Marshall Memo 409

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 7, 2011

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Young people are inexperienced at being old. A 22-year-old will perceive 20 years as an eternity."

Antony Davies (see item #1)

"You develop willpower and patience through practice. If you defer gratification, the payoff can be greater than with immediate gratification, but the brain has to learn that."

Paul Zak (see item #1)

"When students' grades are inflated and not clearly connected to achievement on well-defined outcomes, students begin to believe that grades are not about what they do, but about who they are. Such adaptations to grades actually lead to a decrease in motivation."

"Fair and Accurate Grading for Exceptional Learners" by Lee Ann Jung and Thomas Guskey in *Principal Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 12, #3, p. 32-37); an earlier version of this article is summarized in Marshall Memo 321.

"The *A* that a student earns on his fifth attempt at mastery is just as legitimate as the *A* earned by his classmate on the first attempt."

Rick Wormeli (see item #5)

"Asking *Why?* continues to be underused as a key mechanism for encouraging mathematical reasoning."

Lynn McGarvey and Kate Kline in "Why 'The Value of Why?'" in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, October 2011 (Vol. 18, #3, p. 132), no e-link available

1. Can Young People Learn to Defer Gratification?

In this thoughtful article in *Newsweek*, Sharon Begley and Jean Chatzky report on scientists' emerging understanding of people's ability to delay gratification. Humans seem to be hard-wired for instant gratification – pleasure now versus pleasure later – but some are able to control the urge. In the classic "marshmallow" experiment by Walter Mischel in the late 1960s, four-year-olds were left alone in a room with a marshmallow, having been told that if they waited until the experimenter returned, they could eat two marshmallows. Mischel and his colleagues have checked in on the children as they grew up, and found that those who were able to wait for the second treat scored much higher on the SAT and were less likely to be obese, addicted to illegal drugs, and divorced. Brain scans of the original subjects, now in their 40s, show that those who are more able to defer gratification have a more-active rational pre-frontal cortex. It's basically sending *calm down* messages to the *I want it now* midbrain limbic system.

Can deferring gratification be developed, or is it a hard-wired trait that people either have or don't? Mischel believes it can be learned, pointing out that some of the children in his experiment who were unable to resist gobbling the marshmallow at the age of four grew up to have strong deferred-gratification skills. "Being unable to delay gratification is not something we're stuck with for life," he says. Just because the brain behaves in a particular way doesn't mean it's hard-wired to do so. There are at least four approaches to boosting people's ability to wait for rewards:

• Zapping the midbrain with transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), a noninvasive technology that has also been used to treat chronic pain, major depression, tinnitus, and some symptoms of schizophrenia. While the research on TMS is intriguing, this technology is clearly not ready for prime time.

• Strengthening short-term "working" memory is associated with being able to project oneself into the future and plan for it. To achieve a goal, after all, one has to keep it in mind. Warren Bickel of Virginia Tech has found that when people are trained to improve their memories, they develop longer time horizons and place more value on the future. "We're only at the beginning of figuring out how to change people's temporal horizons," he says, "but the preliminary data are encouraging."

• Children can be encouraged to train their brains to defer gratification – for example, understanding that doing homework tonight produces better grades next month, that saving their allowance means being able to make a big purchase later. "You develop willpower and patience through practice," says Paul Zak of Claremont Graduate University. "If you defer

gratification, the payoff can be greater than with immediate gratification, but the brain has to learn that."

• Zak has also found that small amounts of the hormone oxytocin (which enters the bloodstream when people feel bonded and happy) produce greater patience. "This tells us that people who are happier and have greater social support save more," he says. "Oxytocin reduces anxiety, so we can make decisions that are better for us."

But are the odds stacked against today's young people? They've become accustomed to downloading songs in seconds, immediately Googling the answers to their questions, viewing favorite movies on demand, texting with friends all over the world, and getting next-day delivery through online shopping. "Instant gratification is fun," says Bickel, "and that's what today's technology is teaching us… Unless you're trained to control your impulses, why would you?"

Duquesne University economist Antony Davies adds another reason for pessimism: lack of life experience. "Young people are inexperienced at being old," he says. "A 22-year-old will perceive 20 years as an eternity. To ask this person to save for retirement is like asking the person to give his money to someone else: he cannot picture himself as a retiree."

"Stop! You Can't Afford It" by Sharon Begley with Jean Chatzky in *Newsweek*, Nov. 7 & 14, 2011, http://bit.ly/tvAXTi

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2. Ideas for Students Who Suffer from Test Anxiety

In this helpful article in *Teaching Exceptional Children*, SUNY/New Paltz professor Spencer Salend analyzes what to do with students who suffer from extreme and unwarranted tension during testing or evaluative activities. "Most people feel some level of stress when preparing for and taking tests," says Salend, "and moderate and appropriate levels of nervousness can foster students' motivation, memory and attention." But heightened and detrimental levels of anxiety are another matter; they afflict between 25 to 40 percent of students. Those with disabilities, as well as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, appear to be particularly susceptible. Here's what one student said:

> I start to think about what will happen if I don't do well on the test and then things snowball and I lose my focus. Even if I know the answer, I start to blank out and struggle to find the right words to explain it or start to think about other things. As soon as I leave the room, I remember everything and can answer the questions.

Salend says there's a difference between test anxiety and more generalized *trait anxiety*, which is an ongoing personal characteristic across settings and situations. Test anxiety is situation-specific.

Salend has the following suggestions for helping students overcome test anxiety and do their best work on tests:

• *Identify students with test anxiety*. Teachers can watch for telltale signs during testing and also pick up information from conversations with students and family members.

Elementary students tend to show physical symptoms (including excessive perspiration, sweaty palms, headaches and stomachaches, nausea, shaking body parts, rapid heartbeat, dizziness and light-headedness, muscle tension, tics, flushed skin color, and difficulty sleeping, eating, and toileting before tests); secondary students are more likely to exhibit behavioral and affective symptoms. In many cases, triggers and symptoms can interact: students may perform poorly because of insufficient preparation, family pressures, learned helplessness, or badly designed tests, and their poor performance can cause difficulties with concentration, attention, self-esteem, and memory during subsequent tests, causing further anxiety.

• *Teach study skills*. There's nothing like effective studying to reduce test anxiety, says Salend, but many students don't know the best ways to study. Here are some tips:

- Give students study guides that address the purpose, content, and format of the test.
- Ask students to work in groups to predict the content and test items that will be on the test, quiz each other, and create study materials and memory aids.
- Use educational games and simulated tests to review and practice possible test content, questions, and conditions.
- Give students a list of items that may be on a test – for example, essay questions.
- Give study tips, including creating a schedule of study sessions, identifying difficult material that may require further explanation by teachers, focusing on specific goals, having the necessary resources and materials on hand, creating an outline, summary, or visual aid of key points and questions and resources, and using games, flash cards, and mnemonic devices to remember key items.

Here are some online resources on test anxiety:

- Test anxiety scale: http://www.learningskills.com/test.html
- Are you anxious? http://istudy.psu.edu/FirstYearModules/TestTaking/AnxietySurvey.html
- Achievement: http://www.wright-counseling.com/checklists/TestAnxietyAssessment.html

• *Teach effective test-taking skills*. These can help students stay relaxed, focused, and motivated during tests:

- Do a memory dump or download as soon as the test is handed out, jotting down key points, definitions, formulas, dates, mnemonics, drawings, memory clues, and names you are likely to use in the test.
- Work on the easier test items first to build confidence.
- Budget time according to the time allotted, the value of each test item, and difficulty level.
- Highlight essential parts of test directions to focus on specific details (for example, *Answer three out of the five essay questions*), types of answers being asked for, aids, resources, and assistance you can use, and time, length, and space constraints.
- Use specific strategies for answering multiple-choice, matching, true-false, sentence-completion, and essay questions.

• *Teach and prompt the use of anxiety-reduction strategies*. These include arriving at the test site on time, rather than early, to avoid interactions with other students than can heighten anxiety; politely avoiding conversations with peers about what was studied, answers to

questions, and false rumors; using encouraging self-statements; wearing comfortable clothes; taking a few minutes to relax and focus on your goals and plans for success; using anxiety-reduction techniques including meditating, praying, taking deep breaths and breaks, tensing and relaxing muscles; using a squeeze ball; engaging in positive self-talk; focusing on past successes; and listening to guided imagery, affirmations, meditation recordings, or calming music.

• *Offer attribution training*. Students with disabilities may approach a test with low expectations for success. "As a result," says Salend, "they ascribe their poor performance to bad luck (e.g., "I got the hardest questions"), teacher mistakes (e.g., "The teacher didn't teach that"), lack of ability (e.g., "I'm not good at that"), and other factors that they view as out of their control." Attribution training is designed to counteract these thoughts by getting students to focus on the events and actions that contribute to their success and failure on tests and engage in positive attributions that credit effort and factors they can control (e.g., "I worked hard studying for this test" and "I learned that material"). The key insights are:

- Understand how attributions and effort affect your test performance.
- Interpret poor performance as a signal to work harder and identify ways to improve.
- Acknowledge and analyze successful outcomes to identify behaviors that need to be continued and enhanced.
- Discuss and learn from mistakes.

"The role of teacher feedback is critical to attribution training," says Salend. Teachers can reinforce effective effort ("You really worked hard to learn this") and get students focusing on the right kind of reflection after tests ("Can you think of another way you could have answered this?"). After tests, students might be asked to respond to these prompts: I did well on this test because_____. I struggled on this test because_____. The things I can do to be successful on future tests are_____.

• *Create accessible and student-friendly tests*. Avoid surprise tests and quizzes, urges Salend. "Tests that cause confusion and distraction can make students with organizational and attention difficulties feel anxious before they begin," he says. Give tests with adequate study time, a reasonable amount of content focused on the key concepts and skills of the curriculum unit being studied, relevance to everyday life, clear directions, a logical sequence, and student-friendly graphics.

• *Involve students in the testing process*. They can be asked to devise possible test questions, and tests can give them options on which items to answer.

• *Provide appropriate testing accommodations*. These can include timing, scheduling, and settings, as well as readers, scribes, cues, hints, coaching, and information when permitted.

• *Use technology-based testing*. Taking tests on computers can be a boon for some students with disabilities, especially if the test can be customized to give choices of format, conditions, and accommodations.

• *Consider collaborative test-taking arrangements*. For some students, cooperative-group testing minimizes stress.

• *Consider a range of scoring methods*. These might include granting partial credit for correct aspects of an answer, offering extra-credit options, awarding bonus points for certain items, and letting students earn back points by revising incorrect answers or retaking the test using different questions assessing the same content.

• *Collaborate with students' families and other professionals*. This includes providing information about tests and test anxiety and working with family members to come up with the best strategies and interventions to reduce test anxiety.

• *Evaluate what works and what doesn't work*. This involves touching base with students, teachers, and family members.

"Addressing Test Anxiety" by Spencer Salend in *Teaching Exceptional Children*, November/ December 2011 (Vol. 44, #2, p. 58-68), no free e-link; Salend can be reached at salends@newpaltz.edu.

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3. Thomas Guskey on Overcoming Obstacles to Better Grading

(Originally titled "Five Obstacles to Grading Reform")

"Educators seeking to reform grading must combat five long-held traditions that stand as formidable obstacles to change," says University of Kentucky professor Thomas Guskey in this *Educational Leadership* article. "… Leaders who have the courage to challenge the traditional approach and the conviction to press for thoughtful, positive reforms are likely to see remarkable results." Here are the obstacles:

• *Obstacle #1: Grades should differentiate students on the basis of talent*. "Students who show superior talent receive high grades, whereas those who display lesser talent receive lower grades," explains Guskey. This view suggests that schools are in the business of *selecting* rather than *developing* talent. If the goal is selection, then a school should maximize the achievement differences among students. One way of doing this is using assessments like the SAT and ACT, which eliminate questions on which most students score well. Another way to maximize student-achievement differences is to teach poorly; it works every time. But if the goal is developing talent, the school should be clear about learning outcomes and do everything possible to ensure that all students learn. The result should be almost all students reach high levels of achievement.

• *Obstacle #2: Grade distributions should form a bell-shaped curve*. The logic here is that intelligence is distributed along a bell-shaped curve, and achievement is related to intelligence, so grades should look the same. The flaw in this logic is that bell-shaped curves represent human variation when nothing intervenes. When learning conditions are optimized, the relationship between intelligence and achievement approaches zero. With effective teaching, the curve should look much different. In fact, if there's a normal curve after teaching, it's a sign that instruction was ineffective.

• *Obstacle #3: Grades should be based on students' standing compared to classmates*. This kind of grading means that a student who receives an A did better than others in the class, versus achieving objective success. The problem with norm-referenced grading is that it's

possible for students to perform poorly and still get high grades compared to other students who are performing even worse. Comparative grading also cranks up competitiveness. "Students are discouraged from cooperating or helping one another because doing so might hurt the helper's chance of success," says Guskey. "Similarly, teachers may refrain from helping individual students because some students might construe this as showing favoritism and biasing the competition." In standards-based grading, on the other hand, grades are based on rigorous, challenging, and transparent learning outcomes and have much more meaning.

• *Obstacle #4: Getting low grades makes students try harder*. There is no research evidence that low grades are motivational. In fact, low grades often lead students to dismiss the importance of grades and stop trying. A much more effective strategy is giving students who don't achieve mastery an *I* for incomplete and requiring them to get help the same day (during lunch or after school) to reach mastery.

• *Obstacle #5: Students should get a single grade for each subject or course*. There's plenty of evidence that combining achievement, attitude, effort, behavior, punctuality, and level of responsibility into one composite grade doesn't work, says Guskey. It's far more effective to give separate grades for *product* (a summative assessment of student learning, usually using A, B, C, D, and F), *process* (how students got there), and *progress* (the value-added from the learning experience), usually using a 4-3-2-1 grading scale, with separate marks and rubrics for homework, class participation, punctuality, effort, etc. Using this system, grade-point averages are based solely on the product grade. Guskey says that splitting up grades this way actually saves teachers time – and also saves constant arguments about how different factors counted in a composite grade. It's important, of course, to be clear up front about how grades will be reported.

"Five Obstacles to Grading Reform" by Thomas Guskey in *Educational Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 69, #3, p. 16-21), http://www.ascd.org; Guskey can be reached at Guskey@uky.edu.

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4. Tips for Adopting Standards-Based Grading

(Originally titled "Starting the Conversation About Grading")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant/researcher Susan Brookhart strongly advises schools that are rethinking grading policies to start with the overarching issues before getting into the weeds. "Merely tweaking the details of a grading system can result in a system that makes even less sense than the one it was intended to replace," she says. "Any school that is interested in reforming grading needs to talk about it in ways that challenge colleagues on the right questions… [and] deal seriously with educators' long-standing beliefs and entrenched practices." Brookhart lists four philosophical points that need to be discussed first:

- Grades should reflect students' achievement of intended learning outcomes.
- Students and parents are the primary audience for grades; teachers, administrators, and other educators are secondary audiences.

- Grades should reflect each student's individual achievement; group and cooperative skills should be reflected elsewhere, not in academic grades.
- Grades should support students' motivation to learn; there should never be a point where students conclude that failure is inevitable and there's no point in trying.

The biggest shift with standards-based grading is marking students on what they have *learned*. Many teachers are firmly rooted in a different belief – that grades are about what students have *earned* through the work they do, following directions, and behaving. Shifting this belief system is the first order of business, and Brookhart suggests these steps:

• *Transparency* – School and district leaders should be clear about their reasons for addressing grading practices.

• *Vote, compare, and discuss* – Working in small groups, faculty members should indicate their agreement or disagreement with the four points above and then begin the whole-group discussion with the areas of agreement. Where there's disagreement, teachers should be asked "Why do you believe that?" and frame disagreement as "I'm not there yet."

• *Debate* – Brookhart suggests randomly assigning teachers to pro and con positions, four or five on each side, and arguing for that position, whether they agree with it or not. Inevitably there will be teachers who say, "Why would students behave if I can't grade them down if they don't behave?" and that concern has to be addressed (for example, saying, "We need to develop alternatives for handling behavior.")

• *A local expert panel* – Ask teachers who have experimented with standards-based grading to share how they got started, how they worked with students and parents, and what they learned.

• *Fishbowl* – Give a small group of teachers the discussion points above to debate, with the rest of the faculty observing.

Once a school has taken the plunge on standards-based grading, it can get into implementation questions: what grading scale to use (letters, percentages, or rubrics), how often to report grades, whether to assign zeros for missed work, whether to adopt a "no D and F" policy, how many marks to combine, and how to combine them.

Brookhart says schools that make the shift to standards-based grading find themselves spending much more time discussing student learning – classroom strategies, differentiation, formative assessments, and coaching.

"Starting the Conversation About Grading" by Susan Brookhart in *Educational Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 69, #3, p. 10-14), http://www.ascd.org; Brookhart can be reached at susanbrookhart@bresnan.net.

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5. The Power of Having Students Re-Do Disappointing Work

(Originally titled "Redos and Retakes Done Right")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant Rick Wormeli makes the case for having students regularly re-do below-mastery assignments and tests (whether caused by poor understanding, insufficient effort, or plagiarizing) until they meet high expectations. As it is,

many teachers give low grades for poor work and move on, which has a negative effect on motivation and future effort. "As hope wanes," says Wormeli, "resentment builds. Without hope – especially hope that teachers see the moral, competent, and responsible self inside them, waiting to shed its immature shell – students disengage from the school's mission and the adults who care for them. Our education enterprise is lost."

Wormeli makes a strong case that do-overs are not a "soft" response to student failure. "The goal is that all students learn the content, not just the ones who can learn on the uniform time line," he says. "True competence that stands the test of time comes with reiterative learning. We carry forward concepts and skills we encounter repeatedly, and we get better at retrieving them the more we experience them."

Wormeli recommends the following steps for managing re-dos for maximum impact on teaching and learning:

• Replace the previous grade or mark with the most recent one – don't average the two. "The A that a student earns on his fifth attempt at mastery is just as legitimate as the A earned by his classmate on the first attempt," he says.

• Allow students to re-do only the portions of the assignment or test with which they had difficulty.

• Have students submit the original attempt with the re-do and write a brief letter comparing the two and saying what they learned in the process.

• Reserve the right to give alternative versions of the assessment to be re-done.

• Tell students and parents that re-dos are permitted at teacher discretion; they can't be taken for granted.

• Require parents to sign the original, poorly-done versions of assignments so they're aware that their children are being given multiple attempts to achieve the standard.

• Require students to submit a day-by-day plan of mastering the problematic material and provide evidence that they are working at it before attempting the re-do.

• If a student doesn't follow through on promised relearning steps, require a letter of apology for breaking the trust.

• If two or three re-do attempts don't result in mastery, pause for a couple of weeks to figure out what's wrong – Inappropriate content? Lack of student effort? Insufficiently creative teaching?

• If the same student repeatedly asks for re-dos, something is wrong, says Wormeli. Perhaps the content is developmentally wrong, there are issues at home, or there's an undiagnosed learning disability.

• Don't use re-dos with all assignments and tests, only those most important to core learning objectives.

• Allow re-dos for students with *B*s and *C*s as well as students with *D*s and *F*s. "Why stand in the way of a student who wants to achieve excellence?" asks Wormeli.

• If there isn't time for a re-do before report card grades are due, go with the current grade and allow the student to make up work in the next marking period and submit a grade change request.

• Consider a blackout period on re-dos just before report card time. "For eight weeks, you're Mr. or Ms. Hopeful," says Wormeli, "but for that one week, it's OK to protect your sanity and personal life."

"Redos and Retakes Done Right" by Rick Wormeli in *Educational Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 69, #3, p. 22-26), http://www.ascd.org; Wormeli can be reached at rwormeli@cox.net.

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6. A Model for Turning Around Struggling Kentucky High Schools

In this *Education Week* article, Sheldon Berman and Arthur Camins describe the turnaround model they used when they served as superintendent and innovation director, respectively, in the Jefferson County (KY) schools, a district that had ten persistently low-achieving high schools. Berman and Camins believe the Investment Model they used is more effective than the four turnaround options provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Here are its foundational beliefs:

- High-poverty schools are most likely to attract and retain effective teachers when there is effective leadership, student support, and a culture of collaboration and professional growth.
- Teachers are most successful when they have time to collaborate with colleagues.
- Students are most successful when the school optimizes time for in-depth, engaging, and challenging learning experiences.
- Students do best when they have positive, personal connections with adults and the school.

These beliefs translated into the following elements in the turnaround plan:

• *Time for teacher collaboration* – Same-grade/same-subject teams have significant, consistent, regularly scheduled blocks to plan units and lessons together, observe one another's classes, analyze student work, and plan ways to deal with gaps in students' knowledge and skills. Team meetings are facilitated by coaches and teacher leaders.

• *Formative assessments* – These are designed to provide diagnostic information on students' conceptual understanding of content and provide carefully tailored feedback. "This personalization builds students' confidence in their own capabilities, sustains them in tackling more-challenging material, and motivates them to set higher goals," say the authors.

• *Creative scheduling* – A five-block trimester model gives teachers 70-minute periods, reduces class size, allows students to concentrate on only five subjects at a time, and allows flexible time for remediation and acceleration and stronger connections with adults, including a weekly advisory period for support of social development, career interests, and preparation for postsecondary education.

"Investing in Turnaround That Endures" by Sheldon Berman and Arthur Camins in *Education Week*, Nov. 2, 2011 (Vol. 31, #10, p. 28, 22), free link for subscribers only

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7. Asking Multi-Level Questions About Texts

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey say principals should pay close attention to the kinds of questions teachers ask students about the texts they are reading. A steady diet of knowledge and comprehension questions fosters literal reading and stunts students' growth. Questions that get students synthesizing and evaluating prepare them for the kind of thinking they will have to do in high school, college, and life.

Fisher and Frey advocate a balance of questions. They also note that the Common Core State Standards require students to provide evidence from the text to justify their answers and opinions – something many students aren't accustomed to doing. Here are some suggested questions (directly quoted):

Questions about the story:

- What happened in the story?
- Were you able to predict the ending?
- What other way might the story have ended?
- What will probably happen next?
- What might have happened if a certain action had not taken place?
- What was the most important part of the story?
- List important words about people, animals, places, or things.

Questions about the setting:

- Where did the story take place?
- Why did this setting work?
- Do you know of a place like this?
- When did the story take place?
- Which part of the story best describes the setting?
- What words does the author use to describe the setting?

Questions about the author:

- What do you know about the author?
- Why do you think the author wrote the book?
- What is he or she trying to tell you in the book?
- What does this book tell us about the author?
- What sorts of things does the author like or dislike?
- What did the author have to know about to write this book?

Questions about characters:

- Choose one character: Why is this person important in the story? What lesson did the character learn?
- Do any of the characters change?
- Why did they behave as they did?
- Was the behavior of a particular character right or wrong?
- Are people really like these characters?

Basic questions:

- Was there anything you liked about this book? What especially caught your attention? What would you have liked more of?
- Was there anything you disliked?
- Were there parts that bored you?
- Was there anything that puzzled you or that you thought was strange?
- Was there anything that completely surprised you?

"Asking Questions That Prompt Discussion" by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey in *Principal Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 12, #3, p. 58-60), ftp://64.14.13.138/others/PLA/PL_20111101_Nov_2011.pdf; Fisher can be reached at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu, Frey at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.

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8. Reading Historical Fiction in Literature Circles

In this article in *Middle Ground*, Robert Morris University professor Carianne Bernadowski says that good historical fiction is one of the best ways to motivate middle-school students to read. Here are some of her favorites:

- *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne
- *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Cooper Sun* by Sharon Draper
- *Day of Tears* by Julius Lester
- *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan
- *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers
- *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *47* by Walter Mosley
- *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez
- *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse
- *Revolution* by Jennifer Donnelly
- *Sarny: A Life Remembered* by Gary Paulson
- *Sunrise Over Fallujah* by Walter Dean Myers

Bernadowski is a great believer in literature circles. Students need a quick explanation on how circles work, especially the different roles within each group: discussion director (moderates discussions, asking questions like "Would you like to have the main character as a friend?"), word wizard (identifies and gives the definition of words that may be of interest), passage picker (highlights interesting paragraphs or phrases), summarizer (writes a short paragraph describing the important events of the book), investigator (brings additional information about the topic to the group), trivia tracker (asks basic questions to check for details, e.g., "What year did the story take place?"), artful artist (creates a drawing, sketch, or diagram), and connector (finds relationships between the book and the real world).

With this basic training under their belts, each group of students chooses a different book, assigns roles, and reads the book with the teacher as overall facilitator. "If you were to eavesdrop on a literature circle discussion," says Bernadowski, "you'd hear enthusiastic conversations about book characters, events, author's craft, and how a story is related to the reader's personal life. You'd hear students make important connections to other texts and to the world around them." When students finish their books, they might share observations with the whole class, take part in a discussion of different books, write a letter to one of the main characters (or take the role of that character in a letter), create a timeline of the main events in a character's life, or produce a video depiction of something that happened in the book.

"Literature Circles and Historical Fiction" by Carianne Bernadowski in *Middle Ground*, October 2011 (Vol. 15, #2, p. 32-33), link for members only; Bernadowski can be reached at bernadowski@rmu.edu.

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9. Short Items:

a. Seven billion people – Check out this BBC website for some graphics on world population, including your place in the story: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-15391515

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b. Google Art Project – Google continues to branch out. Here's a new art project with extraordinary resources: http://www.googleartproject.com/

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c. Real-world math – In this website, math teacher Thomas Petra shares practical math lessons, lesson ideas, examples, and downloads, including how to find the volume of the Great Pyramids of Giza, converting currency, working with time zones, and tracking a storm's progress: http://realworldmath.org.

"Bulletin Board" in *Principal Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 12, #3, p. 7)

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d. Resources for standards-based grading – This *Educational Leadership* item has three links for grading support:

- Kirk Robbins's blog: http://teachscience4all.wordpress.com
- The Anchorage School District: http://www.asdk12.org/depts/cei/SBAR
- Tara Richerson's standards-based grade book: http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com

"Help for Standards-Based Graders" in *Educational Leadership*, November 2011 (Vol. 69, #3, p. 9)

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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 41 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).

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- 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 log-in

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Better Evidence-Based Education
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
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
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
The School Administrator
Theory Into Practice