Marshall Memo 118

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 9, 2006

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"My darkest hours of teaching were when I had no one else to talk to about student achievement and effective instruction."

A veteran North Carolina teacher, interviewed by Hirsch in 2005 (see item #7)

"Even more than reading, writing is a mental juggling act that depends on automatic deployment of basic skills such as handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation so that the writer can keep track of such concerns as topic, organization, word choice, and audience needs."

Louisa Moats (see item #2)

"Why does spelling appear on the one hand to be simple, something that any reasonably intelligent person should be able to do, but on the other hand, cause so many students academic grief?"

Louisa Moats (*ibid.*)

"Educators must remember that some students get lost during adolescence and can wind up continuing down a self-destructive path simply because they do not know how to change. Schools must find ways to support students' good choices and recognize students' positive assets."

Julia Davidow, high-school principal (see item #3)

"Instituting a [student] uniform policy can be viewed as analogous to cleaning and brightly painting a deteriorating building in that on the one hand it grabs our immediate attention; on the other hand, it's only a coat of paint."

David Brunsma (see item #8)

"My kid sells term papers to your honor student."

"Anti-brag" bumper sticker (*New York Times*, Jan. 5, 2006, spotted in *PEN Weekly Newsblast*, Jan. 6, 2006)

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1. How Praise Can Motivate – or Kill Motivation

If we believe Alfie Kohn, praising students is bad because it's an extrinsic reward that makes students dependent and less intrinsically motivated. But most of us were praised a lot as we grew up, and we turned out okay. So where does the truth lie? In this thoughtful article in the new *American Educator*, cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham reviews the research and enunciates four principles:

• *Praise should sincerely commend something that is praiseworthy.* If we want praise to improve motivation, students need to believe it's for real. For example, if a teacher gives genuine praise to a girl for her ability to stick with a challenging task, the student is likely to incorporate that attribute into her self-concept, saying to herself, "I am the type of kid who keeps working even if a project is hard."

Most students can see right through the three kinds of insincere praise:

- Dishonest praise – Students dismiss praise that they perceive as not truthful or credible. Global, effusive praise ("You are the smartest boy ever!") is the most likely to be rejected, as is praise that is clearly phony (for example, a teacher praising a student for hard work when he knows quite well he sloughed off).

- Controlling praise – Students will also reject praise if they can tell that its purpose is to control or manipulate them (for example, "Good job on those puzzles. Keep it up. I would like you to do even better on the next game."). Studies have shown that controlling praise is counterproductive because rather than leading the student to make a positive self-attribution ("I'm the kind of kid who enjoys puzzles and does them well"), the student draws a different conclusion (I'm doing these puzzles because the teacher wants me to, not because I enjoy them"). A good rule of thumb is to avoid the kind of praise that hints at past weaknesses or failure. Here are two examples:

"Well, you finally played that piece of music the way it should be played."

versus: "I really like the way you kept a strong, rhythmic beat going in that piece."

"I never thought you would pass that test – but you did!"

versus: "I can see you put in a lot of work to pass that test."

- Unearned praise – Imagine that a student who rarely turns in work actually completes a project, but you can see at a glance that it's not his best work. Should you praise him? No, says Willingham, because praising substandard work will tell the student, in so many words, "This work is fine – for a person of your ability. It's not that didn't try hard. You just can't do any better." Here's a better approach: "It's great that you finished the assignment, but I'm a little disappointed in the quality of this work because I know you can do better."

• *Praise should emphasize process, not ability*. Praising ability ("You're a wonderful writer") and intelligence ("You're the smartest math student I've ever taught") may seem harmless, but it becomes a problem when students encounter difficulty or failure. Praising intelligence feeds the belief (which is very much part of American culture) that intelligence is a fixed characteristic that cannot be changed. The more a child thinks that intelligence (or a particular talent or ability) is fixed, the more threatening failure is, because there's nothing that can be done about it ("I'm just not good at math"). Praising effort, on the other hand, feeds the belief that intelligence or ability is malleable and you can get better by effective effort. Children who buy into the fixed-intelligence paradigm find themselves in an odd trap: If you're smart, you don't need to work hard; thus, working hard is a sign of being stupid! These kids are in a tough spot: they want to be seen as smart, but they believe they can get there only by not working hard!

Children are astonishingly sensitive to the way in which adults praise them. In one study (Mueller and Dweck, 1998), fifth-graders were given some relatively easy puzzles, and when they were finished, different students were praised in three different ways:

- Some were praised for intelligence ("You must be smart at these problems").
- Some were praised for effort ("You must have worked hard at these problems").
- Some were praised for just their high score ("Wow, congratulations on your score").

Students were then given harder puzzles to solve, and the students who were praised for intelligence were much less successful than those praised for effort; the third group fell in the middle. When given a chance to work the puzzles in their free time, the intelligence-praised students were much less likely to spend time on them. Students were then given puzzles at the level of difficulty of the original set, and the intelligence-praised students did worse than they did originally, while the effort-praised students improved on their initial scores. Finally, students were given a questionnaire on their opinions on intelligence and, at least for the duration of the study, their views were influenced by the ways in which they were praised. Students who were praised for intelligence embraced the fixed-ability view of intelligence, and those whose effort was praised embraced the malleable-intelligence paradigm.

Willingham believes praise that compares students to each another ("I really like the way Jane has put away her materials and is ready to work") operates in the same way as praise for ability: it seems harmless at first, but backfires later. The hidden message to Jane is that she's being praised for putting her materials away *first*. If the teacher praises a different student for being first tomorrow, will Jane be pleased that she also put her materials away? Probably not. Willingham says the research on comparative praise is incomplete, but it probably does more harm than good.

The clear implication of all this, says Willingham, is that teachers should avoid praising students for ability and instead praise them for a *process* they have successfully applied – working hard, concentrating despite distractions, using good strategies on a project when obstacles arose, thoughtful planning, paying attention to details, etc. Another implication is that teachers should use biographies of famous people to address students' views on fixed versus malleable intelligence. "Students are often surprised to learn," writes Willingham, "that

musicians or athletes whom they respect are not simply talented, but also work very hard at their craft. Student athletes are usually familiar with this principle from personal experience. They are familiar with the kid on the team who has a lot of ability, but doesn't work hard. They know that such athletes are seldom the best players, and they are certainly not esteemed by the rest of the team."

In short, praise should label the praiseworthy action, not the child. Here are two more examples: "You told me what happened at recess today even though you knew I might get angry. I appreciate your honesty." "You sorted out your pencils, crayons, and pens, and put them in separate boxes. That's what I call being organized!" Praising the process the child used encourages the belief that praiseworthy behavior is under his or her control.

• *Praise should lead students to draw positive conclusions about themselves*. For example:

- When the teacher says, "That was a tough problem, but you kept working at it until you solved it," the student might think, "I don't give up easily. I persist."

- When the teacher says, "You cleaned the brushes and put away all the art materials without being asked. I really appreciate that," the student might think, "I can be responsible."

- When the teacher says, "Your opening sentence grabbed my interest and made me want to read on," the student might think, "I'm getting good at writing."

• *Praise should be immediate and unexpected*. Delayed praise loses much of its motivational and informative impact, so a good rule of thumb is that praise should come shortly after a praiseworthy act. But Willingham says praise should not become predictable or routine. This risks conditioning the student to engage in the activity for praise rather than for its intrinsic rewards. The solution, he says, is to make praise an unexpected bonus, not a right. Teachers should work at weaning "praise addicts," for example, engaging the student in a positive conversation about the work but resisting the urge to offer explicit praise. The goal is to get these students to be less needy for praise, and to engage in work for its own sake, not just to please the teacher.

"How We Learn: Ask the Cognitive Scientist: How Praise Can Motivate – or Stifle" by Daniel Willingham in *American Educator*, Winter 2005/06 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 23-27, 48)
http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/winter05-06/cogsci.htm

2. The Key Role of Spelling in Students' Reading and Writing Achievement

In this cogent article in *American Educator*, literacy expert Louisa Moats argues that learning to spell is critically important to students' development as readers and writers. Spelling is all tied up in the letter/sound relationships that make fluent reading possible (better spellers are better readers, and vice-versa) and there's an even stronger link between spelling and good writing: if a student has to think too hard about how to spell, it's much harder to concentrate on content and style. "Even more than reading," says Moats, "writing is a mental juggling act that depends on automatic deployment of basic skills such as handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation so that the writer can keep track of such concerns as topic,

organization, word choice, and audience needs." Poor spellers tend to limit their writing to words they know how to spell or lose track of their thoughts as they struggle to spell a word.

Spelling is also part of being an educated citizen. "In a literate society," says Moats, "conventional spelling is expected and anything beyond a few small errors is equated with ignorance or incompetence." In fact, one recent study found that job applications containing more than one or two spelling errors are almost always doomed. And being able to spell reasonably well is important to lots of everyday activities – filing things alphabetically; looking things up in the phone book or dictionary; recognizing the right word from the options presented by a computer's spell-checker; and writing notes that others can read.

"Spelling instruction may be old fashioned," says Moats, "but its importance has not diminished with computerized spell-checkers – and there's no reason to believe that it will diminish in the foreseeable future." She believes that good teaching of spelling is important to improving vocabulary, writing, and understanding of the English language.

Yet few states' literacy standards are very precise about spelling, virtually no state tests give useful data on students' spelling needs, and the teaching of spelling in most schools is scattershot. Step one, Moats says, is making sense of the English spelling system, which is not as irregular as it appears. Only four percent of English words are truly irregular and the rest can be figured out through systematic teaching of the logical framework embedded in these five principles:

• *Words' language of origin and history can explain their spelling*. English is a combination of several core languages, including Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, Latin, and Greek, each of which contributed its own words, sounds, and rules. This is why English has roughly twice the number of words as German, Spanish, and French, giving us a much richer vocabulary. The spelling of many words is related to their language of origin, and spelling instruction can help students understand families of words with common origins and patterns (for example, words with the same Latin root such as dictum, dictionary, edict, and indict).

• *Words' meaning and part of speech can determine their spelling*. English, where meaning trumps pronunciation, is more difficult than Spanish or Finnish, which pretty much stick to phonetic rules. But the good news is that if you know what to look for, you can find clues about an unknown word's meaning. For example, *incredulous* would be spelled *increjulous* in a phonetic language, but because the Latin root *cred* has been preserved, it's possible to figure out the meaning.

• *Speech sounds are spelled with single letters and/or combinations of up to four letters*. For example, the long /a/ sound can be spelled cradle, maybe, feign, and weigh. The basic problem is that the English language has only 26 letters to represent 40 phonemes (sounds) and more than 250 graphemes (ways to spell those sounds). Learning 250 graphemes may seem overwhelming – which is why teaching them in a systematic way over eight grades is the only way to go.

• *The spelling of a given sound can vary according to its position within a word.* As English evolved and was systematized, scribes and dictionary writers invented some of these

conventions. For example, the /ou/ sound can be spelled *ou* or *ow* depending on where it appears.

• *The spellings of some sounds are governed by established conventions of letter sequences and patterns*. For example, it was decided at some point that English words would not end with a *j* or *v* because these relatively new letters could be confused with *i* or *u*, from which they were derived. This led to the convention of adding an *e* to words that end with the /j/ or /v/ sound (for example, *have* and *nudge*).

Together, these five principles explain how English can be rich and varied and yet contain words spelled in regular and predictable ways. "Virtually every word's spelling," says Moats, "can be explained by its language of origin, meaning, and/or sound structure… The complexity of English gives us seemingly infinite choices among words when we're searching for the right way to express ourselves, and the language's regularity makes reading, speaking, and writing those words an achievable goal."

But learning these patterns is not a trivial enterprise, and it will not happen just by learning phonics and reading books (this was the theory espoused by the National Reading Panel's report in 2000). Moats says recent research indicates that without systematic instruction, spelling proficiency plummets from grades 1 - 4 while reading proficiency remains on track. So we cannot assume that progress in reading will lead to progress in spelling. She recommends the following grade-by-grade sequence, with 15-20 minutes of instruction each day or 30 minutes three times a week:

• Kindergarten – Phoneme awareness, letter names, and letter sounds

• Grade 1 – Anglo-Saxon regular consonant and vowel phoneme-grapheme correspondences

• Grades 1-3 – Irregular Anglo-Saxon words

• Grade 2 – More complex Anglo-Saxon spelling (e.g., spelling according to the position of a sound in a word, letter patterns/conventions, and most common inflectional endings)

• Grade 3 – Multi-syllable words, including Anglo-Saxon syllabication, compounds, schwa, and most common prefixes and suffixes

• Grade 4 – Latin-based prefixes, suffixes, and roots

• Grade 5-6 – More complex Latin-based forms

• Grade 6-7 – Greek combining forms

"While invented spelling helps young children learn more about phoneme-grapheme correspondences and frees them to focus on the ideas they want to write down," says Moats, "students should be expected to correct errors on words they have already studied, whether they do this through reference to a list, word wall, dictionary, or proofreading partner."

"How Spelling Supports Reading" by Louisa Moats in *American Educator*, Winter 2005/06 (Vol. 29, #4, p. 12-22, 42-43)
http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/winter05-06/Moats.pdf
Moats is the author of *Spellography* (Longmont, Colorado; Sopris West)

3. High-School Miscreants Working to Be "Students in Good Standing"

In this *Principal Leadership* article, New Jersey high-school principal Julia Davidow describes the Student in Good Standing Contract, a program her school developed to give students who have committed serious offenses an "opportunity for renewal." Here's how it works:

• When a student commits a violation of the discipline code at the suspension or expulsion level, he or she is offered a contract that outlines eight areas in which to demonstrate renewal.

• The contract requires the student to gather documentation and testimony in these areas:

- Evidence of good attendance, punctuality, and following school rules;
- Report cards and/or academic records from at least two teachers attesting to the student's willingness to study and learn;
- Testimonials from at least two teachers on good class participation;
- Two letters from teachers, along with discipline records, attesting to respectful conduct toward authority figures;
- Two letters from students testifying to respectful conduct to peers;
- A personal statement by the student on goals, intentions, and mission;
- Three hours of community service demonstrating respect for school rules and property;
- Documentation that the student contacted his or her student assistance counselor and, in the case of illegal substances, that the student actively participated in a program outlined by counselors. If the student got private counseling, the counselor has to supply documentation on treatment;

• If the student accepts the contract, it has to be signed by the student, the principal, a parent or guardian, and the student's guidance counselor, all of whom receive a copy.

• Once the contract is signed, the student has 21 calendar days to gather the items it stipulates, in preparation for a meeting of the Student in Good Standing review committee. The date of this presentation is in the contract.

• During the three-week period, the student is suspended from activities and athletics and cannot attend social or athletic events. The student attends classes and works to be accepted again as a student in good standing.

• The burden is on the student to secure all the items in the contract. This sends a strong message about responsibility and time management.

• The review committee hearing (to which the student is encouraged to bring an advocate, usually a parent, guardian, counselor, case manager, or student assistance counselor) happens after school. The committee consists of the principal and two other administrators.

• At the hearing, the student presents the portfolio of evidence, answers questions, allows the advocate to speak, and makes a summary statement. Committee members can ask questions, but not about the actual offense, which remains confidential.

• Afterwards, the committee deliberates and votes (each member has one vote) on whether the student is ready to become a Student in Good Standing or needs further interventions.

• The principal meets with the student after school the next day, explains the finding, and gives the student a formal letter.

• The contract and the committee's judgment becomes part of the student's disciplinary record. Some students have found this helpful in juvenile court to show evidence of positive behavior and work in school.

Over the past two years, the school has offered the contract to 50 students. Three quarters of them signed a contract, and 98% of those who did were successful. Davidow says that this process is highly effective, showing students how to "take ownership of their reputations and their lives." She feels strongly that zero tolerance discipline programs are too harsh and treat students as disposable. "Educators must remember that some students get lost during adolescence," she writes, "and can wind up continuing down a self-destructive path simply because they do not know how to change. Schools must find ways to support students' good choices and recognize students' positive assets. We have found that our SGS program builds character, supports personal and family values, nurtures the students' self-confidence, and helps students change their behavior, rather than simply punishing students for their poor choices."

"Getting a Second Chance" by Julia Davidow in *Principal Leadership*, January 2006 (High School Edition, Vol. 6, #5, p. 39-42), no e-link available

4. Using Literature to Teach Character Education in Middle School

In this article in the January issue of *Principal Leadership*, Florida middle-school principal Joseph Brown describes how his school used works of literature to implement the school district's mandate to teach character education. He won a $5,000 grant and worked with the school's literacy coach to select class sets of 15 books appropriate to different grades and reading levels. Brown decided to use the school's daily 30-minute homeroom block to implement the literature program. He launched it at a faculty meeting, but few teachers picked up on the idea.

Disappointed, Brown decided to model the idea in the eighth-grade homeroom he supervised. He suggested *Gifted Hands* by Ben Carson to students and was told that they had read the book the year before. So Brown suggested Carson's second book, *Think Big*, which is the story of how Carson made it from the slums of Detroit to director of Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Children's Center. Students took turns reading the book aloud and remained engaged for the whole of the first semester. One student pulled up her failing grades as a direct result, saying that "what Dr. Carson said makes sense. And if he can do it from where he came from, I can make it too."

Next the class read *The Code: Five Secrets of Success for Teenagers* by Mawi Asgedom, an immigrant from Ethiopia who was admitted to Harvard and graduated. Again,

students were intrigued and a failing student improved as a direct result of reading the book, focusing on his work and earning promotion at the end of the year. A seventh-grade homeroom read Carson's first book, *Gifted Hands,* and students were equally impressed. "He was the dumbest kid in class just like I was in fifth grade," wrote one student in a reflection paper. "And yet he made it." Another student wrote, "I learned that people may call you names and talk about you, but when it is time to get to work, then you're going to be the smart one and they are going to be the ones looking lost."

Brown acknowledges that his literature-based approach and choice of books are not the usual way of approaching character education but he believes it is successful at "people building" – helping students to look at life issues from a new perspective, go beyond their own experience, and learn from the wisdom of others. After his tentative start, Brown is now designating books for each grade level and working one-on-one with teachers to increase the number of homerooms implementing the program. [In an e-mail, Brown told me that this year, about 10 of 37 homeroom teachers are using the books as a vehicle for character education, and the program is also a component in the in-school suspension program.]

"Books at Work" by Joseph Brown in *Principal Leadership*, January 2006 (Vol. 6, #5, p. 39-42), no e-link available

5. Preventing and Breaking Up Fights

In this *Principal Leadership* article, two Missouri educators, Judy Brunner and Dennis Lewis, offer advice on preventing and breaking up student fights. They describe the reaction that most school administrators have when they hear that a fight is in progress: "The heart rate accelerates and adrenaline rushes through the body – and for good reason." Kids and staff members can get hurt, the climate of the school is often damaged, and staff members inevitably have to spend hours sorting out the facts and dealing with the aftermath.

Prevention is always better than reaction, say Brunner and Lewis, "and the single most effective deterrent is visible adult presence throughout the school building." They believe that suspensions alone are ineffective at preventing fights between students. "It will be what they have to do or are not able to participate in upon returning to school after the suspension that will have the greatest effect on reducing their willingness to engage in a fight," they say. Post-suspension consequences might include mandatory participation in a support group for anger management, exclusion from activity programs, or community service. All this needs to be spelled out in the student handbook.

Here are the authors' suggestions for what an administrator should do when a fight is reported:

• Bring at least one other staff member with you; it's difficult to handle many situations alone.

• Upon arriving at the scene, keep your emotions under control and work to keep your own stress level down.

• Delegate tasks to other adults on the scene, for example, dispersing bystanders and getting one of the combatants to an isolated location.

• Remove the audience by getting natural student leaders in the crowd to move on. Eliminating the crowd can take away a prime motivation for the fighters.

• "Remain at least an arm's length away from those involved in the fight unless getting closer is absolutely necessary to prevent serious injury," advise Brunner and Lewis.

• Pick the combatant with whom you have the most rapport, position yourself so you can make eye contact, and use a firm, commanding voice and clear, short sentences to get through the fog of war, for example, "Daniel Keeting, stop fighting now!" Students involved in a fight have selective hearing and vision, so you often have to take extra measures to be heard.

• If necessary, create a diversion (for example, slamming a book into a wall) to break the fighters' concentration and gain their attention. A loud, unexpected noise can break students' focus on the fight. Throwing water on them can also work.

• Once you have their attention, give specific verbal commands.

• Only as a last resort should you intervene physically, especially if you are the only adult present. Most staff injuries and assaults occur when the adult gets between the fighters. If you have to intervene, say Brunner and Lewis, push and shove rather than grab, and then back off quickly. "The shock of being pushed and shoved, along with the resulting loss of balance, may bring some reality back to one or both combatants," they say.

• Once the fighters have been separated, immediately order or escort them to a place where they cannot see and hear one another. There's a strong tendency for kids to continue to "mouth off" after a fight, and this can easily get the fight started again.

• After the fight has been dealt with, say Brunner and Lewis, "it is always a good idea to visit with other staff members who responded to the incident. This is an opportunity to discuss what worked and what did not. This information can be shared at the next faculty meeting so all staff members can learn from what a few experienced."

"School House Fights: Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" by Judy Brunner and Dennis Lewis in *Principal Leadership*, January 2006 (Vol. 6, #5, p. 65-6), no e-link available

6. Checking Out Your School's Parent-Friendliness

"Every time parents come into your school," writes Virginia-based parent advocate John Wherry in the new issue of *Principal* magazine, "they unconsciously filter tremendous amounts of information, drawing conclusions and making judgments." The Fairfax County schools in Virginia recently developed "The Welcoming Atmosphere Walk-Through" to help schools get a fix on how they appear to parents and others visiting for the first time. A 16-person team, made up of parents, community members, and school staff, divides into four teams, and each looks at different things:

• *The first team looks at the physical environment* – entrances, offices, hallways, cafeteria, gym, and other public spaces, looking for:

- Clear directions outside the school pointing to the main entrance

- A welcome sign on the door, written in appropriate languages
- Are visitors given a "Parent" or "Volunteer" badge (not "Visitor")?
- Is there a waiting area where visitors can sit and read available resources?

• *The second team looks at schoolwide practices and policies*, interviewing the principal to find out:

- Is there an orientation for new families?
- How does the school communicate with parents who don't speak English?
- How does the school communicate with non-custodial parents?

• *The third team talks with school staff.* As members tour the school, they ask themselves:

- Do office staff greet visitors quickly, and with a smile?
- Do all staff members smile at visitors in the hallways?
- What happens when a team member tries to walk through the school without a badge?

• *The fourth team reviews the school's written materials*, assessing how understandable and parent-friendly they are:

- Are educational acronyms explained?
- Would the printed materials be understood by someone new to the school?
- Is student work highlighted?

"Parents and Schools: Can Your School Pass the Parent 'Blink Test'?" by John Wherry in *Principal*, January/February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 6), no e-link available

7. Keys to High Staff Morale

In this article in the new *Principal*, ERS researcher Nancy Protheroe lists some of the ways principals can foster high staff morale:

• *Provide the basics* – Teachers need a safe environment, the materials and supplies required to teach the curriculum, and professional development opportunities, both on and off campus.

• *Listen to teachers* – Teachers need to feel that they have the ear of their administrators and can participate in important decisions. Teachers also appreciate administrators who balance mandates with a respect for teachers' professionalism and autonomy and keep "stressors" like extra duties and paperwork to a minimum.

• *Build a professional learning community* – "My darkest hours of teaching were when I had no one else to talk to about student achievement and effective instruction," wrote a veteran North Carolina teacher in a 2005 study. Teachers thrive in schools where they are not isolated and can work together with administrators and colleagues – where there is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff.

• *Support new teachers* – Novice teachers are especially vulnerable to low morale. They value being able to ask their principal questions and discuss concrete solutions to classroom

problems, being observed in the classroom and getting direct feedback and guidance, and getting support on disciplinary decisions.

• *Recognize effective performance* – Teachers appreciate a pat on the back for a job well done.

• *Collectively get results* – Perhaps the deepest kind of morale comes from significant gains in student achievement, and the key to that is discussing standards and sharing ideas and strategies.

"Maintaining High Teacher Morale" by Nancy Protheroe in *Principal*, January/February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 46-49), no e-link available

8. Arguments Against Student Uniforms

In this article in the new *Principal*, Missouri professor David Brunsma summarizes recent research on the efficacy of school uniforms. Two previous Marshall Memos (#70 and #84) have covered Brunsma's argument, but this article has some additional information. Here are the main points:

• There are now 15 times more schools with mandatory student uniform policies than there were in the 1980s.

• Uniforms started in elementary schools but are increasingly being mandated in middle and high schools.

• Uniforms are mandated mostly in schools and districts with disadvantaged and minority student populations.

• "The school uniform movement continues to be rooted in pure speculation," writes Brunsma, "without any scientific evidence to support anecdotal arguments for its effectiveness." He reports that a number of careful studies in the last ten years that controlled for other school variables have shown that uniforms have little or no impact on school climate, pro-school attitudes, preparedness, school unity, attendance, parent involvement, safety, or academic achievement.

• The most recent research, argues Brunsma, shows that uniforms can have a negative impact on schools' ability to educate, for example, by creating friction with parents when implementing a uniform policy and by stereotyping poor and minority children as uniform-wearers.

• "Instituting a uniform policy," concludes Brunsma, "can be viewed as analogous to cleaning and brightly painting a deteriorating building in that on the one hand it grabs our immediate attention; on the other hand, it's only a coat of paint." He argues that spending money and focusing attention on uniforms distracts parents, educators, and policy-makers from deeper reforms that need to be made if we are going to improve teaching and raise student achievement for all children.

"School Uniform Policies in Public Schools" by David Brunsma in *Principal*, January/February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 50-53), no e-link available

9. Short Items:

a. Fundraising reforms – Missouri principal Carrie Bachmeier was so frazzled by her elementary school's annual fundraisers that she decreed (a) all future contact with fundraiser sales representatives would be by e-mail, and (b) whatever the school sold would either showcase students or provide a legitimate service to the community. The school ended up selling trash bags – something that virtually every household needs – and made between $5,000 and $10,000. They also had a PTA-sponsored walk-a-thon with each student working to get five $5 pledges (for a potential $10,000).

"Frazzled by Fund-raisers?" by Carrie Bachmeier in *Principal*, January/February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 54), no e-link available

b. Food allergy information – Massachusetts is the first (and so far the only) state to develop and distribute a comprehensive document to guide educators in managing life-threatening food allergies in school. The document can be downloaded at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/news02/allergy.pdf

Spotted in *Principal*, January/February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 44-45)

c. Digital camera uses – Self-professed "digital camera junkie" Catherine Alifrangis touts a number of ways that principals can use a small digital camera, including photos of:

- New students and staff members for bulletin boards;
- Graffiti, school damage, and physical injury;
- School events for an end-of-the-year PowerPoint slide show for the whole school;
- A poorly-cleaned room as a point of discussion with the custodian;
- School events for newspapers, guests, volunteers, businesses, and the school's website;

"The Digital Camera: A Versatile Tool for Principals" by Catherine Alifrangis in *Principal*, January/ February, 2006 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 55), no e-link available

d. What works best to support new teachers – "Several key components help to overcome isolation and build collegiality at the start of a new teacher's career," writes Suzie Boss in this article in the January edition of *Principals' Research Review*. "The strongest factors for reducing attrition include having a mentor in the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject area, having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and being part of an external network of teachers. The weakest factors are a reduced teaching schedule, a reduced number of preparations, and extra classroom assistance."

"Effective Practices in New Teacher Induction" by Suzie Boss in *Principal's Research Review*, January 2006 (Vol. 1, #1, p. 2), no e-link available

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 43 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.

Website:

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

- 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)
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
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
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
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice

E-links will be provided whenever possible.