

Marshall Memo 99

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

August 22, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

“When we push them, they know it’s out of love.”

Johane Ligondé, New York City high-school English teacher

(*New York Times*, August 8, 2005, p. A15)

“They wanted, like, essays. They wanted you to get it.”

Jose Morales, New York City high-school student (*ibid.*)

“[K]ids will let you know about it if they feel they can trust you. And if you’re willing to listen.”

Daniel Robb on sexual abuse (see item #1)

“False gains evaporate; real gains endure.”

Jonathan Kozol (see item #3)

“I wasn’t aware Skittles was a food group.”

Gary Hirschberg, on discovering that his son’s daytime meal at school consisted of pizza, chocolate milk, and a package of Skittles (*Newsweek*, August 8, 2005, p. 51)

“If you can put a man on the moon, you can give kids the food they need to make them lighter, fitter, and live longer.”

Jamie Oliver, an English chef pioneering better food in schools, challenging American schools to do the same (*ibid.*)

1. Reporting Sexual Abuse

In this powerful piece in *Teacher Magazine*, teacher/writer Daniel Robb recalls two incidents that occurred in 1992, when he was a first-year teacher. One afternoon, one of his students, a high-school girl named Ronnie, asked if she could study in his classroom during his free period. She said that Mr. Smith, the teacher in charge of her study hall, had to leave campus. “No problem,” said Robb. He propped open the door and the two worked in silence for the rest of the period. Robb thought nothing of the incident until he saw his colleague during the next morning’s assembly and said, “Hey, Mr. Smith, hope you had a good afternoon off-campus yesterday.” Smith looked puzzled and said he’d never left the school.

Later that day, Ronnie was back in Robb’s classroom wanting to study there again. Robb waited a while and then asked her what was going on, since Mr. Smith actually wasn’t off campus yesterday. Ronnie froze and at first refused to say anything. When Robb pressed her, she started crying. Finally she said, “I can’t tell you, Mr. Robb. It’ll ruin everything.” Robb offered to take her to a female counselor, but she refused.

Finally Ronnie calmed herself down and told what had happened. On several occasions in study hall, Mr. Smith had sent the other students on errands and then, when just the two of them were in the classroom, had fondled Ronnie’s breasts and legs. She was convinced that no one would believe her if she told. She was afraid of Mr. Smith and insisted that what happened had to remain a secret.

Robb said he believed her – but that it was essential that they go tell the principal. “Mr. Smith might be doing this to others,” Robb said, “and we can’t let him get away with it.”

“No, Mr. Robb! This can’t come out! It will ruin my year! I just want it to stop! I just want everything back the way it was.”

Robb tried to persuade her, but got nowhere. Finally, he told Ronnie that he would give her the weekend to think (it was Friday afternoon) and that whatever she decided, he was going to the principal on Monday morning. He convinced himself that this was less coercive and that Ronnie was in no danger of being accosted by Mr. Smith over the weekend.

At five on Monday morning, Robb was awakened by a phone call from Mr. Montgomery, the principal. “You need to come to my office this morning at 7,” he said. Two hours later, Robb was sitting in Montgomery’s office. “I feel like maybe I did something wrong,” he said.

“You sure did,” said the principal. “You didn’t come straight to me and tell me about Ronnie. We told you at the beginning of the year that in the case of becoming aware of sexual abuse, you were under an obligation to come and tell me, the administration, right away.”

Surmising that Ronnie had gone to the principal over the weekend, Robb asked, “So what happens now?”

“Well,” said Montgomery, “it’s under control, so to speak. We were able to validate Ronnie’s statement, and we have let the man go, and we have notified the authorities. But I need you to know something.” Squeezing the back of his leather chair as if it were a kitchen sponge, he continued: “You put us all at risk. You put me at risk. You put the whole school at risk! If you know about this kind of thing, by federal law you have to tell the administration, and we have to tell the proper authorities, or we can lose our federal funding, and we can be sued for negligence. I am the one to blame legally here, not you, for this. I know you didn’t mean anything by it, but you put us all at risk, and you need to know that.”

“I’m sorry,” stammered Robb. “I was just trying to let the girl catch her breath before...”

“Ronnie told me about it,” interrupted Montgomery. “She told me it wasn’t your fault, that she pleaded with you. I just need to know that we are straight on this now.”

“Yes, sir, we are straight.”

“OK. You can go. Anything like this comes up again, you know where to find me.”

Robb goes on to cite the statistics on sexual abuse from Charol Shakeshaft’s book, *Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004):

- Seven percent of K-12 students are victims of physical sexual misconduct by an educator or school staff member.
- Another nine percent are sexually harassed in some other way (e.g., visually or verbally).
 - A little more than half of the victims are girls.
 - This means that in a classroom of 30 high-school seniors, it’s likely that two students have been sexually abused, either physically or otherwise, by a school employee.
 - More than half of sexual abusers are men, but in some studies, as many as 43 percent are women.
 - Abusers are often well-respected figures – popular teachers, coaches, administrators, or other staff members.
 - Abusers choose their victims carefully, cultivate a relationship, and win them over or intimidate them with their stature before beginning the abuse.
 - Virtually all men who assault boys identify themselves as heterosexual. “Sexual abuse is not, as is commonly thought, necessarily about sex at all,” says Robb. “In many cases, the perpetrator feels powerful enough to cross boundaries that are usually considered taboo. Seen in this light, the motivation behind sex crimes can be simplified. Perversion and social deviance sometimes play a role, but it clears the air to understand sexual abuse as a means of control.”
- There are sometimes overt physical signs of sexual abuse, but psychological signs are

more common: depression, mood swings, fear of certain people or places, eating disorders, self-destructive behaviors, or apathy.

- Educators need to get past the common sentiment: “These things happen, but not in my school.”
- Every school should have a clear, explicit policy on dealing with sexual abuse.

Later in his first year of teaching, Robb had another chance to follow up on signs of sexual abuse. Margaret, one of his sophomore students, wrote a composition about a fictional character named Sadie who worked in a laundry. The man who managed the laundry was coming on to her, pressing against her as he stood behind her, touching her in ways that disturbed her. She wanted to quit the job, but couldn't. The story was on Robb's mind, and that afternoon, during baseball practice, he asked a boy who was in Margaret's class if she had an on-campus job. “Yeah, coach, she works where I do.”

“Where?”

“In the school laundry.”

The next morning, Robb was sitting in the headmaster's office with Margaret and her mother, and the girl was asked about her composition. “The office was dark and quiet,” Robb remembers, “and we sat there for a long time while she thought to herself, then whispered to her mother and cried a little. It was hard for her, and her mother looked pained, but finally Margaret told us that, yes, she was Sadie and that the guy in the laundry had done pretty much what she'd described. The school fired the man. Charges were brought against him in the local courts...

“I was still a kid myself back then... But at least that year, I grew up enough to understand how prevalent sexual abuse is. I also learned that kids will let you know about it if they feel they can trust you. And if you're willing to listen.”

“Judgment Call” by Daniel Robb in *Teacher Magazine*, August/September 2005 (p. 44-48)
<http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2005/09/01/01sexharass.h17.html>

2. New York City Educators Deal with Their Citywide Curriculum

This *New York Times* article describes concerns that have cropped up following the adoption of a citywide curriculum in the New York City public schools two years ago. Among the requirements of elementary teachers are: students sitting on the rug for daily discussions, using “word walls” to accumulate useful vocabulary under each letter of the alphabet, limiting lecture-type teaching to brief mini-lessons so that students spend most of the day working in groups or individually, and abiding by a “flow of the day” schedule posted on the wall. These were the concerns:

- Some idealistic young teachers feel that their “creative freedom” is hemmed in by the curriculum.
- Some teachers trained in “backwards design” feel the curriculum limits their ability to do long-range planning and think in terms of outcomes.

- Some principals have been overly zealous in enforcing compliance on the finer points of the curriculum, making unannounced classroom visits to monitor teachers. Nicholas Graham, a thoughtful fifth-grade teacher in Manhattan, said, “They took a progressive model and implemented it in a conservative fashion.”

- Some teachers have trained their students to switch rapidly to the required activity if the principal or another official visitor appears “They can be doing a reading lesson,” said one teacher, “and if somebody walks through the door, all of a sudden they’re doing the writing lesson.”

- It appears that some principals miss important points in their classroom observations: one teacher in the Bronx said that in many classrooms, the word wall has the same words at the end of the year that were there at the beginning.

- Lucy Calkins, the Columbia professor largely responsible for the citywide curriculum, says there has been widespread over-interpretation of what was intended. There is no rigid requirement for rug time, she said, nor a strict time limit on mini-lessons. But Calkins does believe that long teacher lectures don’t work and the best way for students to learn to read and write is by reading and writing. Carmen Farina, the deputy chancellor for teaching and learning, says she has been re-training principals. “When you don’t know something, you tend to over-regulate,” she said.

[New York teachers think this is scripted? They should be thanking their lucky stars that their Republican mayor didn’t mandate a *really* scripted curriculum! In my view, there’s no reason Big Apple educators can’t combine the quite enlightened, general practices mandated by the citywide “curriculum” with some key elements that aren’t included, such as backwards design, teaching for understanding, monitoring results on authentic interim assessments, and working in grade-level teams to continuously improve teaching and learning.]

“By the Script: Young, Idealistic, and Feeling Stifled” by Sewell Chan in *New York Times Education Life*, July 31, 2005 (p. 30). This article can be purchased online at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0713F63B580C728FDDAE0894DD404482&incamp=archive:search>

3. Jonathan Kozol on the New “Separate But Unequal”

In this 14-page excerpt from his forthcoming book, Jonathan Kozol speaks to four concerns with his usual passion: the re-segregation of many U.S. schools in recent years; the huge disparities in teacher pay, resources, and facilities between rich and poor districts; the test-driven dumbing down of curriculum in high-poverty schools; and the Skinnerian, repressive classroom practices in many “overregulated” urban schools.

Kozol is particularly scathing about Success for All (“The rich get richer, and the poor get SFA”), and lampoons the efforts of various teachers to enforce discipline in their classrooms. One teacher who had just used a set of silent signals to keep her students on task said to Kozol out of the corner of her mouth, “I can do this with my dog.” Kozol disapprovingly quotes a rubric used by teachers in an unnamed district to rate students’ filing

through the halls on a 4-3-2-1 scale: “Everyone shows pride, their shoulders high... no slumping.”

Kozol clearly feels that efforts to teach to state standards and implement various “best practices” (“Accountable Talk,” “Authentic Writing,” “Active Listening”) are shallow and insult students’ intelligence. Noting that recent test-score gains at the elementary level have not been sustained when students move on to high school, Kozol argues that those gains are illusory, representing superficial test prep, not real learning. “False gains evaporate,” he concludes. “Real gains endure.”

[This article is bleak, provocative, and disturbing. Much of what Kozol says about re-segregation and unequal resources is right on target, and he accurately captures the lame way some schools are implementing standards and enforcing discipline. But Kozol is so deeply opposed to high-stakes testing and conventional discipline that he has not taken the time to investigate and write about successful inner-city schools, and he misses effective practices when they are right under his nose. This article (and the book that’s about to be published) aspires to influence policy-makers and bring about radical social and economic change. Bravo, but for those who work in urban schools every day, Kozol’s message is likely to produce anger and discouragement.]

“Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid” by Jonathan Kozol in *Harper’s Magazine*, September 2005 (Vol. 311, #1864, p. 41-54), no e-link available.

4. Short Items:

a. Technology ideas – This *New York Times* article showcases several teachers who have become powerhouse resources to their colleagues on computers. Several websites are mentioned that might be useful:

- Paul Reinhart, a fifth-grade teacher in Bowling Green, Ohio, publishes his students’ work on a website to motivate them to write for a larger audience. You can check out his site at <http://www.bgcs.k12.oh.us/reinhart>.

- Kathy Schrock, a technology administrator in the Nauset schools in Massachusetts, has gathered more than 2,600 curriculum and professional development resources for teachers. Check out her stuff at <http://www.discoveryschool.com/schrockguide>.

- Frank Maracola and Susan Hardin of Clinton Township, Michigan have had great success getting special-needs students to write using Begin with ME!, a resource package for teachers that includes “manual” items like Post-its and highlighters and various software tools. Speaking of children with severe physical disabilities learning disabilities, Hardin says, “These kids learn technology fast. They tend to be the guys who pick up how it works the quickest.” Check out these resources at <http://www.beginwithme.misd.net>.

- Bonnie Bracey of Washington, D.C. lectures on technology tools around the world. One of her most recent discoveries is a website that gives science classes free remote access to an electron microscope: <http://bugscope.beckman.uiuc.edu>.

“These Teachers Teach Tech to Teachers” by Bonnie Rothman Morris, *New York Times*, August 3, 2005 (p. 3)
<http://tech2.nytimes.com/mem/technology/techreview.html?res=9D06E5D71E3FF930A3575BC0A9639C8B63>

b. Online gym classes – This *New York Times* article describes the growing popularity of online courses in U.S. high schools, including a particular favorite, online gym. In one class offered this summer in Minneapolis, Frank Goodrich, a veteran football coach, oversaw the efforts of 60 students, requiring each to do four vigorous half-hour workouts a week (parents had to certify that students did what they said they were doing). Students had wide latitude in the type of exercise they chose (for example, swimming in a lake, playing hockey, lifting weights) and had to report on their warm-ups, cool-downs, and heart rates. Goodrich checked on students’ reports and gave grades, including warnings and eventually a few F’s for slackers.

Brenda Corbin, a curriculum writer for the Minneapolis district, was initially skeptical about online gym. “I refused to be part of it,” she said a year ago. “How do you know they’re really working out?” But she swung around after watching the course in action. “I was uninformed about what you can do over the computer,” she said.

“Online Classes Offer Virtual Dissection, But Gym Still Takes Sweat” by Sam Dillon in *New York Times*, August 2, 2005 (p. A10); this article can be purchased online at
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F00F16FB355B0C718CDDA10894DD404482&incamp=archive:search>

c. Seattle parents’ guide to schools – This *Seattle Times* feature advises parents on getting the best from teachers, helping with homework, securing extra support for students with special needs, helping kids become better readers, identifying academic warning signs, getting the most out of high school, and learning how to make new friends. Although some of it is Seattle-specific, much of the material may be transferable to other districts. The site is at
<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/parentsguide/>

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, August 19, 2005

d. First-year teacher survival guide – The U.S. Department of Education website has an online book designed to support first-year teachers. It includes reflections of award-winning novice teachers who talk candidly about their successes and setbacks, with a particular emphasis on the relationships they formed with colleagues, principals, university professors, and parents. It’s at <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/index.html>

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, August 19, 2005

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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 best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 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 39 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 2003-04).

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- 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
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harper's
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Journal of Staff Development
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record

E-links will be provided whenever possible.