Marshall Memo 214

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 17, 2007

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Quotes of the Week

"Some staff members believed that no matter what they did, a certain percentage of students would choose to fail."

Enid Schonewise and Mark Weichel (see item #7)

"They keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks."

An Arizona study of effective schools, commenting on the principals (see item #8)

"I don't know how we all got this belief but we all seem to have it."

Michelle Trujillo, 4th-grade teacher in an effective Arizona school (*ibid.*)

"Perhaps conventional assessments met the cognitive demands placed on students 100 years ago. They do not meet the cognitive demands of the world today. Active and engaged citizens must be creatively flexible, responding to rapid changes in the environment; able to think critically about what they are told in the media, whether by newscasters, politicians, advertisers, or scientists; able to execute their ideas and persuade others of their value; and, most of all, able to use their knowledge wisely in ways that avoid the horrors of bad leadership…"

Robert Sternberg (see item #2)

"Just as regularly checking your blood pressure does little to improve your health if you do nothing with the information gained, what matters most with formative assessments is how students and teachers use the results."

Thomas Guskey (see item #4)

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1. An Idea That's Saved Thousands of Lives – and Could Help Schools

In this fascinating *New Yorker* article, surgeon/writer Atul Gawande describes how a simple innovation in the aviation industry before World War II – and in a few hospitals in the last few years – has saved thousands of lives. Here's the story.

In 1935, the most sophisticated bomber ever built, Boeing's Model 299, was up for approval, and it seemed like a no-brainer. But when the plane took off for its trial, it reached 300 feet, veered to one side, and crashed in flames, killing the pilot and most of the crew. An investigation found that the crash was caused by pilot error – there were simply too many tasks in this bomber for even a highly experienced flyer to manage, and he'd forgotten to release a new locking mechanism on the elevator and rudder controls. The consensus was that Boeing's monstrosity was "too much airplane for one man to fly." Another plane was chosen by the Army Air Corps, and Boeing nearly went bankrupt.

But that was not the end of Model 299. Engineers realized that it was indeed too complex for one man to fly – if he relied on his memory. But with a detailed checklist, he could fly the plane. Checklists were written, and using them, pilots flew this plane – which was dubbed the B-17, the Flying Fortress – 1.8 million miles without a single accident. The Army ultimately bought 13,000 of them, and they were a decisive factor in the Allied victory in World War II.

Medicine, says Gawande, has entered its B-17 phase. "Substantial parts of what hospitals do – most notably, intensive care – are now too complex for clinicians to carry them out reliably from memory alone. ICU (Intensive Care Unit) life support has become too much medicine for one person to fly." A decade ago, Israeli scientists found that in an ICU, the average patient requires 178 individual actions by nurses and doctors, ranging from administering a drug to suctioning the lungs, in a single day. Every one of those actions involves risks, and if they are not performed with near perfection, the patient will die. "Intensive-care medicine has become the art of managing extreme complexity," writes Gawande, "and a test of whether such complexity can, in fact, be humanly mastered.

In 2001, Peter Pronovost, a critical-care specialist at Johns Hopkins Hospital, decided to tackle this issue with the same approach that saved the B-17. He wrote a checklist for one ICU problem that kills hundreds of patients a year – infections in lines inserted into patients' bodies. Pronovost listed the steps necessary to prevent infections – doctors and nurses washing their hands with soap, cleaning the patient's skin with a certain antiseptic, putting sterile drapes over the entire patient, wearing a sterile mask, hat, gown, and gloves, and putting a sterile

dressing over the catheter site once the line was in. These steps had been known for years, and it seemed silly to make a checklist, but Pronovost asked the ICU nurses to observe doctors and prompt them if a step was missed. A few weeks later the nurses reported that in more than a third of patients, at least one step was missed.

Armed with this data, Pronovost got the hospital to run a trial, and the results were stunning. The ten-day line-infection rate went from 11% to zero. Over the next fifteen months, only two line infections occurred. In this one hospital, the checklists had prevented 43 infections and eight deaths – and saved $2,000,000 in costs. Pronovost recruited other doctors and did more trials, one in an inner-city hospital in Detroit. The results were similarly dramatic.

Why were the checklists so effective? They did two things. First they helped with memory recall, which is especially important when doctors and nurses are under stress. Second, they made explicit the minimum, expected steps in complex procedures. Surprisingly, not all doctors knew these steps, and the checklists kept everyone accountable.

Pronovost has been called brilliant, a genius. He's a highly qualified physician and researcher. "But really," wonders Gawande, "does it take all that to figure out what house movers, wedding planners, and tax accountants figured out ages ago?" And yet his idea, even backed up by dramatic results from several trials, was still resisted by some doctors. "Forget the paperwork. Take care of the patient," was a common reaction. Many doctors were caught up in a "Right Stuff" mentality similar to early test pilots and astronauts, with its central belief that "in situations of high risk and complexity what you want is a kind of expert audacity. Checklists and standard operating procedures feel like exactly the opposite."

But this is exactly what's necessary for the brilliant innovations of modern medicine to be executed on a day-to-day basis. And with support from hospital administrators, Pronovost's idea is slowly spreading, and has already saved more lives than all laboratory scientists in the past decade.

[This article has clear implications for educators. Our jobs have, in similar fashion, outgrown the era when we could wing it on talent and dedication, especially with our most high-risk students. But there's another message for us here. Gawande tells how modern medicine is saving increasing numbers of people who are carried into hospitals after being burned, crushed, shot, bombed, and with massive heart attacks, rampaging infections, burst blood vessels in their brains, ruptured colons, and more. By improving standard practice, doctors and nurses around the world are saving more and more lives that would have been lost just a few years ago. Medical folks don't complain about the problems their patients enter with. They work on solving them. This is, of course, the approach that the best educators have always taken with their students, no matter how desperate the disadvantages with which they enter schools. The challenge in the years ahead is taking the heroism of those pioneers and making it standard practice for all schools.]

"The Checklist" by Atul Gawande in *The New Yorker*, Dec. 10, 2007

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2. Tapping Into Students' Creativity, Practical Skills, and Wisdom

(Originally titled "Assessing What Matters")

In this important article in *Educational Leadership*, Tufts professor Robert Sternberg says that we need to teach and assess students' analytical skills, creativity, practical skills, and wisdom (he defines wisdom as being able to use academic and practical intelligence, as well as creativity and knowledge, for a common good). Here are some examples of classroom questions in these four areas:

<u>Social Studies – Understanding the American Civil War:</u>

- Analytical: Compare and contrast the Civil War and the American Revolution.
- Creativity: What might the U.S. be like today if the Civil War had not been fought?
- Practical: How has the Civil War affected the kinds of rights that people have today?
- Wisdom: Are wars ever justified?

<u>English – Understanding *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*:</u>

- Analytical: How was Tom's childhood similar to and different from your own?
- Creativity: Write an alternative ending to the story.
- Practical: What techniques did Tom Sawyer use to persuade his friends to whitewash Aunt Polly's fence?
- Wisdom: Is it ever justified to use such techniques of persuasion to make people do things they do not really want to do?

<u>Science – Understanding Climate Change:</u>

- Analytical: What is the evidence suggesting that global warming is taking place?
- Creativity: What do you think the world will be like in 200 years if global warming continues at its present rate?
- Practical: What can you, personally, do to help slow down global warming?
- Wisdom: What responsibility do we have, if any, to future generations to act on global warming now before it gets much worse?

This broader kind of learning, says Sternberg, is the best preparation for higher education and life. What's more, it produces higher scores on tests, even low-level tests of memory.

Sternberg and his colleagues were troubled by the way standardized tests focused only on memory and analytical thinking. They decided to create a new assessment that included creative and practical thinking, calling it the Rainbow Project. They tested 1,013 high-school students and college freshmen using a mixture of analytical, creative, and practical questions (an example of a practical question: view a video of a group of friends trying to figure out how to move a large bed up a winding staircase and suggest solutions). This study produced three findings:

- Some students do well on multiple-choice tests and others don't do so well. "This result suggested that using multiple-choice tests consistently tends to benefit some students and not others," writes Sternberg.
- Rainbow tests predicted students' success in their freshman year in college with twice the accuracy of SAT scores.

- Rainbow tests significantly reduced ethnic group differences by more accurately identifying talented minority-group students who would do well in college. "Different groups excel in different ways," says Sternberg. "Giving them a chance to show how they excel enables them to show that they can succeed."

After this study, Sternberg persuaded Tufts, where he is a dean, to try using broader assessments as part of their college application process. The researchers added a fourth dimension to the Rainbow tests – wisdom. A question in this category: How would you apply a passion you have toward the common good? After one year of implementation, the project had the following results:

- The number of applicants to Tufts increased slightly (there had been concern that the new application process would scare off students).
- The quality of applicants rose significantly.
- The number of minority applicants increased substantially, and Tufts ended up admitting 30 percent more African-American and 15 percent more Hispanic students.

Sternberg and his colleagues are taking their ideas on the road, and have already helped redesign the admission process for a well-known private school and a large business school, with similar results.

Sternberg concedes that his assessments aren't the only way to measure broader skills, that they don't measure teamwork, that they aren't ready for larger-scale implementation, and that they are more expensive and time-consuming to administer than conventional tests. But he believes they are the wave of the future. "Perhaps conventional assessments met the cognitive demands placed on students 100 years ago," Sternberg concludes. "They do not meet the cognitive demands of the world today. Active and engaged citizens must be creatively flexible, responding to rapid changes in the environment; able to think critically about what they are told in the media, whether by newscasters, politicians, advertisers, or scientists; able to execute their ideas and persuade others of their value; and, most of all, able to use their knowledge wisely in ways that avoid the horrors of bad leadership…"

"Assessing What Matters" by Robert Sternberg in *Educational Leadership*, December 2007 (Vol. 65, #4, p. 20-26), http://www.ascd.org/el; Sternberg can be reached at Robert.Sternberg@tufts.edu.

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3. Orchestrating Experiences and Class Discussions That Get at Big Ideas

In this *Kappan* article, Simon Fraser University professor Selma Wassermann describes how a Canadian high school tried to teach about the famine in Darfur: students who volunteered spent from the middle of a Friday afternoon until noon the next day in the school's gymnasium – with water but no food. Wasserman believes this activity, while it was well-intentioned, trivialized famine. Students treated it as an adventure, bringing sleeping bags, toothbrushes, cell phones, iPods, and CD players. "To raise levels of awareness through experience is surely a good thing in teaching," she writes, "but not every contrived experience

teaches what we intend… Surely there were better ways to create teaching/learning experiences that would deepen students' understanding about events that were too large in scope to comprehend through reading textbook chapters."

What's really sad, Wassermann says, "is the distinct possibility that students coming from a 21-hour fast would believe that they had, in fact, experienced what a famine is like, that they had a shared experience with the Sudanese."

The problem, Wassermann argues, is that this was a superficial *activity*, not a real *experience*. "Experiences can never be had at arm's length," she writes. "They must be lived, and they must evoke a strong emotional response. And to derive meaning from experience requires us to reflect on experience, to reach for important understandings and meanings, to bring ourselves to new awareness, to sift through data and examine assumptions, and to build new concepts… When our thinking and our behavior have been changed, we can say that we have had an experience."

But how can students experience the Darfur tragedy without suffering *real* hunger themselves? "How do we strike a balance between a representative experience and placing students in harm's way?" asks Wasserman.

The starting point is for teachers to define the *big idea* they want students to understand. "When the big idea is made explicit," she writes, "it serves as a road map for developing the curriculum plan, as well as for directing the reflection on experience that must follow." It aligns the teaching with the goal. "While this may seem patently obvious," she continues, "it is rare that teachers do, in fact, sit down first to identify the 'big idea' behind a planned curriculum experience. She believes that the teachers at this high school had *little* ideas for the famine activity: To have students appreciate that they lived in Canada, and to learn how it feels when your country has a famine.

Wasserman suggests that a better experience to help students understand famine would be a vicarious experience – watching a powerful documentary film such as *All About Darfur* – keyed to two big ideas:

- A famine is a social and economic crisis that is commonly accompanied by widespread malnutrition, starvation, epidemic, and increased mortality.
- Although many famines stem from national or regional shortages of food, famine can also occur amid plenty because of economic or military policies, warfare, or terrorism.

With these ideas clearly in mind, the film would be followed by carefully planned questions framed in the following categories (drawn from the work of Harvard Business School professor Roland Christensen, who was known as the "father of discussion teaching"):

• Data-gathering – What did you observe? What did you see and what did you assume? What were your assumptions and value judgments? How would you summarize the important ideas of the film? What did you notice about the important characters?

• Analysis of data – Support your answers with data. What hypotheses do you have about how this situation came to be? What are the health consequences of systematic and enduring starvation?

• Evaluation – What are your opinions about Darfur? What are your criteria to support your judgments?

• Value positions – Where do you stand on what you saw? What is the role of other nations in providing assistance to the Sudanese? What is the role of the Sudanese government?

• Action – What could you and others do to support your positions? Which plan is promising and viable? What are its possible consequences?

Wasserman has these suggested guidelines for leading a high-quality follow-up discussion:

- Prepare your list of questions in advance. Christensen spent hours preparing questions for each of his classes, using the sequence above.
- Ensure that the questions flow from the big ideas and have a purpose.
- Work to create a climate where students feel safe offering their ideas, meanings are explored, students think about issues, and understandings grow.
- During the discussion, listen to and be clear about what the student is saying in response to your question.
- Avoid saying "good idea" or even "that's interesting," as these judgments from the teacher have a way of shutting down students' responses.
- "Play back" the student's idea in a new way, adding elements that he or she has not considered.
- Take the student's response a step further by asking for supporting data, examples, or a comparison to a related incident.
- Try to spend the right amount of time on each student. "Too much time with one student may mean keeping that student on the 'hot seat' for too long and could cause others to feel left out," says Wassermann. "Too little time doesn't give the teacher a chance to work with the ideas."
- Frame questions and responses so that they are always respectful and non-threatening, but know the right time to challenge a student's thinking.
- Know when to shift gears and move to the next question.

[Note that the section of this article on big ideas and guiding questions closely parallels the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (*Understanding by Design*), although they are not acknowledged.]

"Let's Have a Famine! Connecting Means and Ends in Teaching to Big Ideas" by Selma Wassermann in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2007 (Vol. 89, #4, p. 290-297), no e-link available

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4. Thomas Guskey on Effectively Following Up on Formative Assessments

(Originally titled "The Rest of the Story")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Georgetown College (KY) professor Thomas Guskey says that follow-up is essential to the effectiveness of during-the-year assessments. "Just as regularly checking your blood pressure does little to improve your health if you do

nothing with the information gained," he writes, "what matters most with formative assessments is how students and teachers use the results." Guskey cites Benjamin Bloom's research on mastery learning, which showed that "correctives" after mid-course assessments narrowed the achievement gap.

Where do teachers get the best ideas for correctives? From fellow teachers. "Teaching colleagues often can offer new ways of presenting concepts, different examples, and alternative materials," says Guskey. "Professional development opportunities that provide teachers with time for such sharing reduce the workload of individual teachers and typically yield higher-quality activities."

Here is Guskey's comprehensive list of possibilities for correctives, with comments and caveats:

• Reteaching – but not just slower and louder! It's important that teachers use different formats, learning modalities, and materials. And it's essential for students to experience success. "Corrective experiences should make students better prepared, more confident, and more motivated for future learning tasks," says Guskey.

• Individual tutoring – In this format, it's easy to check for understanding.

• Peer tutoring – Students who have successfully mastered a concept are often the best teachers of struggling classmates.

• Cooperative teams – eterogeneous groups of 3-5 students can discuss what they got wrong on a test and help each other improve.

• Using textbooks – Sometimes re-reading a textbook passage and writing a short paragraph about it can be helpful. Old textbooks are also a good resource.

• Alternative materials – These can include audiotapes, videotapes, DVDs, workbooks, hands-on materials, manipulatives, and Internet and computer resources.

• Academic games – These might include cooperative group games that get at curriculum objectives from a different angle.

• Learning centers and laboratories – Center activities can engage students in hands-on tasks and assignments.

What about students who master the concept the first time around and might spin their wheels? Enrichment is the best answer, says Guskey – but it must be "valuable, challenging, and rewarding" – not just harder tasks and busywork. Choice is important, as is the opportunity for creativity. Fortunately, there are lots of published materials in this area.

Guskey acknowledges that corrective and enrichment activities do add time to curriculum units – initially. But he says that as students become more proficient, as more students learn how to work independently, and as more students can do their corrective work outside of class, correctives end up saving time. There is no need to sacrifice content coverage.

"The Rest of the Story" by Thomas Guskey in *Educational Leadership*, December 2007 (Vol. 65, #4, p. 28-35), http://www.ascd.org/el; Guskey can be reached at Guskey@georgetowncollege.edu. See Marshall Memo 105, #1 for another article by Guskey on Benjamin Bloom's mastery learning.

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5. Getting Students Involved in Formative Assessments

(Originally titled "The Best Value in Formative Assessment")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Stephen Chappuis and Jan Chappuis of the ETS Assessment Training Institute point out the shortcomings of summative assessments (last year's data, not always relevant to this year's students) and interim/benchmark assessments ("often little more than a series of mini-summative tests, not always tightly aligned to what was taught in the classroom"). They go on to make the case for formative, during-instruction assessments, whose greatest value, they say, "lies in teachers and students making use of results to improve real-time teaching and learning at every turn… Teachers can adapt instruction on the basis of evidence, making changes and improvements that will yield immediate benefits to student learning. Students can use evidence of their current progress to actively manage and adjust their own learning."

Getting students involved in the assessment process is golden, say Chappuis and Chappuis. Ideally, students are able to answer three questions:

• *Where am I going?* Students need lists of learning outcomes in student-friendly language and exemplars of strong and weak performance, accompanied by scoring guides.

• *Where am I now?* Students need feedback on their learning from non-graded quizzes, rubric scores, self-assessments, and checklists of learning objectives.

• *How can I close the gap?* Teachers can help students use formative assessment data to set goals, graph their progress, and reflect on what they need to reach their goals, answering questions like: *What changes have I noticed? What is easy that used to be hard? What insights into myself as a learner do I have?*

"Feedback in an assessment *for* learning context," write the authors, "occurs while there is still time to take action. It functions as a global positioning system, offering descriptive information about the work, product, or performance relative to the intended learning goals. It avoids marks or comments that judge the level of achievement or imply that the learning journey is over." Here are some examples of this kind of helpful, non-summative feedback:

- You have interpreted the bars on this graph correctly, but you need to make sure the marks on the *x* and *y* axes are placed at equal intervals.
- What you have written is a hypothesis because it is a proposed explanation. You can improve it by writing it as an "if… then…" statement.
- The good stories we have been reading have a beginning, a middle, and an end. I see that your story has a beginning and a middle, just like those good stories do. Can you write an ending?

"The Best Value in Formative Assessment" by Stephen Chappuis and Jan Chappuis in *Educational Leadership*, December 2007 (Vol. 65, #4, p. 14-18), http://www.ascd.org/el

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6. A South Carolina High School Gets Students Reading Over the Summer

In this *Principal Leadership* article, South Carolina educators Julie McGaha and Rodney Graves describe how Spartanburg High School (where Graves is principal) got students reading over the summer. This urban school (1,600 students in grades 10-12, 57% qualifying for free and reduced-price meals) decided that the key was picking the right books and getting the whole community involved in a shared experience. After much deliberation, staff members chose the following books for summer reading:

- *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers
- *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers
- *The Schooling of Claybird Catts* by Janis Owens
- *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien
- *Seven Laurels* by Linda Busby Parker

Students were allowed to choose any book, with the last two on the list targeted for seniors. So that family circumstances wouldn't prevent any student from taking part, the school used state funds to make the books available to all students.

As Spartanburg staff planned the program, the main worry was that students would goof off and not read over the summer. How could the school encourage reading and maintain a level of accountability without making the program seem punitive? Teachers decided that there would be no penalties, only positive incentives: students who read, participated in a class discussion, and completed a project based on their book would get a certificate worth four extra-credit points for use in any class during the first marking period of the upcoming year. Teachers suggested a wide variety of projects, from traditional book reports to unconventional projects – for example, students who read *Seven Laurels* could assemble primary-source photographs of the Civil Rights Movement.

As teachers gave out books in the last week of school, they were pleasantly surprised by the reaction. Students snapped up the books, many asking for more than one, and immediately began reading and talking about their books at lunch, in class, and in the hallways (some had to be told to put them away and study for final exams). One student refused to take part in the program, and a teacher gave him a book anyway; a few days later the student said he was almost finished and "This *Monster* book is pretty good." When summer began, no summer reading books were left behind in lockers and hallways – they'd all been taken home.

The school hosted several meetings to tell parents and local civic and religious groups about the program, and the response was encouraging. A parent invited two of the authors to speak over the summer, the newspaper ran several stories, a popular restaurant publicized the program, and the Sheriff's Department sponsored a career day for students who read *Monster*, including a tour of the local jail and conversations with law enforcement officers.

When students returned in the fall, it was clear that the program had succeeded way beyond expectations. Ninety percent of students read at least one book, and teachers heard these reactions:

- Reading and discussing books made the summer more purposeful and interesting.

- The program provided high-quality, relevant books (free!) that students would not otherwise have read.
- A number of parents read the books with their children.

Early in the fall, students took part in Literacy Day, starting with an assembly in which the mayor presented two of the authors, Linda Busby Parker and Janis Owens, with keys to the city and students listened to them speak about their books and their careers as writers. Students then broke into small discussion groups led by teachers and community members to talk about their books in depth.

Reflecting on the first year of the program, Spartanburg staff celebrated their success and laid plans for the next summer. The only serious criticism was that all the main characters in the first year's books were male; clearly there needed to be books with strong female characters. Each department made suggestions and choices were narrowed down by department heads, student council leaders, and the school improvement council. Here's the list for the summer of 2008:

- *The Bridge* by Doug Marlette
- *The World Made Straight* by Ron Rash
- *The Pact* by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, Rameck Hunt, and Lisa Page
- *The Water is Wide* by Pat Conroy
- *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd
- *Into Thin Air* by John Krakauer
- *The Seven Habits of Effective Teens* by Sean Covey

"Summer Reading: A Different Approach" by Julie McGaha and Rodney Graves in *Principal Leadership*, December 2007 (Vol. 8, #4, p. 6-8), no e-link available; McGaha can be reached at mcgaha@clemson.edu and Graves at rdgraves@spart7.org.

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7. A Nebraska High School Refuses to Let Students Fail

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Nebraska administrators Enid Schonewise and Mark Weichel describe the steps their 1,500-student suburban high school took to address the perennial challenge of students who weren't turning in work, didn't seem to care, and were willing to accept a zero for incomplete work. Although the school's test scores were above the state average, the plight of these students was troubling – as was the fatalism of part of the faculty. "Some staff members believed that no matter what they did, a certain percentage of students would choose to fail," write Schonewise and Weichel.

Influenced by the work of Richard DuFour and his colleagues (especially their 2004 book, *Whatever It Takes*), the school created The Titan Pyramid, a set of interventions to ensure that all students were "maximizing their high-school experience." The Pyramid has three components – Academic, Incentive, and Character – the first of which this article describes. After one year of implementation, the Pyramid showed remarkable results. Failure rates declined and GPAs and the number of students on the honor roll increased. The failure

rate of students with IEPs dropped from 9% to 1.5%. Surveys showed that students and parents took note of the school's higher expectations. Here are the program's main components:

• *Accountability for homework* – The basic idea was that students didn't have a choice about doing homework; they had to do it! Teachers spent time discussing how to make assignments appropriate and relevant for all students, and established a policy of giving credit for late homework, with each department shaping its own guidelines. The school then set up an accountability structure: If a student didn't turn in homework, teachers tried their own interventions first, and if the student still didn't complete the assignment, he or she was sent to an administrative office to receive an Academic Study Time assignment. This was a mandatory 30-minute quiet study time, at 7:15 a.m. or 4:00 p.m., supervised by a paraprofessional, that had be served within 24 hours. To deal with the problem of students "forgetting" their work, the school used a secretary and student runners to have the work waiting when the student arrived at the Academic Study Time room.

If a student didn't attend the Academic Study Time within 24 hours, he or she was assigned to either Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday School. In the past, Saturday School (8:00-10:00 a.m.) had been a consequence for discipline problems, and there were always students who said it conflicted with jobs and other weekend activities. So the school added Tuesday and Thursday evenings (7:00-9:00 p.m.) as another option, each staffed at a cost of about $42, totaling $4,500 for a year.

• *Support for Continual Difficulties* – This tier was for students who were in danger of failing courses. Each week, the school ran a "credit check" to see which students were struggling in courses. As soon as a student was on the credit-check list, he or she had fewer freedoms throughout the building and received extra support in Academic Study Time and/or Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday School. Students who were on the credit-check list for multiple weeks or who were failing several classes received special attention from counselors, following a four-step process:

- The counselor met with the student and developed an improvement plan, which was passed along to the student's teachers. The counselor checked in regularly with teachers to see how the plan was progressing.
- The counselor gathered information from the student's teachers and parents and worked with an administrator to formulate an intervention.
- The counselor met with the student, his or her teachers, the administrator, and parents.
- The counselor created follow-up plans for weekly monitoring.

In some cases, two weeks of extra help were enough to get the student back on track. In more serious cases, a Student Assistance Team meeting was needed, involving the parents. Counselors could also refer students to two additional options:

- After School/Homework Opportunity Club – An academic study hall held Monday through Thursday, 3:30-4:30 p.m., for students to complete missing work, get extra academic support, and take assessments. The school paid three teachers for one hour of work four days a week, so the program cost about $252 a week or $9,000 a year.

- Success Study Hall – Counselors or administrators might reassign a student from regular study hall to Success Study Hall if the student had an academic concern. A teacher and high-achieving peer tutors were there to help struggling students. Teachers were made available through administrative juggling of supervisory duties.

"Pyramid of Interventions: A Progression of Academic Support" by Enid Schonewise and Mark Weichel in *Principal Leadership* (High School Edition), December 2007 (Vol. 8, #4, p. 29), no e-link available

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8. Arizona Schools That Are Effective for Latino Students

In this sidebar in *The Learning Principal*, Joan Richardson summarizes the findings of an Arizona study of schools in which Latino students do especially well: *Beat the Odds – Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds and Others Don't*. Researchers found that the schools shared these characteristics:

• A clear bottom line – Emphasizing the achievement of all children and taking responsibility for making it happen.

• A strong, steady principal – Managing the school improvement process by "being neither too rigid nor too flexible… They keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks."

• Collaborative solutions – Creating effective work teams and engaging in real teamwork, with the responsibility for school improvement distributed among teachers and staff.

• Ongoing assessment – Monitoring state test data and using the results of monthly, weekly, and daily assessments to improve teaching and help struggling students.

• Virtuous cycle – Engaging in a "vital cycle of instruction, assessments, and intervention, followed by more instruction, assessments, and intervention." Over time, this creates an educational program tailored to each student.

• Sticking with the program – Picking a proven curriculum program that teachers can embrace and sticking with it over time.

"Beat the Odds" by Joan Richardson in *The Learning Principal*, December/January 2008 (Vol. 3, #4, p. 7); the full study is available at:
http://www.beattheoddsinstitute.org/pdf/FAZ502_LatinEd_final.pdf

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9. Lessons from the Jena, Louisiana Noose Incident

In this *Teaching Tolerance* article, editor Jennifer Holladay offers advice to schools in the wake of the Jena crisis:

• *Don't ignore obvious signs of trouble*. The Jena High School incident began when an African-American student asked the principal whether he and his friends could sit under a tree in the school's courtyard. The tree was known as the "White Tree" because white students congregated in its shadow. The principal said that black students could sit wherever they

wanted, which seemed like a reasonable, even courageous thing to say. But it overlooked the core issue: Why did black students feel they needed to ask for permission?

• *Examine your school's climate*. Most teachers and administrators believe their school is free of racial or ethnic tensions, but a recent survey found that lots of students feel otherwise. One in four reported being victimized in racial or ethnic incidents and other forms of fear-producing behavior were common: 70 percent of female students said they had been sexually harassed at school and 75 percent of gay students reported hearing anti-gay slurs frequently, with a third saying they had been physically harassed.

• *Take bias incidents seriously*. After black Jena High students sat under the tree and white students hung nooses from its branches, the superintendent said, "Adolescents play pranks. I don't think it was a threat against anybody." Black students and their families saw the nooses differently; one mother said the act "meant the KKK, it meant…'We're going to kill you.'"

• *Provide forums for meaningful discussion*. In Jena, the initial response was to threaten students with disciplinary action ("I can end your life with one stroke of my pen," said the district attorney in a schoolwide assembly), and black parents were allowed to speak only briefly at school board meetings, which quickly moved on to other business. "When bias incidents occur, schools must open lines of communication, not shut down debate," writes Holladay. "In highly charged bias incidents, schools should hold forums for educators, students, parents, and community members and issue regular updates about the incident, describing what happened, why the incident was unacceptable, and how the school has responded. Schools should invite comments from attendees and seek their input about ways to work together to resolve underlying problems."

• *Use bias incidents as teachable moments*. Classroom discussions are a good forum, and giving students a chance to write about an incident is a smart strategy, says Holladay.

• *Bridge divisions in the school and community*. "Organize schoolwide events to help students get to know one another and learn about respectful behavior," concludes Holladay.

"Six Lessons From Jena" by Jennifer Holladay in *Teaching Tolerance*, September 27, 2007; for the complete article and information on reprints, see http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=867
Spotted in *Education Digest*, December 2007 (Vol. 73, #4, p. 19-20).

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10. Short Item:

After-school tool kit **–** The National Partnership for Quality After School Learning has created a toolkit to help build fun, innovative, and academically enriching activities after school. Check it out at http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits.

"Free After-School Tool Kit" by Danette Parsley and Sarah LaBounty in *Principal Leadership*, December 2007 (Vol. 8, #4, p. 30)

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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 effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

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- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Atlantic Monthly
Catalyst Chicago
Chronicle of Higher Education
CommonWealth Magazine
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
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Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
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Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
TESOL Quarterly
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