Marshall Memo 350

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 6, 2010

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"It's not enough to observe teachers' classroom performance; we need evidence that students have learned."

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A Los Angeles teacher with a poor track record of student test scores (see item #2)

"Homework that students cannot do without help is not good homework and is demotivating. Homework should make students feel smarter, not dumber."

Cathy Vatterott (see item #4)

"Great! You tried different ways, you followed the clues, and you found a strategy that worked. You're just like Sherlock Holmes, the great detective. Are you ready to try another one?"

Carol Dweck on how to praise a student (see item #3)

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High-school history teacher Christopher Doyle on student cheating (see item #5)

"Press releases get tossed in the trash… What's gold to journalists is actual conversations with actual educators."

Linda Perlstein (see item #6)

1. Using Team Accountability Versus Individual Merit Pay for Teachers

"It's time to admit that the idea of evaluating and paying individual teachers based on their students' test scores is a loser," says Kim Marshall in this *Education Week* commentary article. It sounds logical, but it won't work, he argues, for the following reasons:

- Practical – Standardized-test results aren't available until weeks or months after teachers have to be evaluated each spring.
- Psychometric – Standardized tests aren't valid for one-shot assessments of individual teachers, and it takes at least three years of value-added data for reliable patterns to emerge.
- Staff dynamics – When individuals are rewarded, collaboration suffers.
- Curriculum quality – Low-level test preparation thrives when the stakes are high.
- Moral – Turning up the heat increases the chances that some teachers will cheat.
- Simple fairness – How can schools divvy up credit among all the teachers who contribute to students' success?

So why is the idea of individual merit pay still being talked about when it's so clear it's ineffective? Because the idea of holding teachers accountable for test scores sounds so *obvious* – and federal and state officials have enabled that gut feeling and made it an important factor in the Race to the Top competition.

Marshall believes there's a constructive solution to the dilemma in which school districts find themselves. He starts with these stipulations:

• Those who advocate performance-based accountability "are absolutely right that student achievement needs to be front and center," he says. "It's not enough to observe teachers' classroom performance; we need evidence that students have learned."

• We know from recent research that teachers and principals are the most significant factors in student achievement. "They shouldn't be ducking responsibility," says Marshall.

• Even idealistic and intrinsically motivated educators feel affirmed and energized when they are acknowledged for doing a good job.

• The current teacher-evaluation process is broken, and raising the stakes might help galvanize people to fix it.

But how can schools shift the conversation to results and reward deserving educators without running into the problems listed above? Marshall believes it can be done by making smart choices in three areas:

• *Who gets rewarded* – Individual teachers? Teacher teams? Or the entire school staff? Marshall believes the best choice is teacher teams. This promotes collaboration and avoids the problems of individual rewards (hoarding ideas and staying in one's silo) and large-group rewards (freeloading by lazy and ineffective staff members). "Team rewards encourage

colleagues to push all students to high achievement," he says, "and create a dynamic in which peers hold each other accountable."

• *What's measured* – End-of-year standardized test scores? Value-added scores? Student gains on in-school assessments? Or teachers' classroom performance? Marshall believes the best choice is a combination of individual classroom proficiency (based on multiple unannounced classroom observations with face-to-face follow-up conversations) and team student achievement gains (based on school-based assessments using state-of-the-art scales of reading attainment, rubrics to measure writing and performance tasks, and well-crafted multiple-choice items). "In-school assessments may not be psychometrically perfect," he argues, "but teachers trust them more than standardized tests, and the results are far more timely and helpful."

• *The reward* – Pay bonuses? Positive year-end evaluations? Or praise from the principal? Marshall believes the best choice is a team score for student learning gains as one element in teachers' annual evaluations. "A pat on the back isn't enough," he says, "but merit pay (for individuals, teams, or the entire staff) increases the chances of shenanigans and gaming the system." Each teacher's final evaluation, then, would be a combination of the principal's assessment of classroom performance and a collective score for the team's student learning gains that year. "Team accountability would create a powerful incentive for teachers to work together to solve learning problems *during* the year," says Marshall, "and get *all* their students over the bar."

Here's what this would look like for a hypothetical 2nd-grade team. In early September, teachers would do a baseline assessment, agree on the best metrics for measuring learning, and set SMART goals (for example, 85 percent of students scoring proficient and above on the writing rubric by June). The principal would look over the plan and suggest a few changes before signing off. The team would then design curriculum units, teach them (using a variety of methods and materials), check for student understanding during lessons and with gradewide interim assessments, and meet with teammates at least once a week to discuss what was working and what wasn't. The principal would make frequent classroom visits with feedback, drop in on team meetings, and constantly chat with teachers about teaching and learning.

Toward the end of the year, the team would gather the most recent data and meet with the principal to present its value-added report. They would discuss accomplishments, problem areas, and curriculum revisions, and the principal would give the team an overall 4-3-2-1 score on learning gains, with commendations and suggestions. Over the next few days, the principal would meet individually with each teacher, ask for input, rate his or her classroom proficiency and outside-classroom performance, add in the team learning score, and get the teacher's signature.

This approach is far more effective than individual merit pay, Marshall argues, for these reasons:

- It puts the entire school's focus on student learning.
- It avoids the utterly bogus "dog-and-pony-show" mode of teacher evaluation.
- It uses timely student learning data to boost team collaboration.

- It rewards teams that get results.
- It immerses school leaders in the teaching-learning process.
- It gives the principal a manageable number of student-learning data sets to analyze and discuss (six team reports versus 35 individual teacher reports in an average-size school).
- It makes year-end teacher evaluations far more robust.
- It makes it possible to include primary-grade, art, music, physical-education, computer, library, and other teachers in the accountability conversation.

In other words, teachers and administrators are using real-time evidence of student learning to continuously fine-tune their craft – a powerful engine for improving teaching and learning.

Is there a place for monetary compensation for effective teaching? Marshall thinks this could happen in three ways without undermining the process described above:

- For the most highly-rated teachers, opportunities for career-ladder advancement, taking on extra responsibilities for extra pay;
- For the most highly-rated teachers, pay incentives to work in high-need schools and subject areas;
- For mediocre- and low-rated teachers, no step increase and a tight timeline for improving, with dismissal for those who don't improve.

"Merit Pay – or Team Accountability" by Kim Marshall in *Education Week*, Sept. 1, 2010 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 24, 20)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/09/01/02marshall.h30.html?tkn=PONCje7mnKuem39zU1RoLB2fGyCdsb2cGu1r&cmp=clp-sb-ascd

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2. The Flap Over the *Los Angeles Times'* Release of Teachers' Ratings

In this timely *New York Times Magazine* article, economics writer David Leonhardt explores the question of when holding teachers accountable goes too far. Until quite recently, he notes, it's been almost impossible for parents and researchers to get objective *Consumer Reports*-like information on schools, let alone individual teachers. But the *Los Angeles Times* may have changed that for good. A few months ago, the newspaper sent a team of reporters and an education economist to look at seven years of ELA and math standardized test scores for grades 3-5. Using value-added methodology, the economist analyzed how much progress students had made in about 6,000 different teachers' classrooms. "The variation was striking," says Leonhardt. With some teachers, students made great strides each year. With others, they did not. With great fanfare, the newspaper released the data, giving teachers the chance to post comments on their scores: http://projects.latimes.com/value-added.

Reactions have been mixed. Some praised the newspaper for a bold move. The president of the local teachers union called for a boycott of the newspaper. (At the same time, the union said it was amenable to discussing how test scores might become part of teachers' year-end evaluations.) Thus far, more than 1,700 teachers have privately reviewed their data online and hundreds have left comments that will accompany their ratings.

"In many respects," says Leonhardt, "this movement is overdue. Given the stakes, why should districts be allowed to pretend that nearly all teachers are similarly successful? (The same question, by the way, applies to hospitals and doctors.) The argument for measurement is not just about firing the least effective sliver of teachers. It is also about helping decent and good teachers become better… When the *Times* reporters asked one teacher about his less-than-stellar scores, he replied, 'Obviously what I need to do is to look at what I'm doing and take some steps to make sure something changes.'"

The problem, says Leonhardt, is that value-added test-score analysis is imperfect. Scores can bounce around from year to year for any given teacher, so a single year of scores can be misleading. In addition, students aren't randomly assigned to teachers – some of the best teachers may get the most challenging students – and there's a lot that standardized tests don't measure. Value-added data for several years may be able to identify the most-effective and the least-effective teachers, say researchers, but there's less validity in the middle of the spectrum.

"One way to think about the Los Angeles case is as an understandable overreaction to an unacceptable status quo," concludes Leonhardt. "For years, school administrators and union leaders have defeated almost any attempt at teacher measurement, partly by pointing to the limitations… If principals and teachers are allowed to grade themselves, as they long have been, our schools are guaranteed to betray many students… Lately, though, the politics of education have changed. Parents know how much teachers matter and know that, just as with musicians or athletes or carpenters or money managers, some teachers are a lot better than others." But when individual teacher ratings are released, some teachers will be unfairly judged.

Robert Manwaring of the Education Sector has suggested a possible middle ground – releasing a breakdown of teachers' multi-year value-added scores at the school level without publicly releasing teachers' individual ratings. This would give principals and teachers the data to get to work improving performance that is below par. Long term, it's also important to improve the quality of standardized tests and revamp the way teachers are supervised and evaluated.

"Stand and Deliver: When Does Holding Teachers Accountable Go Too Far?" by David Leonhardt in *The New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 5, 2010 (p. 13-14)

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3. Carol Dweck on Fostering a "Growth" Mindset

(Originally titled "Even Geniuses Work Hard")

In this thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, Stanford professor Carol Dweck says, "Teachers who strive to design challenging, meaningful learning tasks may find that their students respond differently depending on the students' assumptions about intelligence. Students with a growth mindset may tackle such work with excitement, whereas students with a fixed mindset may feel threatened by learning tasks that require them to stretch and take risks." To foster a growth-mindset classroom culture:

• *Don't praise ability* – Praise students' effort, the strategies they used, the choices they made, their persistence.

• *Downplay speed* – "Teachers should also emphasize that fast learning is not always the deepest and best learning," says Dweck, "and that students who take longer sometimes understand things at a deeper level."

• *Teach the growth mindset* – Dweck and her colleagues have developed a curriculum: http://www.brainology.us. Students might share an area in which they used to be inept and are now proficient. "Such discussions encourage students not to be ashamed to struggle with something before they are good at it," she says.

• *Have students set goals* – For example, a student who can't understand absolute values might commit to watching a YouTube video on solving linear absolute value equations and teach the process to classmates.

• *Make students advocates* – Students might write a letter to a struggling student explaining the growth mindset, urging the student to avoid labeling, and suggesting strategies.

All this transmits crucial information to students, says Dweck, and communicates "that their role is not to judge who is smart and who is not, but to collaborate with students to make everyone smarter." Dweck has three additional recommendations:

• *Make every child stretch*. Don't let some students coast to success, says Dweck. "This experience can create the fixed mindset belief that you are smart only if you can succeed without effort." Also, present challenging tasks as fun and exciting. When a student succeeds, say, "Great! You tried different ways, you followed the clues, and you found a strategy that worked. You're just like Sherlock Holmes, the great detective. Are you ready to try another one?"

• *Chart progress toward mastery*. Give a pre-test at the beginning of a unit. When students do much better on the post-test, they have a clear sense of how, with application, they can become smarter.

• *Grade for growth*. In one Chicago high school, unsuccessful students are graded *Not Yet* and aren't ashamed because they know they're expected to master the material next time, or the next. "The word 'yet' is valuable and should be used in every classroom," says Dweck. "Whenever students say they don't like a certain subject, the teacher should say, 'yet.' This simple habit conveys that ability and motivation are fluid." Some schools grade students on growth-mindset factors, rewarding those who challenge themselves, are resilient in the face of difficulty, and show clear improvement over time.

"Even Geniuses Work Hard" by Carol Dweck in *Educational Leadership*, September 2010 (Vol. 68, #1, p. 16-20)
http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Even-Geniuses-Work-Hard.aspx
Dweck can be reached at dweck@stanford.edu. Her best-selling book on this topic is *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Random House, 2006). For previous summaries of her articles, see Marshall Memos 144, 152, 188, 206, and 319.

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4. Homework That Gets Done and Contributes to Learning

In this *Middle Ground* article, University of Missouri/St. Louis professor Cathy Vatterott offers suggestions for increasing the homework completion rate and getting a bigger instructional bang for the buck:

• *Provide a clear academic purpose* – Homework shouldn't present new knowledge; rather, it should enhance classroom learning by checking for understanding, practicing a skill learned in class, reviewing for a test or quiz, or previewing something students will learn soon.

• *Make it do-able* – "Homework that students cannot do without help is not good homework and is demotivating," says Vatterott. "Homework should make students feel smarter, not dumber."

• *Personalize* – Students should have choices and opportunities to gain ownership of the assignment.

• *Make it interesting* – Students are much more likely to complete homework when it is clear, interesting, and fun. "Middle grades students routinely complain about spaces too small to write in or too much information on a page," says Vatterott. Some examples of good assignments:

- Write an op-ed piece defending a war, a theory, a method, a character, or an author.
- Create a lesson plan to teach the water cycle to students in a lower grade.
- Write a story or newspaper article showing you know the meaning of the 15 vocabulary words of the week.

• *Differentiate* – "One-size-fits-all homework does not fit all," says Vatterott. Homework can be differentiated by:

- Time – A 20-minute assignment for one student can take another student 60 minutes. One solution is to make an assignment time-based rather than task-based, for example, "Do as many problems as you can in 20 minutes, draw a line, and work longer if you'd like."
- Difficulty – For example, fewer questions, or circling rather than writing answers. Many adaptations that teachers use for ELL or special-education students could benefit others as well.
- Scaffolding – Providing graphic organizers, word banks, multiplication tables, partially-completed math problems, and copies of class notes can make homework more do-able.
- Interest/learning style – For example, letting students choose which book to read or which aspect of a country's culture to research, or let students choose how they will demonstrate what they have learned – a report, poster, or video.

• *Decriminalize grading* – "Homework should not cause students to fail," says Vatterott. "If homework carries too much weight in determining students' grades, students may fail even though they have demonstrated mastery on tests and in-class assignments." Holding students accountable for homework should mean insisting that they finish rather than giving them a zero. Some possible policies:

- Have a Zeros Aren't Possible policy – all work must be completed.

- Use homework to check for understanding and give feedback.
- Don't kill motivation or course grades by being too punitive.
- If possible, don't give grades at all; give credit for completion only, not correctness or accuracy.
- Count homework 10 percent or less of final grades.
- Be somewhat lenient on lateness; allow re-dos or give "incomplete" grades.

Vatterott suggests ways of checking homework every day: (a) A quick visual check (these got it, these didn't) with immediate follow-up instruction for the students who didn't; (b) Student self-check (got it, not sure, didn't get it) with follow-up instruction for the latter two groups; and (c) Peer review – students meet in groups, compare answers, ask each other questions, and report back to the teacher.

• *Solve problems* – When students don't complete homework, figure out why. Reasons might include academic, organizational, motivational, situational (too many distractions at home, too many after-school activities), or personal (depression, anxiety, family issues). Solutions might include:

- Let some students keep a copy of the textbook at home.
- Assign "homework buddies" to work with or call for help.
- Set a maximum amount of time to work on each assignment.
- Prioritize assignments.
- Give all assignments for the next week on Friday, due the following Friday.
- Stagger due dates for each segment of long-term projects.
- Allow parents or students to call the teacher at home if necessary.
- Once a week, have students clean out lockers and reorganize their folders.
- Coordinate core-subject homework assignments and limit the number of tests and projects at any given point in time.

• *Provide support* – "Instead of trying to teach kids responsibility, let's force them to practice responsibility," says Vatterott. Some schools have ZAP (Zeroes Aren't Possible) after-school programs four days a week, with mandatory early intervention for students who aren't turning in homework on a regular basis. Other schools use advisory or study hall periods for homework support.

"Five Steps to More Effective Homework" by Cathy Vatterott in *Middle Ground*, August 2010 (Vol. 14, #1, p. 29-31), no e-link available; the author is at vatterott@umsl.edu

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5. Dealing with Cheating in Suburban High Schools

In this sobering *Education Week* article, veteran high-school history teacher Christopher Doyle says for the last few years, when he and his suburban students have gotten to know and trust each other, he asks whether they have ever cheated in school (this usually comes up when they ask, *How could Richard Nixon have lied so much?* or *How could people have owned slaves?*). Virtually all students confess to some kind of cheating. In order of frequency, here's the list:

- Copying homework from a classmate;
- Cheating on a test;
- Lifting text from the Internet (verbatim or with slight changes in wording); one student blatantly used paragraphs from a book review that Doyle himself had written!
- Buying Adderall from a classmate with ADD and using it to enhance studying.

Doyle says that cheating is pervasive in his upper-level classes and slightly less common in lower-level classes. Studies confirm his impression – between 75 and 80 percent of college-bound students cheat in one way or another.

Why? Students tell Doyle that one reason is mediocre teaching: "We aren't going to respect teachers who give us photocopied worksheets as 'busywork,'" they say. "We're not going to waste our time doing that." Others see it as a way of "sticking it to the Man" for assigning too much work. Others rationalize that "as long as we do well on the tests, the homework doesn't matter." Many feel that the deck is stacked against them and dishonesty is the only way they are going to get good grades while building up their extracurricular activities to get into a good college and have a shot at a decent life.

In frank conversations with students, Doyle has seen a ray of hope – they seem remorseful. One got into an Ivy League college and said, "I don't think I earned it." Some students say they wouldn't cheat "if the school worked better." Doyle lists solutions from books on the subject – emphasizing student growth versus competition; making the schedule sane so students get enough sleep; implementing honor codes; teaching ethics; de-emphasizing the importance of going to Harvard – but he thinks the problem is deeper.

"What we adults need to come to terms with, I think, is our own insecurity," he says. "We live in a moment of high anxiety: bad economy, two wars not going well, seeming political impotence, and corrupt business practices." It's not surprising that students internalize the notion that they have to be dishonest to make it in the world. "My students are asking for help to lead more honest lives," he concludes. "They have already begun to talk about it. All we need do is refuse to let them suffer the fallout of our own fears, engage them, and follow through with the conversation."

"All My Favorite Students Cheat: When Dishonesty Is a Norm at School" by Christopher Doyle in *Education Week*, Sept. 1, 2010 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 18-19), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/09/01/02doyle_ep.h30.html

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6. Advice for Working with Reporters

In this *Harvard Education Letter* interview, editor Nancy Walser asks veteran education journalist and writer Linda Perlstein about school leaders handling the media. Some excerpts:

• "Press releases get tossed in the trash," says Perlstein. "If you have a relationship with the reporters who cover your area, pick up the phone and say, 'We're trying this new math program, and I'm calling because I know you are interested in this topic.' What's gold to journalists is actual conversations with actual educators. That's it. Literally, that's it. They

want to know about a policy coming into play, what's working and what's not working in the classroom."

• In some districts, being a "team player" means "Do what we say and don't question it." There's a culture of fear and people are afraid of saying *anything*, and reporters are having trouble getting access to schools. "As an administrator, I would push back on that rule," says Perlstein, "or build an off-the-record relationship with a reporter." She advises looking for writers who can be trusted to get things right, get all sides of a story, and keep confidences. And it's also important to be explicit up front about what "off the record" means.

• Good reporters visit a school once a week, meet educators, walk around, and see what's going on. This establishes relationships and trust for when it's time to write a story.

• The worst thing an educator can do when dealing with the media is to not be honest. "Too many administrators work hard to spin a message rather than explain reality," says Perlstein. "Talk about your challenges rather than pretending they don't exist."

• Newspapers are laying off reporters and assigning the survivors to broader beats, which means that some reporters covering schools are spread thin and don't know much about education. Busy school and district leaders can't be their teachers, and there is a lot they should be able to find online, but an educator can provide context and nuance.

• What should a principal do if a reporter publishes a story with errors or distortions? First of all, says Perlstein, get a reality check to see if you're overreacting. If the story is indeed unfair or inaccurate, call the reporter and say something like, "I'm wondering why you wrote this, when this is the full thing I said." If that conversation isn't productive, the principal can write a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece. If there is a persistent pattern of inaccuracy, contact the editor.

• What kind of school story does the public want to read? "I think people want to know what's going on in classrooms," says Perlstein, "and they are getting almost none of that. They don't know how reading is taught. They don't know how math is taught. They don't have a great deal of detail about how their children's days are spent, intellectually. They don't understand why one teacher has such trouble managing a class full of unruly kids while another teacher does not. They don't understand what it looks like for special education students to be taught alongside other children, or for a teacher to 'differentiate.'"

"The Media-Savvy Educator: How to Work the Press to Educate the Public About Schools" – A Conversation with Linda Perlstein" by Nancy Walser in *Harvard Education Letter*, September/October 2010 (Vol. 26, #5, p. 4-5), http://www.hepg.org/hel/article/476

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7. Green Schoolyards

"Kids love to be outside doing stuff," says Green Schoolyard Network director Kirk Meyer in this *Education Week* article. He passionately makes the case for transforming underutilized areas of school grounds into active centers for teaching and learning, environmental literacy, health and fitness, and community connections. Examples:

• A circle of boulders in the corner of the schoolyard reflects the local geology, including the kind of stone used to construct the school and some houses in the neighborhood. Students use hand lenses to look closely at the stones (*What are these little sparkly pieces? Why is this one bumpy and that one smooth? Look at the bugs under this one!*) and reflect on the immigrant laborers who quarried the stones decades ago, making their way in America like many families today. "It is not particularly linear, or organized in a traditional way," says Meyer, "but it is interesting and has raised many questions. Now, the teacher can take a bunch of curious and excited students back inside to use their texts or the Internet to assist in finding answers."

• In the school garden, students pick mint leaves, put them in water jugs in the sun, and drink solar-heated mint tea. They wonder why the dwarf pine tree keeps its needles while the apple tree is shedding its leaves. They rake up leaves and add them to the compost pile. They observe a monarch butterfly hovering around a milkweed plant and a crow perching on the scarecrow. A wind-driven pump sends water through irrigation channels dug by students, but stops when the wind dies down. Again, lots of grist for follow-up inside.

Meyer shares his top ten ways that green schoolyards foster teaching and learning and educate the whole child:

- They shift the educational focus from secondary to primary sources.
- They engage students through experiential learning.
- They make learning a multisensory experience.
- They foster the use of systems thinking, helping students see interconnections.
- They encourage interdisciplinary study.
- They recognize and celebrate different learning styles.
- They connect the school to the neighborhood and the world.
- They project a positive message about publication to the community.
- They blur the boundaries between academic learning and creative play.
- Only a modest capital outlay is required to design and install a green schoolyard.

"Green Schoolyards as an Element of Reform" by Kirk Meyer in *Education Week*, Sept. 1, 2010 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 18-19) http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/09/01/02meyer.h30.html; Meyer's organization is at http://www.greenschoolyardnetwork.org.

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8. Fixing Ineffective Practices in Writing Workshops

In this *Middle Ground* article, Delaware secondary-school English teacher Nathan Kasten shares mistakes he made as he began to implement writing workshop and lists some no-nos:

• *Don't say "Just write."* Students' writing won't improve if they just churn out prose they haven't thought through in order to complete a task, says Kasten. One of his students, for example, wrote pages of observations about what another girl in class was doing moment by moment because, she said, it was the best way to keep writing.

• *Don't ask, "So what?"* "When I first heard about the 'so what?' test, I felt like a baseball pitcher who just learned a new way to throw a curve ball," says Kasten. But when he used this question on a student who asked if it was okay to write about a less-than-stellar topic, the student ended up staring at a blank page for ten minutes.

• *Don't say, "Help me understand what you're trying to say."* Kasten watched the enthusiasm drain from a student's face when he used this question to get him to explain a listless paragraph.

• *Don't say, "Finish it here because you won't feel like writing anywhere else."* This sends the wrong message, says Kasten. A good writer should be thinking like a writer all the time, not just in the classroom or when holding a pencil or pen.

"What NOT to Say in Writing Workshops" by Nathan Kasten in *Middle Ground*, August 2010 (Vol. 14, #1, p. 24-25), no e-link available; Kasten is at singingredbird@hotmail.com.

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9. Are Smaller Learning Communities the Answer?

In this *Peabody Journal of Education* article, University of Connecticut researcher Thomas Levine reports that the jury is still out on smaller learning communities (SLCs) in U.S. high schools. "Although the large comprehensive high school has few defenders," says Levine, "some worry that SLCs do not represent a sufficiently powerful break from a broken model."

There is, however, some hopeful evidence that SLCs are producing better student attendance, higher graduation rates, and a more supportive environment than traditional high schools. Schools where SLCs have been in operation the longest – up to eight years – seem to be doing the best.

The three challenges that SLCs face, says Levine, are (a) focusing on instructional improvement with so many staffing, physical space, student behavior, and other challenges; (b) ensuring equity and rigor when there is unintentional student stratification due to choices of themes and programs; and (c) transcending a school's negative past history.

"We don't yet know whether – or how high – SLCs can lift students' standardized test scores and other valued outcomes," concludes Levine. "Given the significant investment of human and financial resources into this reform, and signs of progress shown to date, it would be a shame if we didn't find out." He's particularly worried because of school administrators' and policymakers' notoriously short attention spans and the Gates Foundation's shift away from SLCs.

"What Research Tells Us About the Impact and Challenges of Smaller Learning Communities" by Thomas Levine in *Peabody Journal of Education*, Fall 2010 (Vol. 85, #3, p. 276-289), no e-link available

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10. Forging Links Between Preschool and Primary-Grade Teachers

In this letter to *Education Week*, University of California/Berkeley field coordinator Rebecca Wheat says that better communication between preschool and primary-grade teachers (especially kindergarten) "can yield enormous benefits and definitely help lessen achievement gaps." Her recommendations:

- Literacy specialists fostering collaboration between preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and principals;
- Forming professional learning communities that get preschool and elementary teachers discussing solutions to the achievement gap;
- Getting preschool teachers visiting kindergarten classes and vice-versa;
- Sharing student assessment data between preschool and kindergarten teachers to spark discussions about the needs of children and their families.

"Letters to the Editor: How Principals Can Promote Early-Childhood Learning" by Rebecca Wheat in *Education Week*, Sept. 1, 2010 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 21)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/09/01/02letter-2.h30.html

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11. What Engages High-School Students?

(Originally titled "Make It Meaningful!")

This *Educational Leadership* article reports on a recent high-school study: 66% of students reported they were bored in class daily. What engages students?

- Discussions without clear-cut answers (65%)
- Discussion/debate (61%)
- Group projects (60%)
- Projects and lessons involving technology (55%)
- Art/drama activities (49%)
- Presentations (46%)
- Role-plays (43%)

"Make It Meaningful!" in *Educational Leadership*, September 2010 (Vol. 68, #1, p. 8); the full report is available at http://ceep.indiana.edu/hssse/images/HSSSE_2010_Report.pdf.

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12. Short Items:

a. Online assessment tools – This site helps teachers use wikis, blogs, multimedia, and polling tools to write assessments:
http://vickiwiki.pbworks.com/Assessment+Using+Web+2+0+Tools

"Click Here: Web 2.0 and You!" by Brenda Dyck in *Middle Ground*, August 2010 (Vol. 14, #1, p. 38-39)

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b. Online images – The BigHugeLabs website allows teachers and students to combine images from magazine covers, mosaics, movie posters, and other media: http://bighugelabs.com.

"Click Here: Web 2.0 and You!" by Brenda Dyck in *Middle Ground*, August 2010 (Vol. 14, #1, p. 38-39)

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c. Oil spill website – This Science NetLinks website relates science, social studies, and political science to the Deepwater Horizon BP disaster: http://www.sciencenetlinks.com/oilspill

"The Science of the Spill" in *Educational Leadership*, September 2010 (Vol. 68, #1, p. 9)

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d. Online computational knowledge engine – http://wolframAlpha.com aims to "collect and curate all objective data; implement every known model, method and algorithm; and make it possible to compute whatever can be computed about everything."

"WolframAlpha.com" in *Educational Leadership*, September 2010 (Vol. 68, #1, p. 9)

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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.

Website:

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or 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
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
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools