

Marshall Memo 306

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

October 19, 2009

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Quotes of the Week

"Teaching is one of those rare jobs whereby on any given day you can *literally* change someone's life."

Nathan Eklund (see item #1)

"Dedication is admirable, but martyrdom is unsustainable. Schools need to make it okay for educators to maintain energy, balance, and happiness."

Nathan Eklund (*ibid.*)

"The idea that a single teacher, working alone, can know and do everything to meet the diverse learning needs of 30 students every day throughout the school year has rarely worked, and it certainly won't meet the needs of learners in years to come... Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment; it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone."

Tom Carroll in "The Next Generation of Learning Teams" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 8-13); can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm>

"Cheerful empiricism"

Karin Chenoweth's description of successful schools' approach (see item #5)

"Kids decide they don't like math because they've had a diet of math that's like eating cardboard."

Deborah Ball in "Equity and Mathematics", *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 56); this article can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm>.

1. What It Takes to Sustain Good Teachers

“Teaching is one of those rare jobs whereby on any given day you can *literally* change someone’s life,” says consultant Nathan Eklund in this thoughtful *Kappan* article. That same exciting potential, however, is the reason teachers can easily exhaust themselves working too intensely and not taking care of their own needs. “Put bluntly,” says Eklund, “the more you care about this work, the greater your risk of burning out... Today’s growing shortage of teachers tells us we’re failing to protect our most valuable commodity.”

Two things can counteract this tendency: the school being a supportive, healthy environment for adults and students, and educators being mindful of their own boundaries and limitations.

- *A healthy workplace* – Schools need to agree on norms for collegial relationships so staff members know what it looks like to be supported by their colleagues – and be supportive of them. “Don’t leave intended and desired adult behavior to chance,” says Eklund. He also suggests recognizing and celebrating good work by colleagues in regular staff meetings, involving teachers in the hiring process, and empowering staff to solve their own problems. An example: there was tension within a high-school English department because some teachers were getting students’ essays back to them within a day or two while others were taking a month. Finally, teachers sat down and agreed on a common standard: papers would be returned within a week, which worked well for students and teachers. Eklund also suggests that schools should explicitly discourage the belief that teachers who are the most exhausted and miserable deserve the most admiration. “Dedication is admirable,” he says, “but martyrdom is unsustainable. Schools need to make it okay for educators to maintain energy, balance, and happiness.”

- *Work-life balance* – “If we’re not adequately taking care of ourselves,” says Eklund, “we’re jeopardizing our ability to take care of others.” First, he recommends lancing workplace boils. “If we have lingering issues with a colleague, we must resolve them in order to be fully present in the workplace,” he says. “If we have growing dissatisfaction with a workplace condition, we must take personal responsibility to address it and look for reasonable change.” Second, he suggests establishing a “colleague of the month” award for staff members who make the job more appealing for their coworkers. Third, Eklund says we must make time for our own personal passions outside of school – exercise, music, whatever. And finally, he says we must “Laugh loud and laugh often... Isolation is a leading cause of burnout. When asked to

identify what makes a good day good, ‘laughter’ and ‘time with colleagues’ are often at the top of the list.”

In his work with educators and school districts, Eklund often asks three questions. Here’s what he hears in response:

- *What makes a good day at work?* Laughter, collegiality, freedom to innovate, recognition of good work, being thanked, being able to decide what to do with time, not too many meetings, the ability to *teach*.

- *What makes a bad day at work?* Conflict with colleagues, chaos, loss of time, lack of support, and factors that make me wonder why I went into teaching.

- *What can save a bad day?* Encouraging words, humor, exercise, family and friends, collegial and administrative support, and positive interactions with students.

“Sustainable Workplaces, Retainable Teachers” by Nathan Eklund in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 25-27); can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org>

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2. Using Behavior-Based Interviewing with Teacher Candidates

“Past behavior is the best predictor of future performance,” says Berry College (Georgia) professor Mary Clement in this *Kappan* article. That’s why she believes so strongly in behavior-based interviewing – only asking questions that begin with phrases such as: “Tell me about a time when...”, “How have you...”, and “Describe your experience with...” The key, says Clements, is delving into the candidate’s actual track record with content knowledge, lesson planning, teaching methods, motivation, classroom management, assessment, grading, student diversity, communication, and professionalism.

“With high-stakes hiring,” she says, “interviewers no longer have the luxury of asking candidates to ‘tell about themselves’ or to ask random hypothetical questions.” She strongly suggests that hiring committees articulate a clear idea of what skills will be required for a particular position, write good questions in advance, and ask the same questions of each candidate. “Don’t ask questions that can’t be evaluated,” she says, and suggests a rating scale, perhaps Unacceptable/Acceptable/Target, with “I don’t know” earning an Unacceptable and the top rating reserved for answers that wow the interviewers. Candidates with the most Target answers should be offered the job.

Clement has two acronyms for evaluating answers. The first is PAR – Problem, Action, Result. For example, candidates might be asked about a time they encountered a problem, took action, and what the result was. The second acronym is STAR – Situation, Task, Action, and Result. In answer to this question – “Describe a classroom management plan that you have used and why it worked” – a target answer would be: “In my student teaching placement [situation] in a 5th-grade, my teacher used a plan with three to five rules that were observable, enforceable, and in effect at all times. She taught me that having the rules with consequences and positives wouldn’t help at all if we didn’t teach the rules like part of the curriculum [task]. So, every morning the first few weeks of school, we actually taught the plan and the rules

[action]. The rest of student teaching went well because students knew the rules and the class procedures [result].”

“A good interview allows the candidate to teach the interviewer the things they will be teaching students and parents,” says Clement. “Those who can’t explain basic answers to the interviewer, or who have had no previous experience with the topics, won’t be successful with the necessary demands of teaching.”

Here are sample interview questions, first some general questions, then some subject-specific questions:

- Describe two important curricular topics that you have taught in this grade or subject area.
- How have the state standards for this subject guided your teaching?
- Tell me about a lesson you taught and why it went well.
- Name a specific method or strategy you have used to teach in the past and why it is one you will continue to use.
- Describe a classroom management plan that you have used and why it worked.
- What have you done to start and end a class successfully?
- Describe an approach you have used to differentiate instruction for students.
- While a lesson is ongoing, how can you tell if students are “getting” the material?
- Describe positive communications with students’ families that you have used in the past.
- How have you evaluated your own teaching to improve?
- Elementary: What approaches to teaching reading have you used?
- Elementary: How have you used manipulatives in teaching math?
- Middle: How have you worked with a teaching team?
- Middle: Tell about integrating the teaching of reading into other subjects.
- High: How have you interested your students in the subject and motivated them to learn?
- Science: How have you used labs in the classes you have taught?
- Foreign language: What percent of a typical lesson do you teach in the target language?
- Art: What routines for safety and cleanup have you implemented?
- Music: Describe a performance or concert that went well and why it succeeded.
- Health/Physical Education: How have you built weight-consciousness topics into your course?
- Special education: Describe your experiences working with students in a mainstreamed/full inclusion/pullout setting.
- Special education: Tell us about collaborating with other teachers to help a student.

“Hiring Highly Qualified Teachers Begins with Quality Interviews” by Mary Clement in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 22-24); purchasable at <http://www.pdkintl.org>. See Marshall Memos 217, 186, 87, and 29 for other articles on teacher hiring by Clement.

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3. What Makes an Effective Math Teacher?

“Good teachers know both content and how to ‘get it across’ to their students,” say education professors Heather Hill and Deborah Loewenberg Ball in this *Kappan* article. Their research on this one-two punch, which has been labeled “pedagogical content knowledge” and “mathematical knowledge for teaching”, shows that it’s highly correlated with high student achievement. “We realized that the capacity to see the content from another’s perspective and to understand what another person is doing,” say Hill and Ball, “entails mathematical reasoning and skill that are not needed for research mathematics or for bench science.” Here are some of the key elements:

- Content knowledge of math – for example, knowing if the student’s answer is correct, the definition of a concept or object, and how to carry out a procedure;
- Specialized mathematical knowledge – for example, being able to model integer arithmetic using different representations;
- Knowledge of students;
- Knowledge of teaching;
- Knowledge of curriculum;
- Horizon knowledge – “peripheral vision” needed to see the larger mathematical landscape.

Central to being an effective mathematics teacher, say Hill and Ball, are the following manifestations of mathematical content knowledge:

- Interpreting and analyzing student work;
- Providing a mathematical explanation that young learners can understand;
- Forging links between math symbols and pictorial representations;
- Analyzing student errors;
- Knowing what to do when you encounter unconventional solutions;
- Choosing examples;
- Assessing the mathematical integrity of a representation in a textbook.

The question is how teachers have developed these skills – and how novice teachers can develop them. This is the subject of ongoing research.

“The Curious – and Crucial – Case of Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching” by Heather Hill and Deborah Loewenberg Ball in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 68-71); this article can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm>

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4. Key Components of New-Teacher Induction

“Support for new teachers can transform our nation’s schools,” says Ellen Moir of the New Teacher Center in this *Kappan* article. Here are the elements that she and her colleagues believe are necessary for successful induction:

- A carefully selected mentor for each first- and second-year teacher;
- Full or substantial released time for mentors so they can focus on classroom instruction and content;

- Orientation, training, and ongoing professional development for mentors;
- Best practices as articulated in published professional standards;
- A clear role for principals, who stay in close touch with the induction program;
- Decent teaching conditions for new teachers;
- Interim assessments to gauge student learning and stimulate teacher reflection;
- In-person and online networking among new teachers for professional development;
- Involvement for other key stakeholders;
- A focus on equity and English language development;
- Linkages to teachers' pre-service training;
- Advocacy for beginning teachers;
- Program evaluation.

“Accelerating Teacher Effectiveness: Lessons Learned from Two Decades of New Teacher Induction” by Ellen Moir in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 14-19); can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org>

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5. Avoiding False Choices and Doing What’s Right for Students

In this *Education Week* article, Education Trust writer Karin Chenoweth shares something that struck her about highly effective schools (described in her new book, *How It’s Being Done: Urgent Lessons from Unexpected Schools*, Harvard Education Press, 2009): they avoid either-or choices between ideologically driven polarities and take an approach that is best described as “cheerful empiricism.” Three examples:

- *Literature versus phonics* – Graham Road Elementary School in Fairfax County, VA, found that the district’s reading program wasn’t teaching ELLs how to decode unfamiliar words, even if the words were in their vocabulary. So the school’s primary-grade teachers supplemented the program with phonemic-awareness lessons, including rhyming games, songs, and an old game, “I’m packing a suitcase and in it I put...” with every item beginning with a particular letter. Students’ reading achievement is now very impressive.

- *Skills versus knowledge* – PS/MS 124 in Queens, New York City, found that students didn’t have important background knowledge and weren’t learning it from the district’s skills-focused reading curriculum. So the school brought in the Core Knowledge program and began integrating rich content with the teaching of skills (e.g., making inferences, drawing conclusions, and separating facts from opinion) in science and social studies classes.

- *College-prep versus technical/workforce training* – Imperial High School in California decided to get all students working with their hands as well as their brains. College preparation is the default curriculum for the school, but students are also required to take at least one semester of a vocational class, for example, computer graphics, marketing, business, woodworking, or agriculture. The school’s vocational teachers consider themselves regular faculty members and align their course objectives to California standards, such as formulating a coherent argument and applying the scientific method.

“Successful Schools Avoid False Choices” by Karin Chenoweth in *Education Week*, Oct. 14, 2009 (Vol. 29, #7, p. 22, 24) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/14/07chenoweth.h29.html>

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6. The Impact of “Stereotype Threat” on Eighth Graders

In this *Harvard Educational Review* article, Louisiana State University professor Keena Arbuthnot looks at the math test performance of eighth graders through the lens of stereotype threat. “Stereotype threat is defined as a social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about their group applies,” explains Arbuthnot. “This predicament threatens the individual: he or she fears being negatively stereotyped, judged or treated stereotypically, or inadvertently conforming to the stereotype.” Previous work on stereotype threat by Claude Steele and others [see Marshall Memos 40 and 145] has found that evenly-matched groups of college students perform differently on challenging tests when they are subjected to cues related to a rumored weakness – for example, the stereotype that females have less innate ability in math and science.

Arbuthnot’s two studies involved 257 students of different achievement levels in urban magnet schools. Students were randomly assigned to take a test in two groups, each supervised by an African-American test administrator and a Caucasian proctor. The high-stereotype group got the following directions, which closely resembled the directions usually given at the beginning of state math tests: “We are interested in studying mathematics achievement, so you will be taking a standardized mathematics test. We will also be asking questions about your test-taking experiences.”

The low-stereotype-threat groups were shown a short video in which two black, two white, and one Hispanic professor explained the purpose of the study. One of the professors (a black female) said, “The purpose of this study is to understand psychological factors involved in test-taking experiences like mathematics problem-solving. In particular, we are interested in how you think about and solve mathematics problems to study these test-taking experiences. Through a joint project between UIUC and Historically Black Colleges, we have developed a special set of standardized mathematics test items. Black, Asian American, Hispanic, white, and Native American students all perform the same on these test items.”

Students in both groups were then asked to complete pre- and post-test surveys and answer the same thirty math problems.

What were the results? Black students in the low-stereotype-threat groups handily outscored comparable black students in the high-stereotype-threat groups. And what was the mechanism of this underperformance? Arbuthnot’s follow-up surveys and interviews found that students in the high-stereotype-threat groups were less creative in their problem solving. They used more conventional, conservative methods to solve math problems than students in the low-stereotype-threat groups, and also experienced more cognitive disorganization. “I didn’t get it,” said one student. “I didn’t really understand. Well, I understood, but I didn’t know how to do it... Well, I did know how to do it, but I didn’t know how to do it right... It feels kind of like I’m forgetting something.”

These findings, says Arbuthnot, should help educators understand social-psychological factors that affect some students' test performance and take steps to minimize factors that undercut their showing their true potential.

“The Effects of Stereotype Threat on Standardized Mathematics Test Performance and Cognitive Processing” by Keena Arbuthnot in *Harvard Educational Review*, Fall 2009 (Vol. 79, #3, p. 448-472), no e-link available

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7. Three Principles of Leadership

In this *Wharton Leadership Digest* article, Eugenio Guzman sketches the highlights of a book just published in Spain, *Real Leadership* by Rodrigo Jordan and Marcelino Garay. The book synthesizes a wide variety of ideas on leadership into a “Delta Model”, which has three key principles:

- *Goals* – Leaders in all fields should spend half of their time establishing objectives that are clear, shared, common, and challenging – and then generating deep and widespread commitment to those objectives.

- *People* – Leaders should devote serious time to team selection – “getting the right people on the bus” in Jim Collins’s formulation. Team members should have technical skills, personal skills such as perseverance, initiative, emotional intelligence, and creativity; and social skills such as conflict management, empathy, negotiation skills, and the ability to communicate well.

- *Values* – Leaders should work actively to promote a set of values with an overriding emphasis on excellence.

“‘Real Leadership’ from Basics to Practice” by Eugenio Guzman in *Wharton Leadership Digest*, September/October 2009 (Vol. 13, #11-12)

<http://leadership.wharton.upenn.edu/digest/index.shtml>

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8. School Boards and Effective Policy-Making

In this *Education Week* article, Dakarai Aarons reports that most school boards, presented with an agenda item recommending that the district spend economic-stimulus money on reading interventions, would say, “Sounds great! Approved. Next item.” Aarons then quotes governance expert Donald McAdams, who believes school boards should slow down and follow a more thoughtful pathway so they can evaluate each action recommendation against clear criteria. Here are McAdams’s steps for school governance boards:

- Establish core beliefs and commitments.
- Articulate theories of action for change.
- Develop reform policies that put the theory into practice.
- Oversee and guide policies as they are implemented.
- Develop effective school board processes.

- Maintain clear roles, responsibilities, and relationships.
- Develop civic capacity.
- Plan for leadership transition.

These steps are part of the Reform Governance in Action training program, which McAdams launched in 2004 to help U.S. school boards play a more effective role in raising student achievement. The training is based on the idea that school boards have three major levers: using reform-oriented policy to drive change; building community support for the agenda; and hiring superintendents who can carry out the vision.

“Governance Project Teaches Value of Policy Framework” by Dakarai Aarons in *Education Week*, Oct. 14, 2009 (Vol. 29, #7, p. S6-S7) no e-link available

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9. Cellphone Cheating in Schools

This *Kappan* “Highlighted and Underlined” item quotes a Common Sense Media poll on the use of cell phone and the Internet by students:

- Almost two-thirds of students with cell phones use them during school, regardless of school policies against such use.
- Teens send an average of 440 text messages a week, of which 110 are sent by students while they are in the classroom.
- 48 percent of teens say they call or text friends to warn about pop quizzes.
- 52 percent admit to some form of cheating involving the Internet.
- 38 percent have copied material from a website and turned it in as their own work.
- 35 percent of teens with cell phones admit using them to find an answer to a test.
- Of those who use their phones this way:
 - 26 percent say they store information on their phones for use during a test.
 - 25 percent text friends about answers during an exam.
 - 17 percent take pictures of a test to send to friends.
 - 20 percent use their phones to search the Internet during an exam.
- 76 percent of parents say they believe some type of cellphone cheating happens in their children’s school, but only 3 percent believe their own child has cheated using a cellphone.

“Using Technology to Cheat” in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2009 (Vol. 91, #2, p. 6)

<http://www.common sense media.org/hi-tech-cheating>

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10. Short Items:

a. Social justice websites – In this ASCD *Education Update* article (originally titled “Teaching Social Justice”), New Jersey principal Deirdra Grode recommends several websites that provide teachers with good resources:

- Facing the Future: <http://www.facingthefuture.org>

- Free the Slaves: <http://www.freetheslaves.net>
- United Nations Cyberschoolbus, global teaching and learning: <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org>
- Heifer International – ending world hunger: <http://www.heifer.org>

“Teaching Social Justice” by Deirdra Grode in *Education Update*, October 2009 (Vol. 51, #10, p. 6), no e-link available

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b. Connecting with schools around the world – In this sidebar in *The Language Educator*, Leslie Davison recommends “Around the World in 80 Schools” as a gateway to finding schools in other countries with which to connect via computers:

<http://aroundtheworldin80schools.com>

“Tools You May Use” by Leslie Davison in *The Language Educator*, October 2009 (Vol. 4, #5, p. 29).

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c. Websites to enhance digital whiteboard foreign-language teaching – In this article in *The Language Educator*, Susan Bausch recommends a number of websites to help foreign-language teachers take full advantage of digital whiteboards in their classrooms:

- SMART Board Revolution is a social-networking tool for teachers using SMART boards:

<http://www.smartboardrevolution.ning.com>

- Foreign-language lessons: http://technology.usd259.org/resources/whiteboards/smart-lessons/foreign_language_lessons.html

- Make Beliefs Comix allows students to create their own online comic strips in any target language: <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>

- Interactive activities in Spanish: <http://oye.languageskills.co.uk/index.html>

- Interactive games in French: <http://www.poissonrouge.com>

“Digital Whiteboards Contribute to Interactive Language Classrooms” by Susan Bausch in *The Language Educator*, October 2009 (Vol. 4, #5, p. 52-55)

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d. Foreign-language Web resources – This feature in *The Language Educator* recommends a number of websites for foreign-language teachers:

- Distance Education Spanish Modules (elementary): <http://seeds.coedu.usf.edu/index.htm>

- Vocational Languages Resource Bank: <http://www.vlrb.org.uk/index.asp?p=home>

- Virtual Tour of the Eiffel Tower: <http://www.tour-eiffel.fr/index.html>

- Chinese Signs: <http://chinesesigns.wikispaces.com>

- Japanese Reward Stickers: <http://www.sabotenweb.com/bookmarks/materials/sticker.html>

- French Culture Online: <http://www.frenchculture.org>

- Hindi Language: <http://www.hindilanguage.org>

“Web Watch: What’s Online for Foreign Language Educators” in *The Language Educator*,
October 2009 (Vol. 4, #5, p. 58-59)

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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).

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.

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- 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 Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal