

Marshall Memo 92

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 20, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

"Western society has created a waiting room for young people called 'adolescence,' which is a purgatory between childhood and adulthood, and high schools are where we put them until they ripen."

Paul Houston in "Intelligent Redesign," *Education Week* (Vol. 24, #40, p. 40)

"All pupils need texts of an appropriate level of complexity in their hands all day long... Because children differ, no single text nor any single task can be appropriate for all children in a classroom – much less a grade level."

Richard Allington (see item #1)

"One of the greatest barriers to learning and working effectively with conflicts is believing that one must speak with certainty."

Robert Garmston (see item #2)

"If we train our teachers to become really good at assessment, we nurture them and nourish the environment of our schools. But if we don't do this and instead task someone else with the project, we miss the opportunity to grow and develop as a community."

Peter Campbell, New Jersey educator (see item #3)

"One of life's tough lessons is trying hard and failing. It does no kid anywhere any good to give grades based on trying hard or behaving nicely because sooner or later they hit the wall of not having the knowledge the grade implied."

Karen Gruner, Maryland high-school teacher (see item #4)

"Earning money to gratify immediate needs such as going on outings, to support bad habits such as tobacco or alcohol use, or even to contribute toward rent apparently has negative effects on many high school and postsecondary outcomes."

Herbert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman (see item #7)

1. Richard Allington on Five Essential Reading Activities

In his first “President’s Message” as head of the International Reading Association, Tennessee education professor Richard Allington says that he has no quarrel with the five key reading areas in the National Reading Panel (NRP) report:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

However, Allington believes that the NRP, because of insufficient time and funding, missed five other areas that are equally important to student achievement. He compares reading instruction without these additional topics to a beach house with half the number of pilings needed to stand over time: “I don’t think any reading program design that ignores or underemphasizes any of the 10 pillars can be expected to develop the reading proficiencies of all students, especially the reading of struggling readers.”

Here is Allington’s list of the missing areas of effective, evidence-based reading instruction.

- *Classroom organization* – To develop as readers, children need a balance of whole-class, small-group, and side-by-side lessons every day. “If there is anything less scientific than a one-size-fits-all curriculum, I’m not sure what it might be,” says Allington.

- *Matching pupils and texts* – “All pupils need texts of an appropriate level of complexity in their hands all day long,” he writes. “Because children differ, no single text nor any single task can be appropriate for all children in a classroom – much less a grade level.” Allington believes that this is especially true for students whose development lags behind their peers.

- *Access to interesting texts, choice, and collaboration* – Recent research has shown that the impact of giving students the chance to read a variety of interesting material, giving them choice in what they read, and fostering reading collaboration among

children have an even greater impact on reading achievement than systematic phonics instruction.

- *Writing and reading* – There is strong research evidence on the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing: composing can enhance comprehension, spelling can facilitate decoding, and so on.

- *Expert tutoring* – “Struggling readers benefit enormously from access to tutoring,” says Allington. In fact, it is one of only two research findings that have been included so far on the U.S. Department of Education’s list of “Gold Standard” findings (<http://www.ed.gov>). A recent meta-analysis of Reading Recovery, an expert tutoring intervention, showed strikingly positive effects on reading achievement.

“The Other Five ‘Pillars’ of Effective Reading Instruction” by Richard Allington in *Reading Today*, June/July 2005 (Vol. 22, #6, p. 3), no e-link available

2. Cognitive Conflict (Good) Versus Affective Conflict (Bad)

In this thoughtful piece in *Journal of Staff Development*, California professor / consultant Robert Garmston says that conflict is inevitable in schools, but it’s important to distinguish between *affective* and *cognitive* conflict.

- ***Affective conflict:***

- Person-to-person or group-to-group antagonism;
- Personalized anger or resentment directed at people or groups, not ideas;
- Saps energy, decreases empathy;
- Sidetracks tasks, blocks work, reduces progress;
- Fosters hostility, distrust, cynicism, avoidance, and apathy among members;
- Leads to poorer decisions, decreased commitment, and decreased cohesiveness.

- ***Cognitive conflict:***

- Disagreement about ideas, issues, and approaches, not personalities;
- Team members examine, compare, and reconcile their differences;
- A natural part of a properly-functioning team;
- Focuses attention on assumptions that may underlie a particular issue;
- Improves faculty effectiveness.

In his consulting work, Garmston has identified three resources that are important to spending more time on cognitive conflict and staying away from affective conflict:

A. Group member skills – These include:

- *Sending skills* – Stating the intention of communications; revealing all the relevant information; providing facts, ideas, opinions, suggestions; announcing modifications in one's views; using proper voice; owning ideas ("I feel," not "they say"); and making clear statements of advocacy.
- *Receiving skills* – Checking for understanding by paraphrasing, pausing, inquiring, and probing for specificity.
- *Paying attention to oneself and others* – Being aware of one's own thoughts and feelings; staying alert to others' voice patterns, nonverbal communications, and use of space; maintaining consciousness about the group's task and mood.

B. Meeting protocols – "Without protocols," says Garmston, "groups tend to either avoid hard-to-talk-about topics or do so in ways that evoke affective conflict... Members need a sense of safety to risk putting ideas on the table and to participate." Group leaders have to choose strategies at the right point on a continuum from loose to tight depending on the group's skills, members' emotional intensity, and the complexity of the issue they are grappling with. Some norms and protocols:

- Members feel safe from verbal attack.
- They have a sense that their contributions will be recognized and understood (while not necessarily agreed with).
- Members are not publicly embarrassed.
- Members don't fear retribution.
- There is time to reflect before talking.
- Meetings are not dominated by a few highly verbal members.
- Members don't have to be totally confident about what they say ("One of the greatest barriers to learning and working effectively with conflicts," says Garmston, "is believing that one must speak with certainty.")
- *First word/last word* – In this protocol, group members highlight a passage from a relevant text that has special meaning for them, others in the group comment on the item without cross-talk, and then the member who highlighted it shares his or her thinking about it. This is then repeated for each member.
- *Assumptions wall* – Members list their assumptions on the topic that's up for discussion. They then choose the assumption that most drives their thinking on the topic, write it on a sentence strip in 8-12 words, and post it on the

wall. Others inquire about assumptions in round-robin fashion, using queries like: “I’m curious about what makes this assumption important to you” or “Help me understand the values you feel this assumptions represents” or “Can you help me understand your thinking by sharing what data you are basing this on?” The facilitator guides and intervenes if necessary to keep the tone about discovery, not challenge.

C. Processing time – There needs to be a proper allocation of “gum” and “chewing”, i.e., the content of the meeting versus the ways in which participants can reflect, hear others, state thoughts and opinions, and generate and test ideas. “As a rule of thumb,” says Garmston, “the more emotion involved, the greater the complexity, and the larger the ideological challenges, the more process time is required.”

“How to Turn Conflict Into an Effective Learning Process” by Robert Garmston in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2005 (Vol. 26, #3, p. 65-6649), no e-link available

3. What’s Best for Interim Assessments: Outsourced or In-system?

In this thoughtful letter to *Education Week*, New Jersey educator Peter Campbell expresses great skepticism about his school district’s enthusiastic embrace of a commercial interim testing service, Tungsten Learning. (“I’m somewhere between worried and sick to my stomach,” he writes.) Tungsten’s web-based diagnostic tests (which are similar to those available from Harcourt Assessment Inc. and McGraw-Hill Digital Learning) consist of a series of multiple-choice questions designed to help students practice for state standardized tests and provide teachers with computerized feedback on how students are doing.

What’s the problem with this approach? Campbell believes that having external vendors handle interim assessments, while attractive on the short run, has significant long-term disadvantages. Here’s his balance sheet:

- **External testing vendors** – The district outsources the development and scoring of tests to companies like Tungsten.

Advantages:

- The district gets interim assessments rolling right away.
- Teachers don’t have to score the tests; they receive computerized reports.

Disadvantages:

- Computer-scored interim assessments contain only multiple-choice items.

- There will be a continual outflow of funds to maintain the services and tools.
- Prices are likely to go up each time the contract is renewed.
- Teachers reach a plateau in what they get from the services; they learn as much as they can learn and don't progress further.

• *Internal test development and training* – The district trains its teachers on “assessment literacy” and develops interim assessments in-house.

Advantages:

- Teachers can create formative assessments geared to their specific classroom needs.
- Classroom assessments include writing and open-ended responses as well as multiple-choice questions.
- As teachers become more assessment literate, they become better teachers; assessment is closely linked to what and how they teach.
- The initial investment in teacher training and development of interim assessments continues to pay off over time as teachers share ideas and put them to work in classrooms.
- The cost of ongoing teacher training will be lower than contracted services over time.

Disadvantages:

- It will be 2-5 years before interim assessments are fully operational.

Campbell clearly favors the second option. He concludes, “If we train our teachers to become really good at assessment, we nurture them and nourish the environment of our schools. But if we don't do this and instead task someone else with the project, we miss the opportunity to grow and develop as a community.”

“Districts’ Two Options for ‘Assessment Literacy’”, a letter from Peter Campbell, Lead Instructional Designer, Montclair State University, New Jersey to *Education Week*, June 15, 2005 (Vol. 24, #40, p. 33, 34)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/15/40letter-5.h24.html>

4. Should Effort Be Factored Into High-School Students’ Grades?

This *Washington Post* article by Jay Matthews looks at the perennial question of whether effort should be a factor in high-school students’ grades. For example, if a student has good attendance, does all the homework, listens in class, tries hard – but scores D on tests – should the grade be pulled up to a C? Many teachers want the freedom to include effort in their grades as a motivational tool, but others feel that

grades should measure only academic performance. The problem is that in many schools, guidelines on grading are vague, nonexistent, or ignored – which means that the true meaning of grades varies wildly from classroom to classroom and school to school.

Brad Hopewell, a social studies teacher in Washington, D.C., says, "If a student is having a difficult time but works hard and puts forth a great deal of effort, I think that real-life skill should be rewarded. I frankly do not see how struggling students will be motivated to succeed if there are not some short-term rewards for their struggles." And Jaime Escalante of *Stand and Deliver* fame says he raised grades for effort when he taught AP Calculus at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles: "If the kid put in a lot of hard work, I had to recognize that. And if you put in a lot of effort, you're going to learn something."

But other teachers disagree. "Rewarding effort and not achievement is not helping the student," says Maryland chemistry and physics teacher Stephen Rezendes. "It's basically assuming they can't achieve." Montgomery County, Maryland has a new policy downgrading the role of effort in grading. David Stein, an AP teacher in the district, agrees with the change: "I think this has been a particular problem in some of the middle schools in the past. It has resulted in some ninth graders coming to high school expecting to pass their classes without actually learning anything." Julie Greenberg, another Montgomery teacher, says: "My guiding principle in teaching is that telling the truth about mastery is the best thing I can do." Karen Gruner, another Maryland teacher, agrees: "One of life's tough lessons is trying hard and failing. It does no kid anywhere any good to give grades based on trying hard or behaving nicely because sooner or later they hit the wall of not having the knowledge the grade implied."

Matthews reports that some middle and high schools have started using a tactic that elementary schools have been using for years: giving a separate grade for effort. Once the question of how this counts in a student's grade-point average is resolved, this can be an effective compromise.

"Where Some Give Credit, Others Say It's Not Due" by Jay Matthews in *Washington Post*, June 14, 2005, spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, June 17, 2005,
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/13/AR2005061301471.html>

5. A North Carolina Program for Bringing Out the “Gifted” in Students

Bright IDEA, a primary-grade program in North Carolina, has shown significant student achievement gains in the last three years, almost erasing the gap in the number of students of color who have access to gifted programs. The program, which does not screen participating students, has focused on teacher training, including the following key components:

- Pushing students to use “intelligent behaviors,” i.e., developing the characteristics that gifted people demonstrate: flexibility, persistence, and the ability to grasp larger concepts.
- Training teachers to think conceptually about every lesson;
- Encouraging students to find the “big ideas” behind every lesson;
- Exposing students to content-rich literature;
- Asking more of students, for example, instead of doing a collage after reading a piece of literature, having them write a “letter to the editor” or engage in a debate.
- Going beyond the standard curriculum;
- Going beyond drill-based instruction and memorization;
- Teaching students steps they can take when they don’t know the answer;
- Having students leave every class asking questions.

“N.C. Program Holds Promise for Gifted Classes” by Christina Samuels in *Education Week*, June 15, 2005 (Vol. 24, #40, p. 5)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/15/40gifted.h24.html>

6. A Professional Development Cadre in Canada

This article describes how a small district in Alberta, Canada created a cadre of teacher leaders, immersed them in professional reading, classroom demonstrations, and staff development over a three-year period, created a strong sense of efficacy in the group, and made them the fulcrum of district-wide school improvement effort that produced remarkable student achievement gains. A key component was inquiry – tracking students’ learning and following up on gaps and confusions.

Studies have shown that when it comes to seeking and exploiting opportunities for growth, most people behave similarly in their professional and personal settings. The district’s professional development strategy worked with an interesting model involving four teacher types:

- *Gourmet omnivores* – Seek opportunities and exploit them selectively.

- *Active consumers* – Take advantage of opportunities that come their way.
- *Passive consumers* – Need the company of omnivores and active consumers to find and exploit opportunities.
- *Reluctants* – Tend to push against opportunity and often resist change actively and sometimes aggressively.

Teachers with the most active dispositions (gourmet omnivores and active consumers) learn new curriculum and instructional models more easily and use them more readily than those in the less active categories. But the passive consumers and reluctants are not hopeless; they are influenced by the presence of the more active consumers. The district took advantage of these differences to spread new and effective practices to more classrooms.

“Cadres Help to Create Competence” by Bruce Joyce, Lisa Mueller, Marilyn Hrycauk, and Walter Hrycauk in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2005 (Vol. 26, #3, p. 44-49), no e-link available

7. The Negative Effects of Work During the High School Years

This international study of adolescents’ part-time employment comes to an unequivocal conclusion: its effects are mostly small but consistently negative for students’ academic achievement, course selection, educational and occupational aspirations, and college attendance. The more hours students worked every week, the more negative the consequences, and the effects are consistent across ethnicity, gender, social class, achievement levels, and different types of work.

It’s striking that American adolescents work far more than their peers in other countries – an average of 50 minutes a day in the U.S. versus 15 minutes a day in northern Europe and almost zero in France and Russia. A study comparing American with Asian youth found that 80 percent of students in a Minneapolis high school had part-time jobs compared to only 27 percent of Japanese and 26 percent of Taiwanese students. The prevailing ethos in most other countries is that students should focus on their schoolwork.

The authors of this study conclude by saying that “families and students need to be aware that the only apparent ‘good’ reason to hold a job during the school year is to save money for future education. Earning money to gratify immediate needs such as going on outings, to support bad habits such as tobacco or alcohol use, or even to contribute toward rent apparently has negative effects on many high school and postsecondary outcomes.”

“Consequences of Employment During High School: Character Building, Subversion of Academic Goals, or a Threshold?” by Hebert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman in *American Educational Research Journal*, Summer 2005 (Vol. 42, #2, p. 331-369), no e-link available

8. Educational Triage in Texas

This lengthy research article documents how some Texas teachers attempt to “game” the state’s accountability system by (a) focusing special attention on “bubble” students – those believed to be on the threshold of passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests – and (b) referring “accountability” students (those who might negatively affect the school’s state rating) to special education so they will not count. Why would teachers engage in this sort of educational triage? The researcher found that accountability pressure led teachers to equate good teaching with high test scores and warped educators’ professional identities and teacher-teacher relationships.

“Below the Bubble: ‘Educational Triage’ and the Texas Accountability System” by Jennifer Booher-Jennings in *American Educational Research Journal*, Summer 2005 (Vol. 42, #2, p. 231-268), no e-link available

9. Short Items:

a. Using handhelds to do individual reading assessments – The Montgomery County, Maryland school district has teamed up with Wireless Generation, Inc. to put primary-grade reading assessments on Palm handhelds. In a pilot program, teachers in 19 elementary schools used handhelds to assess students on the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and their own balanced literacy assessments three times during the 2004-05 school year. Preliminary results have been encouraging, with teachers reporting less paperwork and quicker access to data. The district plans to train and equip teachers in the district’s remaining 107 elementary schools next year.

“District, Company Put Reading Tool on the Market” by Andrew Trotter in *Education Week*, June 15, 2005 (Vol. 24, #40, p. 9)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/15/40tech-1.h24.html>

b. Using Broadway shows to teach history – New York City social studies teacher Harold Small uses videotapes of classic Broadway shows to bring history alive

for his middle-school history classes. Students sometimes protest when he announces another show, but he claims that once the tape is rolling, almost all his kids are engaged. "It makes the curriculum more real for the students," he says.

Small is one of a number of teachers taking part in the American Musicals Project, which is sponsored by the New York Historical Society. Here are some of the shows suggested for different units in a U.S. History course:

- *1776* for the American Revolution;
- *Big River* for American slavery;
- *Show Boat* for Reconstruction;
- *Oklahoma* for westward expansion;
- *Paint Your Wagon* for the gold rush;
- *South Pacific* for World War II and racism in the pre-Korean War military;
- *Fiorello!* for the labor movement;
- *Annie* for the Great Depression;
- *West Side Story* for postwar immigration.

"U.S. History By the Book, (And the Score)" by Clyde Haberman in *New York Times*, June 14, 2005 (p. B1), no free e-link available

c. Algebra interim assessments pilot – A team of researchers at Boston College (the Technology and Assessment Study Collaborative, or inTASC, funded by the National Science Foundation) has developed a set of interim assessments for algebra designed to identify whether a given students' achievement is being hindered by one or more common algebraic misconceptions. For example, students who don't understand the concept of a variable won't be able to solve algebraic equations. The inTASC team is looking for teachers to pilot these assessments. Teachers who take part will be asked to have their classes complete at least two of the four 30-item tests, and they will receive immediate feedback on student performance and information about individual students' misconceptions. Interested teachers can register online at <http://www.bc.edu/research/intasc>.

"Diagnostic Testing Gets to the Root of the Problem" in *District Administrator*, June 2005 (Vol. 41, #6, p. 76), no e-link available

d. Starting an online affinity group – Several Web services make it easy for educators to form targeted, special-interest Web-based discussion groups. Here are some of the services:

- Google Groups – <http://www.googlegroups.com>
- Yahoo Groups – <http://groups.yahoo.com>
- Groups@AOL – <http://groups.aol.com>
- MSN Groups – <http://groups.msn.com>
- ICQ Groups – <http://www.icq.com/groups>
- Wikicities – <http://www.wikicities.com>
- High School Online Collaborative Writing – <http://schools.wikicities.com>

“Odvard Egil Dyrli on Affinity Groups and Wikicities” by Odvard Egil Dyrli in *District Administrator*, June 2005 (Vol. 41, #6, p. 80), no e-link available

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 39 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provide e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2003-04).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year (\$25 for a half-year, beginning late January). 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:

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- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

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

E-links will be provided whenever possible.