

Marshall Memo 25

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 16, 2004

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Quotes of the Week

"Instead of trying to 'reform' a school or system, we should be creating the conditions for teams of teachers to continuously achieve (and receive recognition for) short-term wins in specific instructional areas (e.g., where assessment data indicate that students are struggling)."

Mike Schmoker, *Phi Delta Kappan* (see item #1)

"[T]he most productive thinking is continuous and simultaneous with action... as practitioners collaboratively implement, assess, and adjust instruction as it happens. The most productive combinations of thought and action occur in team-based, short-term experimental cycles."

Mike Schmoker, *ibid.*

"How do teaching and learning improve? The answer is no mystery. It's as simple as this: I cannot improve my craft in isolation from others. To improve, I must have formats, structures, and plans for reflecting on, changing, and assessing my practice [which]...must be continually tested and upgraded with my colleagues."

Carl Glickman, *Leadership for Learning*, p. 4 (quoted in Schmoker, see item #1)

"...what do we do when our (presumably terrific) lesson or strategy doesn't work with most students? What went wrong? How can we adjust the presentation, sequence, or use of time and materials to ensure great student success?"

Mike Schmoker, *ibid.*

"When we talk about student achievement and achievement gap, we generally focus on the students. That's wrong. You're never going to close it by doing that. Focus on the teachers."

Mount Vernon, New York School Superintendent Ron Ross (see item #2)

1. Making the Shift from Annual to Embedded Improvement Planning

In this seminal lead article in the new *Kappan*, Mike Schmoker (author of *Results* and *The Results Fieldbook*) launches a frontal attack on strategic, comprehensive, systemic, whole-school planning. It simply doesn't work, he says. Schmoker makes the case for a much leaner, more focused, during-the-year approach to improving student achievement that operates mainly within teacher teams.

Schmoker confesses that for two decades, he himself was caught up in the traditional type of school planning, complete with:

- Conducting wide-ranging needs assessments;
- Writing lofty-sounding vision, mission, and belief statements;
- Holding lengthy meetings to get buy-in from multiple constituencies;
- Listing goals, action steps, and objectives;
- Designating persons responsible, resources needed, evaluation, and timelines;
- Producing a fat, impressive published plan that got *pro forma* approval;

The problem was that instructional quality – and student achievement – rarely budged.

Looking back, Schmoker likens the hundreds of school plans he has seen to “beautiful but badly leaking boats” – doomed to sink with little effect on teaching and learning. The brutal fact is that traditional planning “separates thought from action” (Kouzes and Posner) – it “presumes that the most vital, high-leverage thinking is done primarily by ‘planners’ before the school year begins, rather than by teaching practitioners *throughout* the school year.”

Schmoker believes that strategic planning almost always results in overload and fragmentation because people commit to far more activities and initiatives than anyone can possibly monitor, much less complete (one guess is that less than 10 percent of what gets planned actually gets implemented). Initiatives are not vetted on the basis of their proven impact on learning but are often adopted for personal or political reasons. “In selecting the professional or staff development activities that filled our plans,” he says, “novelty and surface appeal overwhelmingly trumped evidence of school success – or any direct connection to improvements in teaching.”

Almost all of these school plans were demoralizing and incoherent, with constant confusion about key terms like “goals”, often used interchangeably with “action steps” and “objectives.” It took him a long time, Schmoker says ruefully, to realize that goals needed to be simple, measurable statements linked to student assessments, and that the number of goals had to be severely limited. Without this self-discipline,

he believes, strategic planning is a waste of time for school people – who cannot afford to waste a minute.

So what does Schmoker suggest? “The dumb (if unsexy) certainties of having teams of teachers implement, assess, and adjust instruction in short-term cycles of improvement – not annually, but continuously.” He believes that schools need to give teacher teams a good deal of professional autonomy – in the context of clear accountability for meeting explicit goals for student learning. “Effective teachers must see themselves not as passive, dependent implementers of someone else’s script but as active members of research teams – as ‘scientists who continuously develop their intellectual and investigative effectiveness.’”

Schmoker is convinced that the failure of much “reform” activity to raise student achievement is due to the fact that school people haven’t been focusing on the “on-going, messy work of improving teaching.” To remedy this situation we need to zero in on the areas where assessments tell us that students are having the most difficulty and “replace complex, long-term plans with simpler plans that focus on actual teaching lessons and units created in true ‘learning communities’ that promote team-based, short-term thought and action... The key is for teams of professionals to achieve and celebrate a succession of small, quick victories in vital areas... The cumulative effect of such small, ongoing ‘wins’ is the surest route to annual achievement gains.” Schmoker contends that schools’ big-picture thinking and “systemic reform” efforts should concentrate on getting teams of teachers to do just this.

Schmoker has especially harsh criticism for what he calls the “feckless” staff development practices in most American schools. Here, he says, the brutal facts have not yet been confronted as districts continue to offer “a large but unfocused menu of workshops, courses, and ‘awareness’ sessions” covering the “hot topics” of the day and then evaluate their effectiveness primarily on how many teachers show up and whether teachers say they enjoy them. He quotes Richard Stiggins as saying that “Workshops will not work...” because they “do not permit the application of and experimentation with new assessment ideas in real classrooms, and sharing that experience with other colleagues in a team effort.”

What happens when teachers collaborate in this way? Judith Warren Little has documented the results:

- There are higher-quality solutions to instructional problems.
- Teachers become increasingly confident in their own efficacy.

- Teachers are more able to support one another's strengths and accommodate each other's weaknesses.
- Beginning teachers get more systematic help.
- Teachers have a continually expanding pool of ideas, methods, and materials to draw upon.

Schmoker contends that these practices are not rocket science, and can be implemented by any leader, not just the rare individual with great charisma. The result will be "remarkable gains" in student achievement.

"Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement" by Mike Schmoker, *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2004 (Vol. 85, #6, p. 424-432), no e-link available, but Mike Schmoker can be reached at schmoker@futureone.com

2. Closing the Achievement Gap in Mount Vernon, New York

In this article, John Merrow, an education reporter for PBS, sings the praises of Lincoln School in Mt. Vernon, NY, an 800-student K-6 school where the achievement gap has been virtually erased: last year, 99 percent of its diverse urban students met state standards on the Grade 4 New York assessments in English, math, and science. The principal, George Albano, has been at the helm for 25 years, and Merrow describes the practices that seem to have made a difference:

- *Great and dedicated teachers* – Albano works constantly to bring in teachers with special expertise. The staff includes a former NSAS administrator and a former executive of a Fortune 500 company, as well as a professional opera singer and a chess master – and many outstanding "regular" teachers. Most teachers have been at the school for 15 years or more, despite the fact that they could be making 20 percent more in nearby school districts. What do they do when a student doesn't get it? According to several students, their response is, "Do you want to stay after school with me and I'll help you?" or "Can you stay in at recess?" or "Can I tutor you?"

- *Teacher teamwork* – Although this was not mentioned in the article, I contacted Merrow by e-mail and he said that teacher collaboration was indeed a key factor in Lincoln School's success and he had neglected to mention it. Teachers said that Albano "empowers us, and he delegates tasks. He makes us feel important, and he gives us a lot of respect. And that's what keeps us going."

- *A thoughtful approach to testing* – The school eschews the drill-drill-drill of many inner-city schools, instead integrating the state curriculum into all parts of the school day and year (including music and gym). When the state tests roll around, students feel confident and prepared without any special "test prep." One fifth grader

who had taken the state tests the year before said, "I know they taught me everything I'm supposed to know, and I know I know it, so I just go and take the test like it's a regular test." Students said that the teachers seemed more nervous than the kids.

- *An integrated curriculum* – Albano believes in teaching values. "I don't care how good you are on a test," he says, "If you can't live with your neighbor, then I don't think you've been taught."

- *Lots of art, music, and physical education* – The school is alive with musical performances and art exhibits – integrating core curriculum wherever possible.

- *A willingness to bend and break the rules in the interests of students* – Years ago, Albano decided to require that parents come to the school to pick up their children's report cards. "If parents do not come," said Albano, "as far as I'm concerned, they should be in court for educational neglect." Some parents objected and the central office told him to knock it off, but he persisted and now gets 99 percent of parents up for conferences. The superintendent, interviewed by Merrow, could only chuckle in admiration: "You show me a principal who follows the book on everything, and I'll show you a lousy principal. You can't make a good school by following the rules."

- *The complete refusal to let any child fail to learn* – Albano knows that there are huge "opportunity gaps" for many of his students, but he has created a school-wide "no excuses" attitude. If a teacher said "I covered the material, but the kids didn't learn it," Albano would educate that teacher – or make a change. He tells parents, "When your child comes to school, he or she comes to an oasis. I think we have an obligation that, no matter what's happening outside, we have to push that aside and make this youngster succeed."

- *A strong, focused principal* – Albano is clearly a remarkable leader. Merrow calls him "Superman" throughout the article, but is troubled by the idea that it takes a Superman or Wonder Woman to turn around troubled schools. "If it does," writes Merrow, "we are in big trouble, because they're in short supply." But Albano's practices are straightforward and commonsense and don't seem out of reach to other school leaders who are not afraid to work hard.

Here's how Merrow sums it up: "George Albano works hard to dig up extra resources to close the 'opportunity gap,' and he only hires teachers who expect the best from every child, which eliminates any 'expectations gap.' Then, magically, the 'outcomes gap' disappears."

"Meeting Superman" by John Merrow in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2004 (Vol. 85, #6, p. 455-460), no e-link available.

3. “Lesson Study” in Action in New Jersey

An article in this week’s *Education Week* reports on a team of fourth-grade teachers in a K-8 school in Patterson, New Jersey who are using Japanese “lesson study” to craft, pilot-test, and refine lessons to address specific student needs. Patterson is one of the first American districts to implement lesson study, which is called *jugyou kenkyuu* (literally “research lessons”) in Japan and has been used there for fifty years. The idea was introduced to American educators in the 1990s, most notably in *The Teaching Gap*, a 1999 book by James Stigler and James Hiebert that attributed the outstanding performance of Japanese elementary students in international comparisons to the way in which teacher teams worked to polish lessons to meet specific learning goals. Lesson study is so much a part of the culture of Japanese schools that it is not considered anything special – it’s just something you do as a teacher.

Over the last five years, lesson study had been enthusiastically adopted by nearly all the teachers in the Patterson, NJ school. “It’s the greatest thing I’ve ever done personally as professional development,” said William Jackson, the school’s math facilitator. He thinks it is working because teachers are collaborating on solutions that apply in their own diverse classrooms.

Grade-level teams have lesson study meetings once a week while their students are in gym, art, music, and other specialty subjects. At the beginning of each 12-week cycle, teachers look at the entire instructional unit, analyze how the textbooks approach the concepts they are about to teach, and look at how the topic is taught in the surrounding grades. Teachers then choose a particular area of challenge or difficulty for students and construct a lesson to address to address it. When the lesson is ready, one teacher teaches it while the others observe. The lesson is then refined by the group and tested with a second group of students. “This way,” said Jill Precel, a sixth-grade teacher, “you learn to anticipate the shortcomings and the children who may not catch what you’re doing. You teach to all the possibilities, where you might not have before.” Afterward, each teacher team writes a report describing their thinking processes and what they learned from their trial-and-error experiences. These reports, along with videotapes of the lessons, are kept in the school library.

For the Patterson teachers, the most difficult part has been opening up their classrooms to other teachers (and to visitors from other schools and districts). “We are so used to being self-contained and in our own world,” said Geri Dickinson, a 4th-grade teacher. But fears and tensions dissipated over time as teachers learned to focus

more on what students were doing and learning than on the teacher at the front of the room, and the school now has mostly an open-door culture.

How has lesson study changed classroom practices? The 4th-grade team profiled in this article adopted math textbooks from Singapore that focused on fewer topics in more depth. They also eliminated certain math manipulatives that seemed to be distracting students from learning the most important points of the lesson. And lesson study seems to have changed the way teachers think about their craft. “Obviously, you can’t do it all the time,” said Jill Prechel. “But once you’ve had that kind of thinking put before you, it’s hard to turn around and teach any other way.”

“In ‘Lesson Study’ Sessions, Teachers Polish Their Craft” by Debra Viadero, *Education Week*, February 11, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #22, p. 8)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=22Lesson.h23>

4. Multiple Intelligences Theory Twenty Years Down the Road

The entire January issue of *Teachers College Record* (220 pages!) is devoted to 17 articles on the theory of multiple intelligences on the twentieth anniversary of its inception. The last article is by Howard Gardner himself, sharing his astonishment at the theory’s widespread impact and his thoughts about the future. Here are some highlights from the articles:

- The latest update on the distinct human intelligences includes these eight, each associated with specific neuropsychological systems:

- Linguistic intelligence
- Logical/mathematical intelligence
- Musical intelligence
- Kinesthetic intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Naturalist intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence

- When it was first introduced in 1984, multiple intelligences theory was a radically new approach to human intelligence. Despite all the research and writing, the theory has never been accepted in the field of psychology, where most experts continue to embrace the theory of general intelligence (*g*) and don’t consider the evidence for multiple intelligences conclusive.

- However, multiple intelligence theory struck a responsive chord in schools around the world. Howard Gardner continues to be amazed at the impact of his original book, *Frames of Mind* (1984), which was not written for a general audience.

- Thousands of multiple intelligences programs are in progress in classrooms on six continents, some of them faithful to Gardner's theory (notably the Key School in Indianapolis) and some of them so far off base (including one in Australia that speculated on the allocation of intelligences between racial groups) that Gardner has publicly refuted them.

- Multiple intelligences are distinct from learning styles. The latter describes students' learning preferences, while multiple intelligences describe deeper abilities associated with creating a product, providing a service, or solving a problem.

- Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of a number of educators, multiple intelligences theory has not changed the classroom practices of most teachers in most classrooms. As Larry Cuban argues in his essay (p. 140-146), standard practice in American classrooms is very resistant to fundamental change.

- There is no track record for multiple intelligences theory bringing about marked improvements in student achievement or closing the achievement gap.

- The lack of systemic impact may have something to do with the fact that Howard Gardner and his colleagues at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education shied away from developing a set of assessments for the seven (now eight) intelligences and never put in place a field support staff (in the way, for example, that Robert Slavin did for his brainchild, Success for All). Gardner has been satisfied to launch interesting ideas and let educators around the world run with them.

- Howard Gardner is now working on a project with William Damon and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on the ethical dimension of human behavior – how intelligence, creativity, and leadership relate to responsibility, morality, and ethics (see <http://www.goodworkproject.org> for an update of their work). Gardner concludes his essay with these words:

I make no apology for having spent decades in the study of intelligence; it is and remains an important topic. But if at the end of the day, our intelligences are not yoked to a sense of responsibility, then we will not have a world in which most of us would like to live, and perhaps we will not have a world at all. I hope that one dividend of this new work will be a better understanding of how to

nurture young people capable of work that is equally distinguished in terms of its excellence and its ethical dimensions.

Teachers College Record, January 2004 (Vol. 106, #1). Some of the articles may be accessible on line in the weeks ahead at <http://www.tcrecord.org>

5. Addressing Childhood Depression

A centerfold article in the current *Education Week* addresses the issue of clinical depression in school-age children. Most experts believe that 3 percent of children and 8 percent of adolescents suffer from depression (and most them also suffer from another mental disorder). Of depressed students, two-thirds receive no treatment for their illness. Nearly 70 percent of students who have a major depressive episode will relapse when they are adults; 20-40 percent will relapse within two years.

What should educators look for? Symptoms include persistent sadness, irritability, loss of appetite, feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, lack of concentration, and poor sleeping patterns. In the classroom, some depressed students do poorly because they are not motivated to learn, are hypersensitive to criticism, and have such low self-esteem that they cannot appreciate their accomplishments. Some depressed students appear to be doing fine in school, coping with their troubled feelings by becoming perfectionists or overachievers – tactics that can lead to emotional meltdowns later on when they do not achieve perfection.

Depressed students need to be identified and treated. “If it were handled early, we could snap that cycle,” says Erika Karres, a retired North Carolina teacher who advocates for school-based mental-health programs. But many schools do not have the staff. School psychologists and counselors often have too many students to cover and are so consumed with testing students for disabilities and learning problems that they are not able to screen the general population for issues like depression. Even when students are identified, there is sometimes resistance to medications. The article describes an aggressive anti-meds organization in one part of California.

But action is essential. “[Depression] is such a serious, lifelong, life-altering illness,” says the mother of a boy who was diagnosed, went through therapy, and eventually needed medication. “It affects one physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Even when you know what depression is, it’s hard to conquer. And for kids, it’s even more baffling because they don’t have any point of reference.”

“Lifelong Battle” by Marianne Hurst, *Education Week*, February 11, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #22, p. 22-25) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=22Depression.h23>

6. The U.S. Navy's Approach to Staffing Challenging Duty Posts

In many urban districts, the schools that need the best and the brightest teachers often get the least experienced and least effective. How can these districts staff their most challenging schools without violating collective bargaining agreements that give more senior teachers the right to transfer to more “desirable” schools? “Combat pay” for all teachers in struggling schools has proven ineffective, since it subsidizes some ineffective teachers; offering financial incentives to teachers to work in needy schools is expensive and cannot guarantee that teachers who apply are the best match for challenging classrooms.

In an intriguing article on the back page of the current *Education Week*, Donald Cymrot reports that the U.S. Navy is experimenting with a program to address a similar problem of coaxing the right sailors into unpopular duty posts. Having tried a number of unsuccessful approaches (including *ordering* sailors into those posts), the Navy is now using an eBay-like auction system that allows sailors to bid for vacancies in unpopular jobs; the bid each sailor makes is the stipend he or she would like to be paid on top of the regular salary. The idea behind the auction is that not all “bad” assignments are equally bad for all individuals; the auction gives sailors a way to express their preferences.

The range of bids for a particular unpopular posting might range from \$0 a month (the sailor would take it without any extra pay) to \$100. At the end of the bidding period, the officer in charge of making assignments picks the winner, but it's not just a question of what's cheapest for the Navy: the officer also looks at the past performance of each bidder, professional development, and other skills. This system does produce inequities – sailors getting unequal pay for equal work – but because it is voluntary and above-board, this seems not to have been a problem.

How could this system be used in an urban school district? The district would first have to decide which teaching positions in which schools would be included, who could bid and how much, and what criteria would be used to pick the winners. The principal might be given the power to choose among the candidates, or the central office might prefer to maintain that prerogative. Cymrot thinks it might be a good idea for school districts to make an extra-pay assignment of fixed duration (say 3 or 4 years) and have a re-bidding at the end of the cycle, with the incumbent not necessarily assured of the job in the next round.

Summing up his argument, Cymrot writes, “Targeting pay to the most productive workers or to those who fill the most difficult jobs is one way to increase

the effectiveness of a personnel system without breaking the budget. Adapting the experimental Navy system to help reallocate the experience mix and teacher talents to the poorest schools could help those students most likely to be left behind by the current system.”

“Bidding for Talent” by Donald Cymrot, *Education Week*, February 11, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #22, p. 44) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=22cymrot.h23>

7. Master and Commander in the Principal’s Office

Parker Damon has seen the hit movie, “Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World,” and likes the view of leadership articulated by Captain Jack Aubrey (played by Russell Crowe): it’s about courage, respect, and inner strength. Damon spells out Aubrey’s leadership qualities in more detail. The captain displays:

- Energy, visibility, a sense of humor, and a love of being the leader;
- Willingness, even pleasure, in doing hard, difficult, and unpleasant work and not always assigning it to someone else;
- Courage in dangerous, hostile, and stressful situations, and courage to take risks;
- Inner strength-purpose-conviction-clarity of purpose/ goals;
- Respect for others as individuals, for the jobs they have to do, and as members of the community, and an understanding of the culture;
- Ability to make clear what is expected, to provide immediate, appropriate, and tangible rewards, and make consequences for unacceptable behavior fair, swift, and understood;
- Understanding the importance of interpersonal relationships;
- Ability to tell an interesting story and use oral language to have others understand the purpose and importance of their joint efforts and understand controversial decisions;
- Understanding of others’ capabilities and providing support to enable them to be successful; didn’t abandon them in times of need;
- Ability to delegate responsibility and a willingness to ask for and take advice;
- Knowledge about how to do many different things and ability to lead by doing what others are expected to do;
- Ability to work with people of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities;
- Ability to admit error gracefully, accept blame honestly, and acknowledge complicity for being a part of a mistake directly;

- A variety of interests and abilities other than his/her primary responsibility such as: musician, minister, comforter, storyteller, reader, nurse, coach, advisor, supporter of another's interests.

Damon concludes: "Schools and districts need their own Jack Aubreys, not cookie-cutter adherents to a list of generic expectations."

"The Principal as Master and Commander of His or Her Domain" by Parker Damon in *Principal View*, Winter 2004 (a publication of the Massachusetts Elementary Principals' Association and Massachusetts Elementary School Principals' Education Foundation) (Vol. 18, #2, p. 8-9), no e-link available.

8. Short Items:

- *Beefing up the American diploma* – A new study says that states need tougher high-school diploma requirements more geared to the realities of the college and the workplace. The American Diploma Project, sponsored by Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, interviewed more than 300 college officials and employers, looked at employment data, and put forward standards that go far beyond what most states now require for high-school graduation. Some examples from the English benchmarks:

- Demonstrate control of standard English through the use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
- Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauruses, and glossaries (print and electronic) to determine the definition, pronunciation, etymology, spelling, and usage of words.
- Use roots, affixes, and cognates to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Use context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Identify the meaning of common idioms, as well as literary, classical, and biblical allusions and use them in oral and written communication.
- Recognize nuances in the meanings of words; choose words precisely to enhance communication.
- Comprehend and communicate quantitative, technical, and mathematical information.

"State Must Beef Up Diploma Demands, Study Maintains" by Lynn Olson, *Education Week*, February 11, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #22, p. 1, 9); also "Study Says U.S. Should Set High-School Standards" by Karen Arenson, *New York Times*, February 10, 2004. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=22Diploma.h23> The full study is at:

• *The importance of a good school library* – School libraries are suffering in the current round of budget cuts. This article in the International Reading Association member newspaper makes the case for keeping a high-quality library, citing studies linking libraries (schoolwide and classroom, along with frequent book borrowing) to higher student achievement. Specifically, the article advocates:

- Staff school libraries with professional and support staff.
- Stock libraries with current books and licensed databases as well as computers for Internet use.
- Fund libraries to support the school's curriculum and the state standards.
- Adopt flexible scheduling.
- Use the school computer network to extend the library program's reach into every classroom.

"Libraries Called Key" in *Reading Today*, February/March 2004 (Vol. 21, #4, p. 1, 4)
http://www.reading.org/publications/rty/0402_libraries.html

• *Choosing an ideal doctor and teacher* – In an article on waves of school reform over time, Diane Ravitch quotes this passage from the writing of William Chandler Bagley of Teachers College, who, she says, "entered the field of educational psychology in the late 19th century with the hope and expectation that one day there would be a genuine science of education." Can you guess what he concluded?

If I were seriously ill and in desperate need of a physician, and if by some miracle I could secure either Hippocrates, the father of medicine, or a young doctor fresh from the Johns Hopkins school of medicine, with his equipment comprising the latest developments in the technologies and techniques of medicine, I should, of course, take the young doctor. On the other hand, if I were commissioned to find a teacher for a group of adolescent boys and if, by some miracle, I could secure either Socrates or the latest Ph.D. from Teachers College, with his equipment of the latest technologies and techniques of teaching, with all due respect to the college that employs me and to my students, I am fairly certain that I would jump at the chance to get Socrates.

“Recycling Reforms” by Diane Ravitch in *Education Next*, Winter 2004 (Vol. 4, #1, p. 34-40) <http://www.educationnext.org/20041/34.html>

- *An angry voice from Queens* – New York City middle-school teacher R.M. Stein wrote a bitter, impassioned article in *The Daily News* last week accusing Deputy Chancellor Diana Lam and her staff development experts of telling teachers not to give spelling tests (because they strike fear, do not relate experience, and produce a distaste for language), correct students’ work with red ink (too aggressive), and teach grammar (too dull). Stein said his supervisors cared only about visitor-oriented bulletin boards and mission statements and seemed unwilling to acknowledge that anything other than “progressive” teaching practices could produce results. Commenting on Stein’s article, *The Education Gadfly* (a weekly newsletter sent out by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation) accused New York leaders of mandating superficial activity and quoted former IBM chief Lou Gerstner: “Never confuse activity with results.”

The Education Gadfly, February 12, 2004. The original article was “Klein’s Educrats Undermine Good Teaching” by R.M. Stein, *The Daily News*, February 9, 2004 <http://www.nydailynews.com/02-09-2004/news/story/162556p-142533c.html>

- *Why girls fight* – In her new book, *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls*, Lyn Mikel Brown asserts that name-calling, gossip, and cruel competition are not natural behaviors for girls. Based on 400 interviews, Brown concluded that these behaviors occur because girls hear strong messages from the media and society that to be popular and successful, they must conform to certain ideals of femininity, beauty, and romance. Many girls conclude that they cannot trust other girls because they are in competition with them. The result is mean, aggressive behavior. The solution: help girls feel more confident and powerful in their own right, including proficiency in sports and honing their sense of fairness and justice.

“Competition – The Fear That Makes Girls Feud” by Jennifer Wolcott, *Christian Science Monitor*, January 27, 2004 (from *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Feb. 6, 2004). The original article is at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0127/p12s01-bogn.html>

- *Capitalizing on teachable moments* – Educators for Social Responsibility has opened a new website to help teachers take advantage of “teachable moments” by giving them fresh classroom readings and activities on issues in the news (e.g., the Iraq war and the presidential campaign). The website encourages inquiry, dialogue, and thoughtful reflection and also includes resources to improve students’ conflict

resolution skills. See <http://www.teachablemoment.org> (from *PEN Weekly Newsblast*, February 13, 2004)

- *Wait a minute – don't spit out that gum!* Kenneth Allen, a dentistry professor at N.Y.U., has concluded that a pack-a-day chewing gum habit may make the difference in school achievement. He recently conducted a study among 56 dentistry students comparing CD-ROM instruction with lecture teaching and, incidentally, gum-chewing with no gum allowed. The (sugarless) gum-chewers scored an average of B- on the written component while abstainers averaged a C+ (the CD-ROM learners, incidentally, scored slightly better than the lecture audience). Theories abound on why this might be true: does chewing help maintain mental focus (think of baseball players)? Does the continual jaw motion increase the heart rate and get more oxygen to the brain? Allen is conducting a follow-up study with more subjects and will report soon.

“Chew On” by Ben McGrath in *The Talk of the Town, You Don't Say Department, The New Yorker*, February 9, 2004

http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/?040209ta_talk_mcgrath

Correction:

In Marshall Memo 23, item #1, page 4, I quoted a study that said “boys who entered school with a tendency toward aggressive behavior had odds of 3 to 1 of being highly aggressive in middle school if they were in orderly classrooms, and a 59 to 1 chance if they had been assigned to chaotic classrooms.”

A sharp-eyed reader noted that I must not be a gambler, because “low odds indicate that the ‘unit on which you are betting’ is more likely to win or, in this case, become highly aggressive. High odds mean that the ‘unit’ is less likely to win or become highly aggressive. High odds are what are commonly referred to as ‘long shots.’

“Maybe it was the authors’ way of expressing themselves. Either way, the metaphors are mixed. The result is probably just the opposite of what the study shows. If they mean that the aggressive child is less likely to become highly aggressive in an orderly classroom, it must be stated differently... Just avoid the gambling terms.”

Many thanks for the clarification! Now I’m off to the dog track.

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item

in the last week that you think should be covered,

please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/ economic achievement gap; the innate-ability / intelligence / effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

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
Harpers
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
Middle School Journal
New York Times
New Yorker
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

If one of the summaries is of particular interest, subscribers are encouraged to read the full article. E-links will be provided whenever possible. If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

Subscriptions:

The Marshall Memo is sent every Monday (with occasional breaks). Subscriptions are \$50 a year. Reduced rates for institutional subscriptions can be negotiated. Contact Kim at kim.marshall8@verizon.net or 222 Clark Road, Brookline, MA 02445 (617-566-4353).