Student-Led Conferences in a California Middle School

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Los Angeles principal Sarah Brody Shulkind describes how her school implemented mid-year student-led parent conferences. The goal, she said, was for assessment "to tell students what they did and did not do and enable them to self-adjust." Here are the steps the school took:

• *Preparing teachers* – The school began by spending two years building its advisory program so advisors were well-versed in students' unique needs and students trusted that their advisors cared about them as learners. In the summer of 2007, the staff watched a simulated student-led conference in which an eighth grader led a mock conference with an assistant principal playing his mother and a school counselor playing his advisor. "When teachers

witnessed the student's ability to assess his learning progress and needs," says Shulkind, "they shed their disbelief about the power of student-led conferences."

• *Gearing up for the first year's conferences* – During the 2007-08 school year, advisors were eased into a new role: academic oversight. Advisors began to keep a folder on each student containing original and revised goals, progress reports, recommendations and commendations from teachers, and examples of strong and weak work. Every two weeks, advisors met with their students to set and review goals, teach homework and test-taking strategies, and solve academic problems. In an extended faculty meeting in the fall, advisors carefully read students' folders and asked clarifying questions of their colleagues in the room, making notes for their briefing with students.

A month before the actual conferences, another faculty meeting featured simulated student-led conferences to clarify their purpose (to help students reflect on their learning, set goals, and continue to grow and improve), the role of the advisor as facilitator, and the structure of each conference (the advisor explaining the purpose, protocol, and the 20-minute time-frame to parents; the student reviewing material in their folder, showing examples of work, and explaining goals and steps to achieving them; and the advisor thanking parents and asking for their support in achieving students' goals). The school also worked to improve the quality of teachers' narrative comments on students' performance, eschewing pleasantries, general praise and evaluation (*Sheila is a pleasure to have in class, Jeannie needs to try harder, Charlie is a great math student*) and giving more specific, descriptive feedback.

• *Preparing students* – In the first weeks of school, advisors set specific academic and behavioral goals with each student, and in advisory meetings, reviewed those goals in light of teacher feedback and assessments. After the winter break, students chose a subject and wrote their own commendations and recommendations. When teachers presented their commendations and recommendations, students compared them with their own and wrote goals and resources needed in the second semester. Finally, each advisory group watched and commented on a mock student-led conference conducted by reflective, articulate students chosen by the advisor to play the student, parent, and advisor.

• *Preparing parents* – In her weekly bulletin to parents, Shulkind described the purpose of the student-led conferences and included articles on the subject. She also invited parents to a coffee hour to explain how the conferences would work and answer questions.

After the first round of conferences in early 2008, the school surveyed staff, students, and parents, and received overwhelmingly positive feedback. A teacher who had initially been skeptical of the idea wrote, "All in all, I thought this was a wonderful day! The students were proud, the parents were impressed, and I couldn't wipe a smile off my face." A student wrote, "I hung those goals that I wrote on my wall because they help me very, very much, and it helped me to be way more organized." A parent wrote, "I was extremely impressed with this program and my son's presentation. I was shocked and couldn't believe this was my son…" Another parent wrote, "What I liked about the conference was that it made my son critically evaluate the teacher narratives and placed on him the responsibility for addressing the concerns raised. He seemed to take ownership of the solutions he and his advisor developed."

Shulkind believes the conferences changed the culture of the school. "Through student-led conferences," she says, "assessment became more than what happens after teaching and learning are over. Instead assessment is the learning itself – an integral part of the feedback loop among parents, teachers, advisors, and students."

"New Conversations: Student-Led Conferences" by Sarah Brody Shulkind in *Principal Leadership*, September 2008 (Vol. 9, #1, p. 55-58), no e-link available; the author can be reached at sshulkind@milkenschool.org.

Back to page one

4. A Teacher Reflects on the Pluses and Minuses of E-Mail

In this thoughtful article in *Education Week*, Massachusetts teacher Eliza Libman shares what she has learned about using e-mail in the professional domain:

• *Advantages* – E-mail is an incredible asset, says Libman, helping teachers connect with others and respond quickly and conveniently. It's like ice cream, she says, because "too much makes me sick, but life without it would be inconceivable." E-mail also makes it easy to keep colleagues in the loop. When Libman e-mails a parent about a child, she might copy a guidance counselor, one or two administrators, learning-support staff, office personnel, and the school psychologist. Although this adds to their e-mail reading, there are distinct advantages: "The student in question will come to school the next day expecting the adult professionals working with him or her to know all about the situation and how the school will respond to it."

• *Dealing with the volume* – Libman gets 50+ e-mails a day from students, parents, administrators, and other teachers, ranging from "hey did u get my papr I left it in ur box?" to late-night queries about homework to long discourses. She has learned to move quickly through her in-box, dealing with messages that need immediate attention and putting aside those that don't. She's also become more attuned to situations where e-mail isn't the best medium.

• *Treating e-mail like a phone* – Many of those who send e-mails, says Libman, get impatient if she doesn't respond immediately. It's important to set e-mail expectations early in the year, she says, stressing the school's time-frame for responding, which is not instantaneously.

• *Inappropriate content* – E-mails that are confused, malicious, or full of acronyms and jargon are a shame, says Libman. After seeing lots of these, she has become a more cautious e-mailer herself: "A misplaced comma or an ill-chosen adjective could cause major harm to the parent-teacher and student-teacher relationships I labor endlessly to cultivate," she says. "I don't automatically dash off a quick series of e-mails anymore. When I do write them, I write carefully, giving attention to every word."

• *Avoiding difficult conversations* – Some people write things in an e-mail that they wouldn't say face to face. A parent once e-mailed that Libman's differentiated instruction (a school priority) made all the students in her class feel stupid. "Regardless of the merits of her concern," says Libman, "the parent's accusatory tone made for a lousy day, with her diatribe hanging over me like Eeyore's cloud of gloom." She's worked on developing a thicker skin,

but believes the deeper lesson is that e-mail shouldn't be used to duck interactions that should be handled in person. "Those of us who like e-mail the most are also the most likely to use it in situations where it is not the ideal medium," she says. "Just as every teen magazine my students read preaches 'don't break up with someone via e-mail,' so too must teachers remember that sensitive issues call for face-to-face discussions."

• *Setting limits* – When a technical glitch at her school made it impossible to access school e-mail from home, Libman panicked, thinking she wouldn't be able to respond to students and parents – or would be forced to stay at school late into the evening. But she soon found that this unwanted limitation helped her work more efficiently during the day, making her a better teacher and leaving her evenings free of the never-empty in-box.

"Is E-Mail a Teacher's Friend or Foe?" by Aliza Libman in *Education Week*, Aug. 27, 2008 (Vol. 28, #1, p. 27), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01libman.h28.html

Back to page one

5. Writing as a Key to College-Bound Student Achievement

This *Education Week* article reports on the Bay Area Writing Project, a local branch of the National Writing Project, which conducts training to improve the teaching of writing. "Students can pass the reading part of the high-school exit exam without writing a coherent sentence," says Adela Arriaga, a co-director of the Bay Area project, "but to go to college, they have to be able to demonstrate high-level writing ability. If this is what we are asking them to be able to do in college, why aren't we asking them to do this kind of writing in high school?" A 2003 report on the importance of writing echoed this sentiment: "American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom."

In the past, the Bay Area Writing Project was criticized for over-emphasizing student exploration of their feelings and not spending enough time on academic goals. The program took the point and now gives equal weight to content-area writing. "We have a real serious interest in writing poetry and fiction and creative nonfiction," says Carol Tateishi, a director of the Bay Area project, "but we want students to know that it's not just about writing stories." Tateishi and others interviewed science experts and identified the kinds of writing that scientists do in their work, and the project's training now encourages science teachers to give students notebooks to record their hypotheses, research methods, and findings. "It's through the process of writing that students get deep conceptual understanding of science or any other subject," says Laurie Thompson, a consultant with the project.

The National Writing Project has spelled out the following distinctions between traditional *assigning* of writing and more effective *teaching* of writing:

- Students create topics that matter to them (versus writing to the teacher's topics).
- Students are clear about the audience and purpose of their writing (versus writing just for the teacher).

- Students are given writing models and strategies to guide each of their writing assignments (versus flying blind).
- Students brainstorm, free-write, role-play, discuss, and engage in other pre-writing activities (versus taking on writing assignments cold).
- Teachers devote most of their energy and time to teaching writing skills and strategies in class (versus correcting papers after hours).
- Students are encouraged to revise, edit, and improve drafts of their writing (versus being asked to get it right the first time, or correct only grammar, usage, and spelling).
- Students display and publish their writing because they are invested in and proud of it (versus having a bored and perfunctory attitude toward writing).
- Students track their improvement (or lack of improvement) in specific writing skills (versus being unaware of their progress).

"Writing to Learn" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, Aug. 27, 2008 (Vol. 28, #1, p. 23-25), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01writing_ep.h28.html

Back to page one

6. Four Ways to Promote Adult Learning in Schools

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, Columbia Teachers College professor Ellie Drago-Severson draws on her research on effective principals to suggest four strategies that principals can use to promote adult learning within schools. Implementing any of the four can be helpful, she says, but school leaders should be cognizant of the different ways that different adult learners experience each one (more on that below).

• *Teaming* – Collaboration in the schools Drago-Severson studied centered around curriculum, literacy, technology, teaching, and diversity. Getting teachers working in teams helped to:

- Open communication and decrease isolation;
- Share philosophies of teaching and learning;
- Provide a safe environment to share perspectives, challenge each others' thinking, and question assumptions about curriculum and student work;
- Examine the school's mission;
- Overcome adults' resistance to change;
- Facilitate the implementation of new initiatives;
- Share leadership and make decisions collaboratively.

• *Giving leadership responsibility* – When principals get colleagues to step up to increased responsibility, it gives them the chance, says Drago-Severson, to "uncover their assumptions and test out new ways of working as professionals." The effect was often transformational.

• *Collegial inquiry* – Effective principals get adults engaged in conflict resolution, goal-setting, decision-making, and studying the school's curriculum and instructional practices.

• *Mentoring* – "Mentoring and coaching creates an opportunity for broadening perspectives, examining assumptions, and sharing expertise and leadership," says Drago-Severson, varying from "mission spreading" to sharing valuable insights to giving emotional support to novice teachers.

Drawing on the work of Robert Kegan, Drago-Severson identifies three "ways of knowing." Being aware of these can help principals be thoughtful about customizing the above initiatives for maximum adult learning.

- Instrumental – This is a concrete orientation to life: "What do you have that can help me? What do I have that can help you?" People in this way of knowing are oriented toward following rules and procedures and accomplishing their goals. "These learners cannot yet fully consider or acknowledge another person's perspective," says Drago-Severson. "Principals and teachers can help instrumental knowers grow by creating situations where they must consider multiple perspectives."
- Socializing – "Others' approval and acceptance is of utmost importance to socializing knowers," explains Drago-Severson. "Interpersonal conflict is almost always experienced as a threat…" It's best for school leaders to help these adults share their views in small groups before getting involved in large-group discussions.
- Self-authoring – These adults have developed their own internal value system, but may be unable to recognize that other people can legitimately hold completely opposite views that may be worth hearing. "Principals and colleagues can support self-authoring knowers' growth by gently challenging them to let go of their own perspectives and embrace alternative, diametrically opposing points of view that can inform their own," says Drago-Severson.

"Four Practices Serve as Pillars for Adult Learning" by Ellie Drago-Severson in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2008 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 60-63), no e-link available

Back to page one

7. Is This the Way to Get High-School Students to Love Reading?

In this *Washington Post* article, private-school teacher Nancy Schnog quotes a recent study on the declining number of 17-year-olds who read for pleasure and frets that high-school English classrooms may be losing this battle with their students. "It's our job to take digital natives – teens saturated with images on video games and on YouTube – and get them to strike up a relationship with pictureless chains of black print and focus on the decidedly internal rewards of classical literature," she writes. "More and more, this mission feels like blind idealism."

Schnog thinks that English teachers, herself included, may be adding to the problem in three ways. First, they're too often over-analytical with books, endlessly picking apart the linguistic details, giving quizzes on this and that, and asking students to write thesis-driven

essays on novels they don't care about. One parent said, "What I've seen teachers do is take living, breathing works of art and transform them into desiccated lab specimens fit for dissection."

Second, Schnog believes that students are being asked to read some books at too early an age. "In adults' determination to create sophisticated teen readers," she says, "we sever them from potential fictional soulmates." *The Catcher in the Rye* was always provocative and popular with her eleventh graders, but Schnog says that when the book was moved down to eighth or ninth grade, students didn't get it. One girl wrote, "To my twelve-year-old self, the book didn't seem to move anywhere. I didn't understand why Holden couldn't just try a little harder at school. By tenth grade, I had been drunk for the first time. I knew rebellion against my parents, the difficulties of teenage romance, the fakeness of social interaction. As a reader in the eleventh grade, I grew close to Holden; he was a friend who understood me." Schnog's own son had a similar reaction when asked to read *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (a book consisting of vignettes about four culturally displaced sisters who search for identity through therapists and mental illness, men and sex, drugs and alcohol). "I could hardly blame him," she says. "We ask 14-year-old boys to read novels about the travails of anguished women and want them to develop a love of reading?"

Third, teachers sometimes overdo certain themes. When Schnog handed her students two weeks of readings by Wordsworth and Coleridge after a month-long study of American transcendentalists, one boy asked, "When will we read something with a plot?"

"We're Teaching Books That Don't Stack Up" by Nancy Schnog in the *Washington Post*, Aug. 24, 2008 (p. B1), spotted in Daily Ed News, Aug. 26, 2008
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/22/AR2008082202398.html

Back to page one

8. Using Videotapes of Classes to Improve Teaching

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, seven midwestern university researchers cite evidence that when teachers view videotapes of their own classrooms, they see things that aren't apparent from other data sources. "Our research suggests that teachers who use videotaped records are more likely to make instructional decisions based on evidence," they say.

Their program, the Problem-Based Learning Project for Teachers, is based at Michigan State University and trains science teachers to focus on these questions:

- Which during-the-year assessment strategies help me identify misconceptions?
- How can I use productive questions to help students develop independence as learners?
- Can student journals improve students' retention of concepts?
- What is the most effective strategy for grouping students during lab activities?

After summer training, teachers implement their curriculum units and videotape some of their classes. They review the videotapes with experienced teachers or university researchers, looking through four "lenses": content, assessment, student interactions, and instructional

decisions. Teachers then discuss their observations in monthly meetings with other program participants.

Teachers in the program are initially shy about being videotaped and watching themselves, but they quickly see the power of this new window on their classrooms. One teacher said, "Thinking about the things I chose to ask, the sequence in which I asked them, the student responses, and how I responded to students, picking apart is hard to do after the fact unless you have the video." Another teacher exclaimed, "Wow! I saw so much when I viewed my tape. I found this to be the most powerful assessment."

Here's a story about one teacher's learning. Kristin decided to focus on a group of four girls in her class. The girls appeared to be doing well; they all earned an A on the assignment, answering questions accurately and applying the science concepts to the problem. When Kristin questioned the girls, all four seemed to get it. But later test scores showed that two of the girls were unable to explain the concept that they had supposedly learned. Reviewing the videotape showed why: all four girls were working alone, talking as a group only when the teacher was nearby. The tape showed that the minute Kristin walked away, the girls turned away from each other and wrote their answers individually, gaining little from their supposedly collaborative group. "I never would have seen what the groups were doing without the video," said Kristin. "I am just too busy teaching to see it."

Based on this insight, Kristin made three changes in her classroom: (a) She conducted team-building activities to help students learn the different roles they play in groups; (b) She began to use a variety of assessments to encourage individual accountability for learning content; and (c) She developed new group tasks that are more complex and require more teamwork to complete successfully.

"A Lesson in Teaching, Starring You" by Tom McConnell, Meilan Zhang, Matt Koehler, Mary Lundeberg, Mark Urban-Lurain, Joyce Parker, and Jan Eberhardt in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2008 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 39-42), no e-link available; McConnell can be contacted at tjmcconnell@bsu.edu.

Back to page one

9. Why Aren't More Young Women Becoming Engineers?

This *Education Week* article covers a recent 10-state study reported in the journal *Science,* which found that in recent years, girls have closed the gap in math achievement and enrollment in advanced high-school math and science courses and are now performing as well as boys. Yet parents, teachers, and girls themselves cling to the belief that boys are better suited to technical courses and professions, especially engineering and physics. "Stereotypes can still have an influence," said Janet Hyde, a University of Wisconsin psychologist who was the lead author of the study. "They're rarer today, but they still happen."

Hyde believes that many young women turn away from math in college because they believe that certain technical jobs are male-dominated and incompatible with raising a family. "It's not that they're not engineers because they don't want to take math," she says. "They're not taking math because they don't want to be engineers. You have to change their view of

engineers." These perceptions mean that there are very few women in advanced college math classes, and when there isn't a critical mass of women in courses, others are discouraged from enrolling. In addition, parents tend to encourage boys to enter these fields, while subtly discouraging girls.

Changing these attitudes will take time, say the researchers. They believe that we need a public-information campaign and high-school counseling making it clear that women can thrive in science and engineering jobs.

"Stereotype of Mathematical Inferiority Still Plagues Girls" by Sean Cavanagh in *Education Week*, Aug. 27, 2008 (Vol. 28, #1, p. 9),
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01girls_ep.h28.html

Back to page one

10. Researchers' Doubts About Open Court and Reading Mastery

This *Education Week* article reports that Open Court and Reading Mastery, two widely adopted reading programs published by SRA/McGraw-Hill, failed to earn ratings from the What Works Clearinghouse because no research on the programs satisfied the agency's rigorous evidence standards. This is startling news because both programs previously met the requirements of the federal Reading First program and have been purchased by many Reading First schools. (What Works is a program of the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education.)

SRA/McGraw-Hill immediately objected to the report, saying they had lots of research to prove their programs work. But What Works officials said they had looked at 61 studies of Reading Mastery from 1985 through 2007, zeroed in on 15 that used a quasi-experimental design, and none of those proved that the program caused improvements in student achievement. Similarly, What Works looked at 30 studies of Open Court and found flaws in research design and control groups that made it impossible to say that the program caused achievement gains.

"Studies of Popular Reading Texts Don't Meet Reviewers' Rigor Test" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, Aug. 27, 2008 (Vol. 28, #1, p. 12-13),
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/13/01whatworks.h28.html

Back to page one

11. Short Items:

a. Online comparison of state standards – Designed for highly mobile military families, this free website compares grade 3-12 standards, tests, and graduation requirements and provides online assessments to allow students to see where they stand. Developed by the Department of Defense and Princeton Review, SOAR (Student Online Achievement Resources) can be accessed at http://www.soarathome.org.

Spotted in *Principal Leadership*, September 2008 (Vol. 9, #1, p. 9)

Back to page one

***b. Teacher leaders blog* –** This network's website is a forum for virtual collaboration, including daily excerpts from the discussions within the forum with many perspectives on a range of topics important to teacher leaders. Check it out at: http://teacherleaders.typepad.com/tln_teacher_voices.

Spotted in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2008 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 66)

Back to page one

© Copyright 2008 Marshall Memo LLC

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
Changing Schools (McREL)
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
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
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal