Marshall Memo 57

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
October 11, 2004

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"We represent ourselves as educators, and administrators, of educational facilities. We all hold high standards for our students and proudly proclaim these to the public. But we can't agree on how to grade or what a grade should reflect!"

Joseph Brown, Florida middle-school principal (see item #1)

"Unless God Almighty is going to teach Fatima how to read, she's got to be in our school on Saturday."

Shawn McCollough, a Texas elementary principal, persuading a parent to send her third grader to Saturday school instead of communion classes (see item #3)

"Thanks for waking me up."

Fatima Rodriguez, in a card for her parents after she passed Georgia's third-grade test (*ibid*.)

"In most instances, teacher have little direct influence over the privileges that students most value or the punishments they most fear. For example, teachers cannot restrict students' access to automobiles, computer games, or television. Nor can they limit students' social activities. But teachers do control grades, and grades can indirectly influence those privileges and punishments… The threat of a zero – and the resulting low grade – allows teachers to impose their will on students who otherwise might be indifferent to a teacher's demands."

Thomas Guskey (see item #2)

"It's hard to trust someone that you begin to perceive is faking it for you."

Edmund Gordon (see item #7d)

1. How to Build a Fair System for Grading Students

In this thoughtful article, Joseph Brown, a Florida middle-school principal, describes the steps that he and his Tampa colleagues took when they noticed glaring differences between the course grades students received from their teachers and their scores on the high-stakes FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test). "How can a student who made adequate progress earn straight Fs in course work?" they asked themselves. "How can students who make straight As in course work not make adequate progress?"

The principals formed a committee, did some research, and were horrified to find that their teachers were using four different approaches to grading. This meant that a student could get radically different grades for the same work depending on which classroom he or she happened to be assigned to. The approaches were:

- *The relative method* (grading on a curve) – Students are graded in comparison to other students in the class or course using a normal bell-curve distribution, regardless of how much students have learned; a certain percent of students will make As, a certain percent will make Fs, and the majority will make Cs.
- *The content method* – Students are graded on content-based assignments, portfolios, or contracts, with different assignments weighted according to their importance. Theoretically, all students could receive an A.
- *The fixed-scale method* – Students are graded on a point system; again, all students could theoretically earn As.
- *The flexible method* – Students are graded on a flexible point system, but the total points a student can earn is not set at the beginning of the grading period. This method is easy for students to understand, but they are being graded on completing tasks rather than mastering the subject matter.

The principals were dismayed by the equity issues inherent in this grading anarchy. "We represent ourselves as educators, and administrators, of educational facilities," writes Brown. "We all hold high standards for our students and proudly proclaim these to the public. But we can't agree on how to grade or what a grade should reflect!" The principals empathized with the confusion of a parent whose children have 6-8 teachers, each of whom has his or her own grading philosophy.

As they explored the topic, the principals found that teachers were very sensitive about their grading practices and regarded them as sacred ground. Beneath this

defensiveness, the principals found that teachers had a limited repertoire: "Many teachers simply do not realize that there are other ways to grade," says Brown.

The principals decided to ask their teachers some fundamental questions: Why do we grade students? What composes a grade? Are grading standards flexible, absolute, or relative? How can good scores be skewed through faulty grading? Is a student's grade based on mastery of the curriculum, or is the student's effort part of the grade? How is late work graded? Under what circumstances should a student receive a zero?

From faculty discussions, the group came up with two philosophical statements:

- The purpose of a grading policy is to assess students' mastery of the assigned curriculum. A grading system will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the well-being of the student.
- Grading systems are intended to be fair, useful, informative, timely, and influential so the results can be used with confidence and communicated effectively to students, parents and guardians, and other stakeholders.

Based on this philosophy, Brown has the following recommendations for principals for developing a fair grading system, which he considers essential to fairness and equity:

• *Ask teachers for a written copy of their grading system*. Having to write their system down helps teachers think it through and answer parents' questions.

• *Insist that teams and departments use a common grading system*. This ensures equity, instills confidence in what grades mean, and is less confusing for students and parents.

• *Insist that teachers use objective criteria*. A student's final grade should be based on tests, quizzes, daily assignments, and projects – not subjective criteria like a student's behavior, attitude, or ability.

• *Limit the importance of homework in the overall grade.* Brown believes that outcome-based homework assignments (e.g., projects and essays) should count toward grades, but homework that is practice should not. "The basketball team practices free throws if they are not proficient at making those shots," he argues. "These practice shots do not count toward their season averages."

• *Know how numbers are combined*. A teacher should announce the weighting of grades in advance (for example, tests count for 65% of your final grade, quizzes are 20%, homework is 10%, participation is 5%) and use an electronic gradebook for convenience and accuracy.

• *Consider an A-B-C-I policy* (I for incomplete). Brown believes the easy way out is to tell a student, "You didn't do the assignment, so you have an F. Sit down. We're moving on." The more difficult (and superior) approach is to say, "You will not be allowed to make an F. You will do the assignment, even if you have to stay after school to do it."

• *Demand fairness*. "If grades are based on opinion," writes Brown, "They are not fair." It's also not fair to change the grade of one student because he or she complains and not change the grades of the rest of the class. "If students are not treated fairly," Brown concludes, "it is impossible to know what a grade means."

"Grade-A Perfect" by Joseph Brown in *Principal Leadership*, Oct. 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 29-32); try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week. You can reach the author of this article at joseph.brown@sdhc.k12.fl.us

2. Should Teachers Give Zeros?

When it comes to grading, says Thomas Guskey, a Kentucky education professor, most teachers have had little formal training and do to their students what was done to them when they were students. Guskey believes that one of the least enlightened and least effective grading practices is giving zeros. Many teachers see this as their ultimate grading weapon – a way of punishing students for not putting in adequate effort or for being irresponsible. Zeros are usually doled out when an assignment is missed, neglected, or turned in late and when a student misbehaves or fails to heed a teacher's warning.

"Teachers also use zeros as instruments of control," writes Guskey. "In most instances, teacher have little direct influence over the privileges that students most value or the punishments they most fear. For example, teachers cannot restrict students' access to automobiles, computer games, or television. Nor can they limit students' social activities. But teachers do control grades, and grades can indirectly influence those privileges and punishments… The threat of a zero – and the resulting low grade – allows teachers to impose their will on students who otherwise might be indifferent to a teacher's demands."

But this doesn't work, says Guskey. And in addition to being ineffective, zeros are unfair:

- A zero not an accurate reflection of what a student has learned or is able to do.
- The effect of a zero is magnified out of all proportion if the teacher averages all grades together; a zero has more effect than any other score the student gets.

(This is why in Olympic gymnastics and diving competition the highest and lowest scores are thrown out.)

- Research shows that the use of zeros doesn't work as a punishment. "Instead of prompting great effort," reports Guskey, "Zeros and the low grades they yield more often cause students to withdraw from learning. To protect their self-images, many regard their low mark or grade as irrelevant and meaningless. Other students may blame themselves for the low grade but often feel helpless to make improvements."

Guskey recommends that schools have a candid discussion on the purposes of grading and think about the messages they want grades to communicate. He believes that such a discussion will lead teachers to the conclusion that there are much more effective ways to motivate and encourage students to behave, complete assignments, and turn them in on time. Here are three changes he has seen in schools:

• *Giving an I for incomplete grades and following up*. Instead of a zero, students get an I, along with explicit requirements for completing the work – usually in a mandatory after school study session or a special Saturday class. "[S]tudents are not let off the hook with a zero," says Guskey. "Instead, they learn that they have specific responsibilities in school… no excuses are accepted. The consequence is direct, immediate, and academically sound." Such programs cost money (staffing and transportation costs), but schools have found that they save money in the long run: "When students realize that their teachers are serious about school responsibilities, they also get serious about them. Because the consequences and the accompanying assistance of this policy are immediate, it helps students to remedy learning or behavioral difficulties before they become major problems. As a result, less time and fewer resources will be needed for major remediation efforts in the future."

• *Reporting behavior separately*. In many Canadian secondary schools, students receive achievement grades for their academic performance and separate grades for homework, punctuality of assignments, class participation, effort, and behavior. It would seem that this would require a lot of extra work, but Canadian teachers report that it is actually easier to give separate grades than it is to weight all the aspects of student performance and combine them into a single grade. The separated Canadian grades are also more meaningful for calculating GPA and class rank.

• *Changing grading scales*. The easiest way to lessen the negative impact of zeros (although this avoids confronting the unfairness of the practice) is to change from

percentage grades to a whole-number scale: 4-3-2-1. Using this kind of scale, a teacher can still assign a zero but the effect is far less because it is not so extreme.

"0 Alternatives" by Thomas Guskey in *Principal Leadership*, Oct. 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 49-53); try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week.

3. The Making of a 90/90/90 School in Georgia

In his *New York Times* education column two weeks ago, Samuel Freedman reported on several days he spent in a remarkable elementary school in Gainesville, Georgia. The principal, Shawn Arevalo McCollough, opened the school in the summer of 2003 and found that 125 students were one or two grade levels behind in reading and math. He asked them *all* to attend after-school classes every weekday and a seven-hour session on Saturdays, creating the equivalent of eight days of school a week. The principal visited each family to persuade parents to make a commitment to send their children to the extra classes.

One third grader, Fatima Rodriguez, whose family immigrated from Mexico a year ago, missed the first Saturday session. McCollough found that Fatima was scheduled to be in church every Saturday attending classes for her first communion. He called her mother to his office and told her, "Unless God Almighty is going to teach Fatima how to read, she's got to be in our school on Saturday." (McCollough followed up by asking the local Roman Catholic priest to switch the communion classes to Friday nights.) Fatima made it to school most Saturdays from then on – not without a lot of complaining about the early hour she was roused by her parents. When she wasn't there, McCollough drove over and picked her up.

In April 2004, Fatima took the Georgia basic skills test, required for promotion to fourth grade, and she passed. Fatima made a card for her parents that said, "Thanks for waking me up." Schoolwide achievement was equally remarkable: 89 percent of students passed the state English Language Arts test and 94 percent passed the math test, making it a 90/90/90 school (90 percent children of poverty, 90 percent children of color, and 90 percent meeting rigorous external standards).

McCollough, who is part Filipino, part Spanish, and part Anglo and grew up amid poverty and low expectations in Columbia, South Carolina, has a copy of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on his desk and sees beyond the immediate struggles of his students: "I believe schools are here to change the landscape," he says, "to shift the power." In addition to his very high expectations for all students and his refusal to

accept excuses, here are some of the other moves McCollough has made at Gainesville Elementary:

- Every nine weeks, students take tests to measure their knowledge of various parts of the state curriculum. Teachers analyze the results and devote the next round of lessons to strengthening students in their weak areas.
- There is no pullout for bilingual classes; "survival skills English" is taught two hours a day for a maximum of eight weeks.
- The school is not averse to traditional pedagogy, including phonics and math drills.
- All test results are posted by grade level and individual teacher in the school and on the district's Web site.
- Fundraising from local businesses provided the money for Saturday classes; weekday after-school classes were funded by deferring the purchase of textbooks and other materials.
- Every front-office worker in the school is bilingual; so is half the faculty.
- An adult-literacy program has been established with the help of a civil rights organization.

"Politics Aside, Complex Reasons for School's Real Success" by Samuel Freedman in *The New York Times*, September 29, 2004; the article can be purchased at http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F00913F73C5C0C7A8EDDA00894DC404482&incamp=archive:search

4. Increasing the Success of Low-Achieving Math Students

Joe Slosson, a former teacher and administrator who created Math Lab (a program for underachieving students), believes students who score in the bottom quartile in middle-school math assessments have five basic problems:

- They have poor math skills and low math aptitude.
- They are never exposed to major portions of the curriculum.
- Their learning style directly conflicts with the organizational patterns in most schools, especially in math classes.
- They do not benefit from the current grading system, which allows them to earn a low grade and get credit by doing poor-quality, incomplete work.
- They tend to be the students who have the most difficult behaviors and who get the least experienced teachers.

To address these problems, Slosson recommends that schools take the following steps, which he says he has used with great success in Washington state:

• *Help students work around their math deficits*. "Accept and recognize that some students struggle with math," advises Slosson. "It doesn't do any good to tell them they would be successful if they just worked harder; they know that isn't true." To be more successful, these students need specific tools for dealing with their low skills and aptitude. They need memory tricks, mnemonic devices, and shortcuts (e.g., making their own times tables on blank paper during tests and doing their finger counting on top of the table so they can be faster and more accurate). Slosson believes that these students should not use calculators except for very big numbers.

• *Expand the curriculum*. In addition to the usual computation, decimals, percentages, and fractions, these students should be exposed to geometry, probability, graphing, charting, pattern recognition, and basic algebra emphasizing the creation of simple equations. They should also do real measuring, estimating, data collection, graphing, and calculating, and should write their answers in complete sentences. There should be an emphasis on estimating, landmark numbers, and multiplication and division by factors of 10. The curriculum should include dispersed drill and practice on basic operations, adding new skills and practicing all the skills for the entire year.

• *Change the style of instruction*. "De-emphasize direct instruction," advises Slosson. "These students are not listening, and they will not let you know that they do not understand until it is time to actually do an assignment." It's much more effective to use short bursts of instruction and quickly put students to work with short written instructions and lots of examples. Let students work in pairs or teams and get them talking about math. Increase in-class work and eliminate or decrease homework. Be more concerned about real learning than covering the whole scope and sequence: "It is far more important that these students learn a few things well than everything poorly – or not at all," he says. "Let your pacing be directed by their accomplishments. Keep them in the zone of proximal development; don't let the calendar and chapter headings determine the rate of presentation. Don't be afraid to jump around."

• *Change the grading and credit system*. Slosson recommends giving credit only for complete, quality work. "Adopt the expectation that students will complete every problem of every assignment every day," he says. "If a solution isn't right, they will need to fix it." He recognizes that these changes will not be popular with low-achieving students: "They are comfortable with the status quo and believe that they have a right to do poor-quality work." To manage a high-expectations system, teachers need to create a way of dealing with late work and get in the habit of re-

grading work until it is complete and correct. Slosson believes that students should not be allowed to take a test until they are ready, and the lowest passing grade should be in the 95-100% range, with the option to re-take parts of the test. Students should receive credit for the course only when they have completed all the quality work assigned, even if they have to carry the work over to the next semester.

• *Change the relationships within the class*. Slosson says the expectations for behavior should be at the level of "highly employable young adults. Demand that students treat their teacher as they would their supervisor in the workplace… the teacher is not the students' friend. He or she is their friendly supervisor. The students are the workers. The product they produce is skill and knowledge about math (and life). They need to work hard every day." The classroom needs to be physically and psychologically safe, and students should not be teased if they count on their fingers or look at a times table.

"When 2+2 Doesn't Equal Four" by James Slosson in *Principal Leadership*, Oct. 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 45-48); try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week.

5. Confronting Students' Misconceptions in Science

Students come to school with lots of erroneous assumptions about how the world works, and science teachers have the challenge of getting those naïve assumptions out on the table and helping students correct them and understand the real deal. This is not just about school learning and test scores; misconceptions can cause serious problems – for example, the belief that steam isn't as hot as boiling water and that cars are safe in thunderstorms because they have rubber tires – or that you're safe from lightning bolts if you are wearing sneakers.

The way science is taught makes all the difference. Traditional lecture-and-demonstration teaching rarely changes students' misconceptions and has little impact on deep understanding. Much of the science that is "taught" this way becomes inert in kids' heads and is inaccessible in their everyday lives, their future schooling, and high-stakes tests. Teaching must be more dramatic, more explicit, and more conceptual to dislodge naïve assumptions – and research has shown that lower-achieving students benefit the most from this kind of teaching. This surprises many educators, who assume that conceptual discussions will go right over slower students' heads. Not so, say the author of this article: "…there is strong evidence that unpacking thinking has the most dramatic effect for those students who would be unlikely to do it on their own."

To teach science more effectively, teachers need to take four steps (and most need support from administrators to pull this off):

- Identify the "expert patterns" inherent in the scientifically accepted explanation for a phenomenon;
- Assess how students are currently thinking about the concept;
- Figure out why students are having difficulty learning the expert patterns;
- Develop learning experiences to move students from their naïve explanations toward scientifically accepted ones.

Many of students' misconceptions about the world have to do with causality. The authors list a number of examples, along with suggestions on how to redirect their thinking:

• *Students assume that causality is deterministic* – effects always follow causes or the causal relationship is questioned (e.g., I did it before and I didn't get sick, so I'm not going to get sick now) instead of probabilistic (getting sick depends upon many things; even if I didn't get sick before, I can still get sick now).

• *Students assume that causality is spatially and temporally close to its effects* (e.g., I can't see any bad effects to getting a suntan right now) instead of distant or involving delays (the hurtful effects of getting a suntan accumulate and show up after a long delay between cause and effect).

• *Students assume that causality is linear* (e.g., when I suck on the straw, I make the juice come up), instead of nonlinear (there is less air pressure inside the straw than outside, so the imbalance results in the juice getting pushed up the straw).

• *Students assume that causality is direct without intervening steps* (e.g., green plants matter to animals that eat them but not to animals that eat the ones that eat green plants) instead of indirect (if the green plants disappeared, it would eventually affect everything in the food web).

• *Students assume that causality is unidirectional* (e.g., mice matter to owls because they make food for them, but the owls do not matter to mice) instead of bidirectional or mutual (the owls maintain balance in the mice population).

• *Students assume that causality is sequential with step-by-step processes* (e.g., the electrons crowd onto the circuit and go to each light bulb so the first one gets the most power) instead of simultaneous (the electrons move like a bicycle chain turning in a circle all at once, making the bulb light when it moves).

• Stu*dents assume that causality is constructed from obvious, perceptible variables* (e.g., the object sinks because of its weight) instead of constructed from non-obvious or imperceptible variables (density affects sinking and floating).

• *Students assume that causality is due to active or intentional agents* (e.g., the electrons move to make static electricity) instead of due to passive or unintentional ones (protons and electrons are attracted to each other; bridges stand because of balanced forces; seat belts passively cause us to stop when the car stops).

• *Students assume that causality is centralized with few agents* (e.g., the queen bee directs the activity of a beehive) instead of decentralized with distributed agency and emergent effects (the interactions of many bees result in an organized system).

"Putting Everyday Science Within Reach" by Tina Grotzer in *Principal Leadership*, Oct. 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 16-21); try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week.

6. Strategies for ADHD Students

About 3-7 percent of school-age children in the United States have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. They have chronic problems with inattention, impulsivity, or excessive physical activity; they find it difficult to remain seated and concentrate on schoolwork and frequently interrupt conversations and activities. Experts doubt that ADHD is a sign of bad parenting or an impoverished environment; it appears to have its origins in genetic and biological factors, including early lead poisoning and prenatal exposure to alcohol or tobacco smoke.

But environmental factors, including parents' and teachers' behavioral management style and the nature of classroom tasks, can play a part in exacerbating or ameliorating ADHD. Students who exhibit ADHD-like behaviors need a thorough evaluation by a trained mental health professional to determine if it's really ADHD or some other behavioral and emotional disorders that can produce similar symptoms. For students who truly have ADHD, the next step is an intervention plan. The authors of this article suggest the following steps:

• Schoolwide behavior support plans for all students are a helpful backdrop for classroom interventions for ADHD students.

• ADHD students should have a behavioral contract spelling out the student's responsibilities – and what he or she will get if these responsibilities are met (i.e., privileges at home or school).

• Whenever possible, ADHD students should be taught to monitor and evaluate their own behavior, especially if medications and behavior contracts have been successful.

• ADHD students need to learn how to take notes, complete homework, and study for tests.

• ADHD students need help making the connection between their performance in school and their future. Group sessions with a counselor or psychologist should elicit students' aptitudes and interests, their long-term goals, and the role of school success in meeting those goals.

"An ADHD Primer" by George DuPaul and George White in *Principal Leadership*, October 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 11-15), try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week.

7. Short Items:

a. A full-court press on the achievement gap – In the lead article in this month's *Kappan*, Richard Rothstein summarizes his new book, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. His basic argument (which he made frequently when he was *New York Times* education columnist) is that schools cannot do it alone. He attacks the belief that "social-class differences are immutable and that only schools can improve the destinies of lower-class children," arguing that to close the achievement gap, we must "vigorously and simultaneously" pursue three tracks:

• School improvement efforts that raise the quality of instruction in elementary and secondary schools;

• Expanding the school day and year through after-school and summer programs that are as enriching as those enjoyed by middle-class children; and high-quality early-childhood programs that address the achievement gap that is already huge when children are 3 years old.

• Improving poor children's school readiness through social and economic policies, including narrowing income inequalities, providing stable housing for low-income families (for example, by increasing Section 8 housing vouchers), and improving health services for children (for example, by providing in-school optometry clinics to diagnose and treat vision problems that prevent many low-income primary-grade children from being able to focus on the printed page, and in-

school dental clinics to alleviate the discomfort and distraction many children have from untreated cavities).

"A Wider Lens on the Black-White Achievement Gap" by Richard Rothstein in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2004 (Vol. 86, #2, p. 104-110), no e-link available.

b. Building effective teacher teams – In this column from the National Staff Development Council, Joellen Killion lists the different types of "learning teams" that teachers can be part of within their school (content area, grade-level, cluster, schoolwide, etc.) and has specific recommendations for principals for maximizing the effectiveness of teams:

• Have a clear expectation that all staff members, including administrators, will participate in one or more learning teams, and make it possible for staff members to be part of more than one team;

• Schedule the school so teams can meet within the contractual day;

• Make sure that each team is headed up by someone with leadership and facilitation skills, and have them begin by establishing norms and expectations;

• Help teams use student data to establish their goals;

• Support teams by providing them with books, access to experts, copies of teacher and student work, and student learning data;

• Provide opportunities for cross-team interaction in all-school faculty meetings or through electronic or written communication;

• Visit teams periodically and keep up with their written documentation.

"An In-House Solution" by Joellen Killion in *Principal Leadership*, Oct. 2004 (Vol. 5, #2, p. 54-55); try http://www.nassp.org/publications/pl/ in a week

c. The benefits of students attending parent-teacher conferences – A number of schools include students in parent-teacher report card conferences, and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot advocated the practice in her recent book, *The Essential Conversation*. This *Boston Globe* article reports on the experience of practitioners and research evidence and lists several advantages of student participation in these meetings:

- *Students learn to look at their work objectively and see their progress.* "This is how I wrote the alphabet in September, this is how I write it now."
- *Students learn to speak to an audience of powerful people.* This builds their self-confidence and a belief that adults will listen.

- *Students learn to accept responsibility*. This is especially important in the middle grades, where some students are less interested in school. Having to evaluate their own work in front of a teacher and a parent helps the student refocus.
- *The child's presence reduces parents' stress.* Many parents regard the traditional parent-teacher conference with dread. Three-way conferences validate the parent as an authority on their child and make it more likely that the parent will show up.

There are four important caveats for schools thinking of having students take part in parent-teacher conferences: (a) Teachers should have thoughtful training to prepare them for a different dynamic; (b) children should not be forced to attend if they don't want to; (c) there should be no rigid rules governing the process; and (d) parents should have a chance to talk to teachers privately at some point.

"A Twist on the Parent-Teacher Conference" by Barbara Meltz in *The Boston Globe*, October 7, 2004, p. H-3

d. Earning students' trust with high expectations – A panel of twenty scholars made a set of recommendations last week for a comprehensive strategy to close achievement gaps in American schools. Among their recommendations was the assertion that schools need to develop feelings of trust in students – and the panel put a different spin on trust than most other studies. One way that teachers can lose students, said Edmund Gordon, the chairman, is by lowering academic standards. "It's hard to trust someone that you begin to perceive is faking it for you," he said.

"Panel Outlines Strategy for Raising Minority Achievement" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, October 6, 2004 (Vol. 24, #6, p. 10).
http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=06gap.h24
The full report, "All Students Reading the Top: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps," is available at http://www.edweek.org/links

e. Technology training on the fly – In this insightful article, Doug Johnson, a district media and technology director in Minnesota, argues that it is ineffective and inefficient to do teacher technology training in large-group sessions and "computer boot camps." He recommends shifting from this "just in case" approach to a "just in time" philosophy – learning only what you need to know, as you need it. For computer skills, this means creating individual learning opportunities and taking advantage of the fact that the rudiments of most software programs can be learned in less than an hour with a colleague or a student. Many teachers can learn right along

with their students from a librarian or technology specialist, and online tutorials can supplement face-to-face instruction.

"No matter what the approach," cautions Johnson, "learning technology should only be one part of a broad educational goal. Learning to use a database, for instance, should be part of doing more effective assessments. Learning to use mind-mapping software such as Inspiration should be part of enhancing writing instruction. And learning to more effectively search the Web should be part of improving student research skills. In other words, the focus should be on improving professional practices, not learning to use a computer."

"Just-in-Time Training" by Doug Johnson in *Teacher Magazine*, October 2004 (Vol. XVI, #2, p. 55), no e-link available yet.

f. A report on early literacy assessment – In a report from Educational Testing Service, Jacqueline Jones argues that a single test at the end of the year is inadequate for monitoring the literacy development of elementary-grade children and evaluating the effectiveness of literacy programs. Her report advocates multiple literacy assessments, coherent professional development, and stable school leadership.

"Early Literacy Assessments: Essential Elements" spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, October 8, 2004, available in full at http://www.ets.org/research/pic/earlylit.pdf

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 aims to keep busy principals and other educators very well-informed on important research and ideas in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 years of experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, coach of principals, and writer, acts as "designated reader." Kim searches through 39 publications the week they come out, chooses the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning, and summarizes them in a brief e-mail. Some ideas will be familiar, reinforcing what readers already know; others will be new and genuinely thought-provoking.

Subscriptions:

The Marshall Memo is sent every Monday (with occasional breaks). Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year; rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for information on paying by check or credit card.

Website:

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you can get information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for issues 1-51
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

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

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
Curriculum/Education Update (ASCD)
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Harper's
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education 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.