Marshall Memo 153

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 25, 2006

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"When teachers work together to achieve specific, measurable goals for which team members are mutually accountable, that's truly the engine of student improvement."

Kim Marshall (see item #1)

"Instructional leadership is all about minimizing activities that don't contribute to teaching and learning, and focusing relentlessly on those that do, even if there's some initial discomfort and push-back."

Kim Marshall (*ibid*.)

"Dissatisfaction is common in meetings in which members are not clear about which decisions were made, recommendations developed, and what is to occur next."

Robert Garmston (see item #4)

"We do not learn from experience, only from reflecting on experience."

Robert Garmston (*ibid*.)

"Good teaching is inevitably the fine art of connecting content and kids – of doing what it takes to adapt *how* we teach so that *what* we teach takes hold in the lives and minds of students."

Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jane Jarvis (see item #6)

"When the manual doesn't fit the learner, stop studying the how-to lists and start studying your students."

Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jane Jarvis (ibid.)

1. What Are A Principal's Highest-Leverage Activities?

In this article in the current *Education Week*, former Boston principal Kim Marshall (why is that name familiar?) invites readers to try a forced-choice exercise: If a principal wants to improve the quality of teaching and learning, which *three* of these activities will have the greatest impact?

- Observing and evaluating full lessons, preceded by a pre-conference with each teacher and followed by a detailed write-up and post-conference;
- Systematic walk-throughs of the entire school, focusing on specific target areas (the quality of student work on bulletin boards, for example);
- Mini-observations of three to five classrooms a day (five minutes per visit), with face-to-face follow-up conversations with each teacher;
- Quick "drive-by" visits to all classrooms every day to greet students and "manage by walking around";
- Collecting and checking teachers' lesson plans every week;
- Requiring teacher teams to submit common curriculum-unit plans in advance, and discussing them with each team;
- Having teacher teams use interim assessments of student learning and monitoring how they use the data to improve instruction and help struggling students.

Not an easy choice! But there isn't enough time to do justice to all seven in the super-hectic world of the principalship. Which three add the most value to the quality of teaching and the achievement of all students?

Marshall starts with the four items on the list that he thinks have *less* impact: "During my 15 years as a principal," he writes, "I had increasing doubts about the efficacy of evaluating and writing up classroom dog-and-pony shows, looking at lesson plans that were often works of fiction, and doing walk-throughs and superficial drive-by classroom visits that didn't reveal much about whether observable acts of teaching were producing actual student learning." Marshall then makes the case for the three that he believes have the greatest impact on teaching and learning:

• *Interim assessments with follow-up* – "When teacher teams look at high-quality assessments of student learning (at least every nine weeks)," he writes, "the professional conversation shifts from how good their lessons were (which is usually debatable) to whether students actually learned." Principals can spark this kind of teacher discourse by insisting on common assessments, scheduling time for teachers to score and discuss them immediately after students are tested, and holding teachers accountable for following up.

• *Unit planning* – "When teachers work together to plan multi-week curriculum units (the Civil War, the solar system, ratio and proportion)," Marshall writes, "working backwards from state standards, 'big ideas,' and unit assessments, the result is more thoughtful instruction, deeper student understanding, and, yes, better standardized test scores." Principals can spur on this process by providing the training, support, and time that teacher teams need to work this way.

• *Mini-observations* – "When principals make frequent, unannounced supervisory visits to all classrooms," says Marshall, "(having a measurable goal is vital; mine was five a day), they are using an efficient sampling technique and are far more likely to be able to answer several key questions: *Are teachers on track with the curriculum? Do students seem to be learning? Which staff members need closer attention and support? Who deserves special praise*?" Conventional supervision and evaluation often misses the point, Marshall argues, and is seldom respected by teachers. "A much better use of a principal's time," he says, "is making a few brief classroom visits a day and being sure to catch each teacher within 24 hours for a candid conversation about what was happening, what each 'snapshot' says about pedagogy and student learning, and how things are going in general."

Marshall contends that "Principals who make it their business to focus on interim assessments, unit plans, and mini-observations really know what's going on in classrooms and have powerful leverage as they work with teacher teams. And building the capacity of teacher teams is crucial. When teachers work together to achieve specific, measurable goals for which team members are mutually accountable, that's truly the engine of student improvement… In short, these three activities are a far more efficient use of a principal's time than struggling to improve one teacher at a time via lesson-plan inspection and infrequent, tedious classroom write-ups, or by cruising around the building seeing a lot and changing very little."

Marshall hastens to add that principals *should* be visible throughout their schools to "show the flag," *should* take visitors and colleagues on occasional walk-throughs to get the overall picture and look for specific items, *should* glance occasionally at lesson plans, and *should* conduct in-depth lesson evaluations when necessary and required by the contract. "But principals shouldn't be under any illusions that these activities provide much bang for the buck," he says, "except when the dismissal of an ineffective teacher is at stake."

All this sounds logical, but few principals are spending their time on the three highest-value activities. Why not? "Because it's profoundly countercultural in most schools for administrators to pop into classrooms unannounced, ask teams for unit plans, and require teachers to give common assessments and use the results to improve instruction," says Marshall. "Many teachers are in the habit of planning at the last minute, have gone for years without authentic conversations with their principals, and have fallen into what Grant Wiggins calls the educator's egocentric fallacy: I taught it, therefore they learned it – and if they didn't, it's because of last year's teachers, neglectful parents, hip-hop culture, and other factors outside my control."

How can principals change a culture like this and focus on the highest-leverage activities? They need to believe these activities will produce results, they need real self-

discipline to push back against all the competing activities and distractions, and they need courage. "Instructional leadership is all about minimizing activities that don't contribute to teaching and learning, and focusing relentlessly on those that do," Marshall concludes, "even if there's some initial discomfort and push-back. This kind of leadership will continuously improve the quality of teaching, promote collegiality and a deep sense of efficacy among teachers, and close the achievement gap that is the shame of our schools."

"What's A Principal To Do? When You Can't Do It All, What Are the Highest-Leverage Activities?" by Kim Marshall in *Education Week*, September 20, 2006 (Vol. 26, #4, p. 36-37), no e-link available, but the text of the article is available on the Marshall Memo website: http://www.marshallmemo.com/about.php (scroll down)

2. Advisory Programs in Middle and High Schools: Problems and Promise

This informative *Middle School Journal* article by University of Tennessee education professor Vincent Anfara examines student advisory programs, which have been a mainstay of secondary-school reform efforts. Recently, however, a number of schools have dropped advisory programs as NCLB accountability pressure has mounted. And advisory groups have foundered in some schools because they were not well implemented, were considered frills, and did not succeed in distinguishing themselves from the traditional homeroom period. Anfara reports that many middle schools have dropped advisories from their list of best practices.

What does the research say? Despite some positive studies, Anfara reports that "much of the evidence for effectiveness of advisories is indirect or based on methodologically weak research." Part of the problem in getting solid research is that advisory programs have at least six different purposes:

- Advocacy – having a caring adult who can go to bat for each student;
- Community – building students' sense of belonging;
- Skills – addressing students' weaknesses;
- Academic – building students' knowledge;
- Invigoration – motivating students;
- Administrative – announcements and housekeeping matters.

The research does provide some guidance on what is needed for a successful advisory program: leaders need to define a worthy purpose, get teachers and administrators on the same page, change the school's culture, develop a curriculum, train staff, schedule enough time, plan the logistics, limit the number of students in each advisory, explain and sell the program to parents, provide ongoing support, and do ongoing supervision and program evaluation. This is a tall order!

And yet, says Anfara, an advisory program is still an essential component of a successful middle school. At their best, advisories can create small, supportive communities for students, promote mutually respectful and meaningful relationships, provide individual attention to students from caring adults, provide each student with a sense of belonging, allow teachers to be actively involved in the affective development of students, emphasize the social

and emotional development of every student, help students develop their interpersonal skills, and, yes, contribute to high student achievement.

To have a chance of realizing these worthy goals, Anfara says schools need to answer these questions:

- What does your mission statement say about advisories?
- What are students', teachers', and parents' needs?
- What are the short- and long-term goals?
- How will the program fit into the climate and culture of the school?
- Who will supervise and manage the advisory program?
- How will advisory groups be formed and scheduled?
- How will group size be kept small?
- How will staff be trained, initially and on an on-going basis?
- What are the teacher-advisors' responsibilities?
- What does student advocacy mean?
- How will students and parents be oriented?
- How will the program be evaluated?

"Advisor-Advisee Programs: Important But Problematic" by Vincent Anfara, Jr. in *Middle School Journal*, September 2006 (Vol. 38, #1, p. 54-60), no e-link available

3. Why Friendship Is Not the Best Criterion for Forming Teams

In this thoughtful article in the summer NAESP *Leadership Compass*, Arizona education dean Daniel Kain cautions against forming teacher teams based on personal friendships. There are four dangers in this approach, he argues:

First, friendship-based teams tend to be oriented around relationships rather than purpose. "When a group of friends gathers," writes Kain, "they tend to focus on whatever has created the social bond. The work of the team is secondary to this social purpose, so it becomes increasingly difficult to shift from the pleasurable common ground to the business of the team." To be effective, teams need to "embrace the purpose, and they must focus their joint work on that purpose."

Second, friendship-oriented teams tend to avoid conflict. "Some of the best ideas arise from conflicts between differing perspectives," says Kain. "However, if the members of a team are more interested in preserving their friendships with one another than in generating new ideas that might be of benefit to the students, they will avoid areas that threaten such friendships. In terms of priorities, smooth relationships always trump dangerous possibilities."

Third, buddy-buddy teams often have difficulty enforcing group norms; they typically assume that they will get along and the rules will take care of themselves. To be effective, teams need to be explicit and business-like on issues such as starting on time, deciding whether decisions are by consensus or voting, keeping discussions confidential, and presenting a unified front outside of meetings. Friendship-based teams that don't make these matters explicit have no basis for examining their practices when the road gets bumpy. Kain says that

"when team members explicitly agree on how they will interact (and what sorts of things are annoying to individuals), they avoid many of the frustrations of typical school groups."

Finally, teams based on personal friendships may not have the right mix of knowledge and skills to be effective. Like-minded friends with similar backgrounds and skills often have gaps that detract from the team's effectiveness.

Can't team colleagues also be friends? Sure, says Kain – close friendships can precede team membership or grow from working closely together. "However," he writes, "the team does not start from or depend on the friendship to be effective… team success starts with the right colleagues for the right job." He offers the following tips for school teams:

• *Spend time in early meetings talking about how you will do business*. Too many teams skip this stage.

• *Discuss with each other the specific goals and values you hold as individuals*. When colleagues know what makes their teammates tick, they can better understand why people act the way they do. For example, if one teacher was influenced by a philosopher, that might explain why he asks a lot of "why" questions.

• *Articulate what you desire in team members and map current members' skills in relation to the team's purpose*. Teams should be looking for skills and knowledge that complement what they already have and set them up for success.

"Choose Colleagues Before Friends for Teaching Teams" by Daniel Kain in *Leadership Compass*, Summer 2006 (#3, p. 1-3 – spotted in *Education Digest*, Summer 2006, Vol. 72, #1, p. 53-56) no e-links available

4. How to Avoid "Parking-Lot Syndrome" After Staff Meetings

Why are so many faculty meetings followed by intense, disgruntled "parking lot conversations"? In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, Robert Garmston says it's probably because the leaders didn't follow these five guidelines:

• *Reach closure on what was agreed upon*. "People hear, understand and remember agreements differently. (Ask your spouse)," writes Garmston. "Dissatisfaction is common in meetings in which members are not clear about which decisions were made, recommendations developed, and what is to occur next." This hurts morale and the staff's sense of efficacy. Some concrete steps: near the end of the meeting, the leader should summarize the decisions, recommendations, and actions to be taken (or have staff members pair up and share their sense of the meeting and then compare notes) and publish the minutes within 24 hours.

• *Clarify next steps*. Just before the meeting concludes, the leader or facilitator should ask, "Who will do what by when?" It's important for the group to sort this out before closing.

• *Assess people's satisfaction with the meeting*. Here are three ways of checking in on staff members' level of satisfaction (which is not, of course, the same as effectiveness): (a) The facilitator asks for "pluses and wishes" from the meeting and records responses on a flip chart, which is then used as a starting point at the next meeting; (b) The facilitator hands out sticky notes toward the end and staff members jot "gots and wants" on them and post them on chart paper, anonymously if they wish; the notes can be used to make improvements in future

meetings; (c) The facilitator asks staff members to write what they found satisfying and dissatisfying about the meeting in terms of promoting higher student achievement and then either collects the responses or has small groups share them and reach conclusions (the second process can be the focus of an entire meeting).

• *Test people's level of commitment*. After the group has clarified what follow-up actions will be taken by whom, the leader says, "I know none of you would ever deliberately sabotage these agreements, but if you did, what would cause you to do so?" Asked lightly and without recriminations, this question has a way of flushing out any misgivings that may exist in the group. "Bringing these thoughts to the table allows practical conversation about implementation difficulties should they arise," says Garmston.

• *Assess the ground rules*. "Meetings improve when groups reflect about their work," says Garmston. A quick way to check on this is to periodically ask everyone a give a 5-4-3-2-1 rating on how successful the meeting was at:

- Staying on only one topic at a time
- Using only one process at a time
- Ensuring balanced participation
- Promoting constructive conflict about ideas
- Understanding and agreeing to meeting roles

Staff members fill out the form and hand it in as they leave the meeting, and the facilitator displays the data at the beginning of the next meeting and the group spends ten minutes answering the question, "Given that this is what we said about ourselves last time, what do we want to work on today?" Garmston says this is a good use of time. "Most groups feel the tension of having more work to do than they have time," he writes, "yet the only way to improve is through reflection. We do not learn from experience, only from reflecting on experience."

"Understanding the Art of Ending a Meeting" by Robert Garmstron in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 57-58), no e-link available

5. Effective Implementation of New Professional Development Ideas

In this article in the *Journal of Staff Development*, Harvard professor Ronald Ferguson says that many PD programs fail because they are never really implemented. "[W]hen new initiatives founder," he concludes, drawing on numerous interviews with principals and teachers, "it is due less to the initiatives' merits or characteristics and more to the ways in which the initiatives are introduced, managed, and supported. Too many initiatives are poorly introduced, not embedded in systems of accountability, poorly supported with training, and crowded by competing demands on time and attention."

Each school is different, says Ferguson, which makes the principal's PD challenge that much more daunting. "To various degrees, school communities are predisposed to be trustful or mistrustful; cooperative or caught up in power struggles; ambitious or uncommitted; persistently industrious or easily discouraged; cohesive or chaotic." To meet this differentiation

challenge, Fergus suggests five strategies that principals can use to boost the impact of professional development on teaching and learning:

• *Introduce new activities in ways that inspire buy-in*. The trick is to choose and introduce a new idea in ways that foster trust and interest, not the opposite.

• *Balance principal control with teacher autonomy.* It's important for the principal to assign responsibilities and manage accountability in ways likely to achieve a balance of leadership control and follower accountability – not too much or too little of either. One key is investing teacher teams with important responsibilities and not micro-managing.

• *Commit to ambitious goals*. The key is to plan, initiate, and monitor implementation in ways that inspire ambitious goals, not ambivalence and lack of commitment.

• *Maintain industriousness in pursuit of goals.* Staff members have to be motivated to persist in the face of setbacks, not get discouraged and disengaged.

• *Effectively harvest and sustain the gains*. Principals must "recognize, celebrate, and reward accomplishments in ways that sustain and consolidate positive change," says Ferguson, "not squander then through confusion and incoherence."

The bottom line: as a professional development program is introduced, school staff should feel that:

- Success seems feasible on goals that are clearly defined.
- The goals seem important.
- The experience is enjoyable.
- Supervisors are both encouraging and insistent.
- Peers are supportive.

"Five Challenges to Effective Teacher Professional Development" by Ronald Ferguson in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 48-52), no e-link available

6. Capitalizing on Students' Strengths

In this *Educational Leadership* article, differentiation guru Carol Ann Tomlinson and her colleague Jane Jarvis write, "Good teaching is inevitably the fine art of connecting content and kids – of doing what it takes to adapt *how* we teach so that *what* we teach takes hold in the lives and minds of students." This comes when teachers tune in to the differences among students rather than trying to teach to the "typical" student. To support this kind of work, Tomlinson and Jarvis propose five principles:

• *Principle 1: Teachers who see students' strengths are more effective*. Teachers who are aware of strong areas (perhaps by assessing multiple intelligences) are more flexible in how they teach different students, more likely to see struggling students as capable, and get better results from a variety of students.

• *Principle 2: Teaching to students' strengths helps students see themselves positively.* Tomlinson and Jarvis tell the story of Ellie, a ninth-grader who declared, "I can't do math and that's a fact." Ellie's teacher knew that she often played the lead in school plays and was a fearless public speaker, so she assigned her the job of talking a group of successful math

students through the steps they used as they worked toward solutions. Ellie found that as she verbalized the steps, she began to understand them. Counseled by her teacher, she began to use the same strategy with her math homework. "Researchers like Robert Sternberg and Mel Levine counsel us that different brains are wired differently," say the authors, "but all brains are wired to learn. Few students develop a sense of academic self-efficacy by becoming mired in what they cannot do."

• *Principle 3: Teaching to student strengths helps students see strengths in one another.* Tomlinson and Jarvis tell about how Henry, a painfully withdrawn seventh-grader with a troubled home situation, came out of his shell when classmates discovered that he could create string art. His teacher allowed Henry to teach his peers and his self-esteem skyrocketed.

• *Principle 4: Teaching to student strengths helps students see learning positively.* When teachers invite students to make personal connections to academic content that may not excite them at first (for example, a middle-school teacher asking students to take an area of interest – art, music, sports – and relate it to her Civil War unit) they can become engrossed in the content in a way that would not have been possible if they studied it in isolation from their own passions.

• *Principle 5: Teaching to student strengths helps students overcome weaknesses.* Skillful teachers can use areas of strength and interest to get students working in areas they avoid – for example, getting a group of reluctant writers writing a description of an elaborate structure they had built.

"Teaching Beyond the Book" by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jane Jarvis in *Educational Leadership*, September 2006 (Vol. 64, #1, p. 16-21), no e-link available

7. Key Values Underlying Successful Differentiation of Instruction

In this helpful piece, New York teacher Amy Benjamin spells out the values that should drive differentiated instruction in elementary classrooms:

• *Giving meaningful choice* – "Having a choice gives students a sense of self-determination that translates into increased commitment," she writes. "This does not mean that they have a choice as to whether they will or will not learn basic skills." An example: students in a third-grade classroom make posters showing 20 words with suffixes. All students will be assessed in the same way – but as they make their posters, they have a choice of words in four categories: on the playground, on the road, in the forest, and in the sky.

• *Distinguishing the "what" from the "how to"* – The <u>what</u> of learning is usually the same for all students, for example, what are the 50 states, the steps of long division, the parts of a molecule. But <u>how</u> they are learned can vary within the same classroom – for example, in learning about the 50 states, one group of students might be on the floor putting together a jigsaw puzzle of the states, another might make a board game of the states in each region, another might make a set of flash cards, another a bulletin board display.

• *Balancing ritual and variety* – "Ritual is important," writes Benjamin, "because it establishes expectations, provides security, and instills trust that the teacher is in control. Ritual

and routine can also help children memorize by providing cues that trigger memory. In contrast, variety can bring joy and excitement to learning. But the variety must exist within a ritualized structure for the learner to feel secure."

• *Varying assessments* – Benjamin believes that students are more likely to be successful if assessment covers a broad spectrum of abilities and modes of expression.

• *Supporting collegiality* – There's always the danger that teachers will give up on differentiation because they are overwhelmed by the logistics and paperwork. The support of colleagues is crucial, says Benjamin, "because teachers need ideas, encouragement, tips, a venue for reflection, and a wealth of sources." For this to happen, principals must schedule common planning time. "This doesn't mean conversations in the copy room or having lunch together," cautions Benjamin. "Shared planning time means taking teachers away from their classrooms every few weeks to have serious, focused, and businesslike discussions about professional concerns."

• *Supporting active classrooms* – "Teachers need to know that principals value *student talk* in a differentiated classroom," says Benjamin. This means learning centers where students interact and express their opinions and ideas and actively apply what they are learning.

• *Tolerating open-endedness* – "Closure is not always necessary at the end of a topic," says Benjamin. "Thinking doesn't always lead to knowing the answers; sometimes it leads to more questions."

• *Giving active support* – Differentiation is new for many teachers and parents, and the principal's understanding and support are vital. In particular, parents need to be reassured that it will not hurt their children's achievement.

"Valuing Differentiated Instruction" by Amy Benjamin, from her book, *Differentiated Instruction: A Guide for Elementary School Teachers* (Eye on Education, 2003), reprinted in *Leadership Compass*, Spring 2006 (#3, p. 3) and condensed in *Education Digest*, Summer 2006, Vol. 72, #1, p. 53-56) no e-links available

8. Questions to Guide Content Teachers When They Assess ELL Students

In this *Middle School Journal* article, two Florida State education professors pose a series of questions to help middle-school content teachers craft tests and other assessments that are fair, valid, and reliable for their English language learners.

• *Do I know my students' English proficiency levels?* This is essential to being able to tell whether ELL students are having difficulty reading the questions or understanding the content. ELLs' proficiency levels can guide the linguistic complexity of test questions, graphic and pictorial aids, and whether additional support is needed during the test.

• *Have I designed a test that mirrors classroom objectives, strategies and activities?* This addresses the issue of alignment between what's taught and what's tested, and whether all students have had a fair chance to learn the content.

• *Have I made use of all relevant and available visuals and graphics?* "When working with most ELLs at any level of English language proficiency," write the authors, "visuals and

graphic organizers are essential tools." So is the opportunity for students to illustrate their answers graphically in the assessment.

• *Have I incorporated true accommodations to level the playing field for my ELLs?* These might include bilingual dictionaries, extended time, alternative settings, simplification of directions, translation, visual supports, additional examples, breaks during testing, reading questions aloud, and oral directions in the native language.

• *Have I created a clear scoring rubric that will allow me to provide culturally sensitive and useful feedback?* As with all students, ELLs should have a clear idea of the criteria that will be used to assess their work, and get feedback that is concise and understandable – with an additional layer of cultural sensitivity built in.

Quoting Scarcella, the authors list some possible areas of cultural misunderstanding when teachers question and assess ELL students in the classroom:

- How does the teacher use questions to check comprehension? How would these questions be interpreted by the student?
- How does the student request clarification? How would these requests be interpreted by the teacher?
- How does the student feel about being singled out (spotlighted) in class?
- How are pauses and wait-time interpreted by the student and the teacher? How fast does the student need to respond to a question?
- What constitutes criticism or compliments for the student?
- How does the student view or value error correction?
- How is peer feedback treated in the classroom?

"Assessing English Language Learners' Content Knowledge in Middle School Classrooms" by Eleni Pappamihiel and Florin Mihai in *Middle School Journal*, September 2006 (Vol. 38, #1, p. 34-43), no e-link available

9. Using Picture Books in Middle School

In this *Middle School Journal* article, two educators make the case for using graphic novels and picture books to motivate reluctant middle-school readers. They urge teachers to stay tuned to new releases through *Book Links* and other trade journals and tune in to their students' reactions in the classroom. Here some of their book recommendations by subject area:

<u>Mathematics</u>

• *Incredible Comparisons* by R. Ash (Dorling Kindersley, 1996)
• *The Number Devil: A Mathematical Adventure* by H. M. Enzenberer (Henry Holt, 1998)
• *Math Curse* by J. Scieszka (Viking, 1995)
• *The Librarian Who Measured the Earth* by K. Lasky (Little, Brown, 1994)

<u>History/Social Studies</u>

• *Smoky Night* by E. Bunting (Harcourt Brace, 1994)
• *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* by T. Feelings (Dial, 1995)
• *Rome Antics* by D. Macaulay (Houghton Mifflin, 1997)

• *The Silk Route: 7,000 Miles of History* by J. S. Major (HarperTrophy, 1996)
• *A Is For America* by D. Scillian (Sleeping Bear Press, 2001)
• *Leonardo da Vinci* by D. Stanley (Murrow Junior Books, 1996)

Science/Technology

• *A River Ran Wild: An Environmental History* by L. Cherry (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992)
• *Just One Flick of a Finger* by M. Lorbiecki (Dial, 1996)
• *The New Way Things Work* by D. Macaulay (Houghton Mifflin, 1998)
• *Ride the Wind: Airborne Journeys of Animals and Plants* by S. Simon (Browndeer Press, 1997)
• *Starry Messenger* by P. Sis (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996)

"A Middle School Teacher's Guide for Selecting Picture Books" by Bill Costello and Nancy Kolodziej in *Middle School Journal*, September 2006 (Vol. 38, #1, p. 27-33), no e-link

10. Co-Teaching to Support ELL Students in St. Paul

This *Journal of Staff Development* article reports on St. Paul, Minnesota schools' use of co-teaching by regular-education and ELL teachers. The district believes that this practice is responsible for narrowing the reading achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students from 13 to 6 percentage points and the math gap from 6.7 to 2.7 points between 2003 and 2005.

ELL teachers work in regular-education classrooms to provide language support (for example, making sure ELL students don't confuse "whole" and "hole" in a math lesson on fractions), small-group guided reading instruction, and filling in knowledge gaps in content classes. ELL teachers take their lead from the classroom teachers, but suggest materials and explanations that might help ELL students become more successful. The pairs of teachers also have a joint planning meeting once a week to work on lesson planning, coordination, and assessments.

"In One Voice" by Priscilla Pardini in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 20-25), no e-link available

11. Short Items:

a. Does a teacher's gender matter? – In this provocative article in *Education Next*, Swarthmore economics professor Thomas Dee reports on research he has conducted pointing to a small advantage to students taught by same-gender teachers in most subjects (but not in math). However, Dee cautions against using these findings to make the case for single-gender classrooms. Rather, he suggests that educators should look at the dynamics within classrooms – specifically, why female teachers are more likely to report that boys are more disruptive, inattentive, and unlikely to complete their homework, and why girls are more likely to say that they don't look forward to classes taught by males, are afraid to ask questions, and see less relevance to the subject matter. "My study suggests that gender interactions in the classroom

matter, but it is still far from clear exactly why this is so," says Dee. While we wait for further research, he suggests that sharing the data so far with teachers might help combat "gender biases in teacher behavior and expectations" and ameliorate some of these differences.

"The Why Chromosome: How a Teacher's Gender Affects Boys and Girls" by Thomas Dee in *Education Next*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 6, #4, p. 38-45)
http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/3853842.html

b. New NCTM math expectations – The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics has modified its 15-year-old curriculum guidelines (the subject of heated accusations of "fuzzy math") and produced a new document that so far has been well received across the ideological spectrum. You can see the grade-by-grade learning expectations at the NCTM website:
http://www.nctm.org/focalpoints/default.asp

"Math Organization Attempts to Bring Focus to Subject" by Sean Cavanagh in *Education Week*, September 20, 2006 (Vol. 26, #4, p. 1, 24), no free e-link available

c. Singapore Math – In this detailed article in *Education Next*, math advocate Barry Garelick reports on the back-to-basics math program from Singapore that is credited with vaulting that country to the top spot in international math comparisons and has some passionate advocates in the U.S. Unlike American textbooks, Singapore Math has few illustrations and eschews "real-world" math problems. Instead, it has simple explanations, a logical sequence, a "bar-modeling" method for solving logic problems (as opposed to the "guess and check" approach in U.S. books), and lots of problems of increasing complexity. Singapore Math has some alignment problems with U.S. state standards (for example, it doesn't include data analysis, statistics, or probability), and this was one of several reasons that all but one of the schools in Montgomery County, Maryland dropped the program after a trial run (the school that didn't still swears by it). But given the shift in NCTM standards in the direction of the basics (see preceding item), Singapore Math will undoubtedly win more converts in the U.S.

"Miracle Math" by Barry Garelick in *Education Next*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 6, #4, p. 38-45)
http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/3853357.html

d. Restating purpose – "Sometimes leaders forget to restate, recommit, and rethink what we believe and value," says William Sommers, the president of the National Staff Development Council. He tells of a principal friend who was frustrated because her staff didn't know the school's vision and mission even though it had been on the wall for ten years. It turns out that she hadn't talked explicitly about the mission for three years and 40 percent of the staff had turned over since then. The moral of the story? "Over-communicate organizational clarity," advises Sommers.

"Now's the Time to Make a Fresh Start" by William Sommers in *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 2006 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 7), no e-link available

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).

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.

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- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
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- 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 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
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Jimmy Kilpatrick
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice
Times Educational Supplement