

# Marshall Memo 658

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

October 24, 2016

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## Quotes of the Week

“Why are you here on this planet? What is your function? What is your responsibility? That’s how I was brought up, and that’s what I’ve been doing.”

Performance artist Marina Abramovic in a “Life’s Work” interview with Alison Beard in *Harvard Business Review*, November 2016 (Vol. 94, #11, p. 116)

“It’s not that I’m becoming a new person. I’m just doing different things. I’m trying to get that positive jacket. I’m trying to throw that on for a change. I’m doing this for my family and people who said I couldn’t do it. People who still don’t believe I can do it. Most importantly, I’m doing it for myself.”

Giovanne Morris, a student at Boston’s Bunker Hill Community College, in a speech to College Bound Dorchester students describing his journey from prison to college, “In Boston, Guiding Former Gang Members from Prison to Promise” by Katherine Mangan in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 21, 2016 (Vol. LXIII, #6, p. A6)

“Boys need continuing, serious guidance about sexual ethics, reciprocity, respect. Rather than silence or swagger, they need models of masculinity that are not grounded in domination or aggression.”

Peggy Orenstein (see item #1)

“Math isn’t just about calculations or memorizing formulas. Math is everywhere we look. It’s in the science behind a perfect football spiral, the velocity of a game-winning three-point shot in basketball. It’s in the ratio of ingredients you measure when you’re cooking. It’s even in how you budget to save for your first car. When I was a kid, I didn’t realize that math was training my brain to solve these types of problems.”

John Urschel, an offensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens and a doctoral student in mathematics at M.I.T., in “The Winning Equation in Math Education,” *Education Week*, October 12, 2016 (Vol. 36, #8, p. 23), [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)

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## 1. What Are Kids Learning from the Presidential Campaign?

In this *New York Times* article, author Peggy Orenstein reflects on how the *Access Hollywood* video of Donald Trump and Billy Bush has sparked a nationwide conversation on sexual harassment and consent. “Certainly, such behavior is not representative of men, not by a long shot,” says Orenstein. “Yet neither is it entirely atypical. Sexual coercion, in one form or another, is as American as that baseball metaphor – a metaphor that sees girls’ limits as a challenge boys should overcome.” For many of the high-school girls and college women Orenstein interviewed for her book, *Girls and Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape* (Harper, 2016) “enduring a certain level of manhandling was a ticket to a social life... I’ve listened to girls try to make sense of feeling like objects: Was it empowering or the opposite and under what circumstances? I’ve also realized – known all along, really – that they were neither the only ones struggling, nor solely responsible for solutions.”

Orenstein warns that “if we see this moment as exclusively about girls’ and women’s rights, we are bound to repeat the cycle.” The current imbroglio, she says, has “unwittingly provided grist for a more radical, challenging discussion: about what it means – what it should mean, what it could mean – to be a man, a discussion that must continue in public and in our homes...” Interviewing boys and young men, Orenstein has found them confused and uncertain, eager to fit in yet troubled by assumptions and expectations about masculinity. Some want to speak up when peers make crude, degrading remarks about women, but playing along or remaining silent can be a way of being seen as a man. In the often-revived musical *Grease*, a chorus of girls, giddy about Sandy’s romance, sings, “Tell me more! Tell me more! Was it love at first sight?” and the boys’ chorus sings, “Tell me more! Tell me more! Did she put up a fight?” Orenstein comments, “Despite the progress women have made since the 1950s, when the show was set, or even 1971, when the original musical was written, some things have not changed.”

What lesson will young men draw from the widespread condemnation of Trump’s words? “‘Don’t sexually assault women’ (or for that matter, ‘Don’t get a girl pregnant’) is an awfully low bar for acceptable behavior,” says Orenstein. “It does little to address the complexity of boys’ lives, the presumption of their always-down-for-it sexuality, the threat of being called a ‘p----’ if you won’t grab one, the collusion that comes with keeping quiet. Boys need continuing, serious guidance about sexual ethics, reciprocity, respect. Rather than silence or swagger, they need models of masculinity that are not grounded in domination or aggression.”

What can schools do? California has made lessons on sexual consent mandatory for high-school students. Orenstein says the Unitarian Universalist Church's *Our Whole Lives* and The Population Council's *It's All One* are models of positive, comprehensive sex education. And there are clever resources on the Internet, including the viral video comparing sexual consent to a cup of tea and "The Sexually Enlightened R&B Song."

"How to Be a Man in the Age of Trump" by Peggy Orenstein in *The New York Times*, October 16, 2016, <http://nyti.ms/2f9xNHe>; Orenstein can be reached at [peggyorenstein@comcast.net](mailto:peggyorenstein@comcast.net).

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## 2. Tuning Schools to the Adolescent Brain

In this article in *Education Week*, psychologist/author Thomas Armstrong reminds us of the three layers of the human brain, "this incredible three-pound organism designed by nature over hundreds of thousands of years to react with excitement and awe to the amazing world that stretches out before it":

- Brain stem – Survival, reproduction, fight/flight, body functions;
- Limbic system – Emotions, connections to others;
- Prefrontal cortex – Planning, decision-making, self-monitoring, impulse-control.

The limbic system has matured by a person's teens, but the prefrontal cortex doesn't develop fully till the early 20s. This means adolescents tend to act on impulses not tempered by mature reflection and restraint.

"Research indicates that while adolescents are able to reason like adults by the age of 15 or 16," says Armstrong, "they can do this only under 'cold cognition' settings (e.g., where there is no emotional pull or peer influence). When they're around their peers or in an emotionally charged situation ('hot cognition'), teens' prefrontal-cortex functions don't work as well, which is why a teenager will respond affirmatively to an anti-drug curriculum in the classroom, but then go out and smoke weed with his friends at night... Neuroscience research tells us that the teenage brain is exquisitely sensitive to environmental influences. This neuroplasticity makes it vulnerable to a wide range of societal dangers – traffic accidents, drug abuse, suicide, violence. But it also makes it acutely sensitive to the influences of teachers..."

Armstrong believes these insights about the brain have several implications for secondary schools:

- *Curriculum* – Schools should orchestrate learning experiences that include metacognition, goal-setting, planning, working memory, reflection on one's learning, and frequent opportunities to make responsible decisions. School should put teens in classroom interactions with their peers that help them integrate impulsiveness, energy, and peer connections with their developing ability to reason and reflect.

- *Out-of-school experiences* – Students should be involved in apprenticeships, internships, service learning, community-based learning, small peer-learning groups, entrepreneur-based learning, and student-directed projects.

- *Metacognition* – Students need to be explicitly taught how their brains work, how to use that knowledge to direct their learning and stay out of trouble, and how to regulate their feelings under stressful and tempting situations.

- *Stress reduction* – “Research suggests that the adolescent brain – subject to the vagaries of dopamine (which connects to reward and pleasure) and serotonin (which connects to well-being and happiness) in the brain – is more susceptible to stress than the brains of either children or adults,” says Armstrong. This suggests that adolescents benefit greatly from mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and frequent aerobic activity.

Based on what we’ve learned about the adolescent brain, Armstrong believes schools should stop doing the following:

- Delivering content through lectures and textbooks that fail to engage students;
- Public posting of grades and test scores in ways that humiliate some students in front of their peers;
- Locking students into a college-bound program that takes away their ability to make decisions about what interests them most;
- Providing insufficient physical education and movement during the school day.

“‘Brain-Friendly’ Practices for Adolescent Success” by Thomas Armstrong in *Education Week*, October 12, 2016 (Vol. 36, #8, p. 28, 24), [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)

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### **3. Dealing with Chronic Stress and Burnout**

“Burnout can often feel insurmountable,” says consultant/coach/researcher Monique Valcour in this *Harvard Business Review* article. It’s been linked to anxiety, sleep disturbances, feelings of futility and alienation, problems with relationships, depression, increased alcohol and drug use, hypertension, and coronary artery disease. “But the sense of being overwhelmed is a signal, not a long-term sentence,” says Valcour. The key is “noticing and acknowledging the symptoms, examining the underlying causes, and developing preventive strategies to counteract your particular pattern of burnout.”

Three components are often associated with a job that a person dislikes, doesn’t have the necessary skills to do well, and/or lacks control over. A person’s burnout profile might be composed of one or more of these:

- Exhaustion – Profound physical, cognitive, and emotional fatigue that makes it impossible to work effectively, see the big picture, and feel positive about the job.
- Cynicism – Feeling detached, negative, even callous about work, which can come from overload or from conflict, unfairness, and not being part of decisions.
- Inefficacy – Feeling unsuccessful, unproductive, even incompetent, which can come from exhaustion and cynicism and also from not having the resources to excel.

Valcour recommends doing a careful analysis of what’s going on (perhaps recording subjective feelings throughout the day), then taking four steps to address the problem:

- *Prioritize self-care.* Physical and emotional energy can be replenished by good sleep habits, nutrition, exercise, social connections, and practices that promote equanimity and well-being – for example, meditation, journaling, and enjoying nature.

- *Shift your perspective.* “What aspects of your situation are truly fixed, and which can you change?” asks Valcour. This might lead to delegating some tasks, reshaping the job to gain more control, focusing on more-fulfilling tasks, shielding yourself from the parts of the organization that are frustrating, stepping up to leadership opportunities, building positive, supportive relationships, working on improving your personal brand, or perhaps quitting and seeking a more-fulfilling job.

- *Reduce exposure to job stressors.* If there are some aspects of the work that are predictably leading to burnout, you may want to restructure them, set new ground rules, or stop doing them. “You have to know when saying no is the right answer,” said one stressed-out executive. “And it takes courage and conviction to stick to your guns and not feel guilty.”

- *Seek out connections.* “Find coaches and mentors who can help you identify and activate positive relationships and learning opportunities,” advises Valcour. “Volunteering to advise others is another particularly effective way of breaking out of a negative cycle.”

“Managing Yourself, Beating Burnout” by Monique Valcour in *Harvard Business Review*, November 2016 (Vol. 94, #11, p. 98-101), <https://hbr.org/2016/11/beating-burnout>

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#### **4. Effective Use of Teacher-Evaluation Rubrics**

In this chapter in *Rubric Nation: Critical Inquiries on the Impact of Rubrics in Education* (edited by Michelle Tenam-Zemach and Joseph Flynn, Jr.), Kim Marshall describes his first exposure to rubrics in the mid-1990s, his thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of existing teacher-evaluation rubrics, and the process he went through to write his own rubric in 2006. He then suggests approaches to the most effective use of rubrics:

- *Introducing a teacher-evaluation rubric to skeptical educators* – Marshall believes that the general/particular/general strategy is the best way to overcome the initial “Holy cow!” reaction that often greets multi-page rubrics, alternating between big-picture ideas and granular detail. Here’s a step-by-step guide; participants should have a hard copy of the rubric in their hands and, ideally, be able to follow each step on a screen:

- Briefly review the rubric’s domains and rating scale. This gives a sense of how the rubric organizes the vast territory of teaching, the number of rating levels (usually four), and their labels (e.g., Highly Effective, Effective, Improvement Necessary, Does Not Meet Standards).
- Have everyone turn to one page of the rubric and silently read only the Effective level. This gives a clear sense that Effective is good, solid, expected professional practice and begins to address the common push-back from teachers who have always been told they’re “excellent.”

- Pick a row on that rubric page and read the descriptions from right to left. This gives the flavor of the rubric's writing style and the progression from less-than-effective to highly effective teaching in one specific area.
- Show item by item how a particular teacher (perhaps the presenter) would score on that page of the rubric – probably a mixed bag of effective and less-than-effective ratings – and eyeball the overall rating for the page.
- Show a one-page display of that teacher's ratings on all pages of the rubric, the summary page at the end, and 2-3 possible improvement goals flowing from the evaluation.
- Have participants think of a teacher they know well and score the teacher silently on one page of the rubric. "A room full of educators usually gets very quiet as people fill out the page," says Marshall.
- When everyone is finished (this usually takes only 3-4 minutes), ask for the overall bottom-of-page ratings of the teachers scored and whether there were any top scores. Usually there are very few overall scores at the highest level but a scattering of top-level scores on individual items.
- Invite participants to engage in small-group discussion about the pluses and minuses of using rubrics to evaluate teachers.
- Then invite whole-group sharing, first of the advantages, then the disadvantages. This invariably produces a solid list of positive points (shared language about good and not-so-good teaching, standards-based evaluations, specific descriptions of performance, self-assessment, less paperwork for administrators) and several cautionary notes (what if there aren't enough classroom visits, evaluators who don't have a good eye for instruction, fixation on numerical scores, using rubric scores for high-stakes decisions).

"In my experience," says Marshall, "this kind of pro-and-con discussion almost always leaves an audience of teachers and administrators with a positive feeling about using rubrics – along with some legitimate concerns. And indeed, the devil is in the details. Even with all their potential benefits, rubrics can be implemented in ways that damage staff morale and do little or nothing to improve teaching and learning."

- *Using the rubrics at the most strategic times* – Many supervisors and teachers are inclined to use the rubrics to score each individual classroom observation. That's because teachers want to know where they stand and supervisors want to keep up with the paperwork. "This hunger for real-time evaluation data has led many supervisors to fill out rubrics throughout the year," says Marshall, "either during classroom visits or in post-observation conferences with teachers. Using rubrics in this manner appeals to busy school leaders since it makes the teacher-evaluation process seem quicker and more efficient." A number of software apps cater to this approach – Rally, Teachscape, and iObservation among them – making it possible to send feedback electronically before leaving the classroom. But Marshall argues that real-time rubric scoring "undermines effective coaching, supervision, and evaluation." Why?

- It's next to impossible to fill out a comprehensive, multi-page rubric while observing the fluid and complex dynamics of a classroom.

- The supervisor is making snap judgments about what's happening in the classroom without giving the teacher a chance to explain the bigger picture.
- The teacher's anxiety level is likely to spike knowing that the supervisor is making evaluative judgments while instruction is still in progress.
- It's less likely that there will be a meaningful coaching conversation afterward since judgments have already been made – people are busy and what's done is done.
- If rubric scores are shared with the teacher in a conference after the classroom visit, there's likely to be a defensive reaction to any mediocre or low scores, and the teacher may be overwhelmed by too much feedback. Again, the possibility of productive coaching on one or two key leverage points is lost.

All this is an example of one of Charlotte Danielson's most telling comments on the way teacher evaluation has been done over the years: it's done *to* teachers, not with them.

Marshall argues that for optimal impact, rubrics should be used at only three points in the school year and be in the background the rest of the time: (a) As school opens, teachers self-evaluate on the rubric and agree on 2-3 improvement goals with their supervisor; (b) Midyear, teacher and supervisor fill out the rubric, meet, and compare ratings page by page, discussing only the disagreements. Coming out of this meeting, there should be agreement on areas for growth and support (as well as kudos for areas where things are going well); and (c) At the end of the year, teacher and supervisor repeat this process and finalize the year's ratings and some brief comments. "The only exception to this three-times-a-year process is with teachers whose performance shows clear signs of being unsatisfactory," says Marshall. "As soon as serious performance problems become apparent, these teachers should receive scores on the relevant areas of the rubric, an improvement plan, and intensive support."

- *Frequently asked questions* – Marshall shares his suggestions on a number of key concerns that are asked about rubrics:

- How many classroom visits are needed to fill out the rubric? Marshall suggests at least ten short, unannounced visits followed by face-to-face coaching conversations focused on one or two key leverage points with very brief narrative follow-up (no rubric scores).

- How can teachers' professional work outside the classroom be evaluated? Supervisors need to drop in on team meetings, observe staff meeting interactions, and monitor attendance, paperwork, and other professional responsibilities, and then compare their ratings on non-classroom areas with teachers' self-assessment to form a fair picture.

- In evaluation conferences, who has the burden of proof? Marshall suggests this approach in areas of disagreement: If the supervisor is giving a lower rating than the teacher's self-assessment, the supervisor should have evidence. If the teacher's self-assessment is higher than the supervisor's rating, the teacher should have evidence.

- Should novice teachers be evaluated with a modified rubric? The concern here is that new teachers may be discouraged by low rubric scores. Marshall argues that the standards of teaching should be the same for all teachers who are working with students, but there should be an understanding that rookie teachers may not be scoring at the top levels right away.

- Should fractional scores be permitted? A compromise might be to allow fractional scores (for example, 2.5) in the mid-year formative conference but insist on whole-number scores at the end of the year.

- Should teachers' ratings be made public? Marshall thinks not; these are confidential personal records. "Public disclosure of rubric scores not only violates the trusting relationship that must be nurtured between supervisors and teachers," he says, "but also runs the risk of putting pressure on supervisors to inflate scores (who wants their school to look bad in the community?)." But it's a good idea for superintendents to create confidential spreadsheets that show how performance looks within schools and across the district and use the data to inform professional development and support.

- Should top-rated teachers receive merit pay? Marshall says that his reading of the research is that merit pay doesn't work, but highly effective teachers might be offered opportunities to perform extra work for extra pay – mentoring colleagues, designing curriculum, and running PD. Teachers scoring at level 2 on the rubric might have their salaries frozen and be given a year to improve their performance, along with lots of support.

- Should teachers' scores be recorded in numerical form? Marshall believes there are several problems with (for example) giving a teacher a 29 in classroom management. First, adding up ratings assumes that rubric lines all have the same value, and they don't; some lines have more impact on teaching and learning than others, and precise numerical scores give a false sense of precision. Second, teachers set personal improvement goals, and the rubric areas aligned to those goals are more important to them. Third, rubric scores may not capture teachers' growth in certain areas. Fourth, a teacher might perform differently based on the degree of difficulty posed by the students he or she is teaching (we don't want to create negative incentives for teachers to work with challenging students). Finally, teachers are likely to compare numerical scores with colleagues, which could spark unhealthy competition and bad feelings. For these reasons, Marshall suggests reporting rubric ratings as Highly Effective, Effective, etc., avoiding numbers.

- Will rubrics improve teaching and learning? Although the research on this question has yet to be done, Marshall believes that "well-constructed rubrics, if used appropriately by competent supervisors, can add significant value. The key factors are a skillful introduction of the rubric to teachers, teachers self-assessing and setting goals, well-trained supervisors making frequent classroom visits with feedback conversations and coaching throughout the year, and teacher input in mid-year and year-end evaluation meetings. In schools with these factors in place, rubrics bring much greater clarity to teacher supervision and evaluation, push educators to higher levels of performance, and provide a powerful boost to students' achievement and life chances."

"Getting Teacher-Evaluation Rubrics Right" by Kim Marshall, a chapter in *Rubric Nation: Critical Inquiries on the Impact of Rubrics in Education*, edited by Michelle Tenam-Zemach and Joseph Flynn, Jr. (Information Age Publishing, 2015), book available on Amazon, chapter at <http://www.marshallmemo.com/articles/Rubric%20Nation%20chapter%20final.pdf>

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## 5. The Impact of Peer Review on Upper-Elementary Students' Writing

In this article in *Reading Research Quarterly*, Zoi Philippakos (University of North Carolina/Charlotte) and Charles MacArthur (University of Delaware/Newark) report that most elementary students have difficulty revising their own writing. Among the reasons:

- Students see revision as fixing errors (mostly wording and conventions) rather than making changes in content and organization.
- They may lack knowledge of evaluation criteria (e.g., not using a good rubric).
- They may have limited audience awareness or not consider audience concerns.
- They may be aware of problems in their writing but have difficulty applying strategies to resolve them.
- They may have cognitive overload as they try to revise.
- Writers' motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation may affect the time and effort they devote to revising.

There are a number of ways to combat these challenges. Philippakos and MacArthur conducted a study of one of them: peer review. They divided 145 fourth and fifth graders into three groups – peer reviewers and two control groups – and ran all students through 12 days of writing and revising to see if getting students to critique other students' persuasive essays would improve the quality, length, and inclusion of persuasive elements in their own writing. Here's how the study was conducted (each day's session lasted 40 minutes):

- Day 1: All students wrote a persuasive essay, responding to a prompt on uniforms.
- Day 2: All students wrote a second persuasive essay on field trips.
- Day 3: All students were introduced to the evaluation rubric's purpose and watched it being used to critique a strong and a weak essay.
- Day 4: Students in the reviewer group were given two papers written by peers (they didn't know their identity) and asked to give honest and helpful feedback on each one by giving it a score on each section of the rubric and then writing comments.
- Students in the first control group read the same papers but weren't asked to give feedback.
- Students in the second control group read unrelated texts.
- Day 5: Same procedures as Day 4, with the reviewers and the first control group reading different papers of varying quality.
- Day 6: Same procedures as Day 4, with the reviewers and the first control group reading different papers of varying quality.
- Day 7: All students revised their own Day 2 essays on field trips.
- Day 8: All students revised their own Day 1 essays on uniforms.
- Day 9: All students wrote another persuasive essay on a new topic (second language).
- Day 10: All students revised these essays.
- Day 11 (seven school days later): All students wrote on a new topic (chores).
- Day 12: All students revised those essays.

What were the results? Students in the reviewer group did a significantly better job than both control groups revising their own Day 1 and 2 essays, and wrote significantly better persuasive

essays after the intervention, as measured by persuasive elements, considering and rebutting opposing positions, and final thoughts for the reader.

Why the improvement? The key elements seemed to be internalizing greater familiarity with criteria for effective writing, critiquing peers' writing at different levels of proficiency, comparing strong and weak points with their own writing, and developing an improved consciousness of the audience for their own writing.

“The Effects of Giving Feedback on the Persuasive Writing of Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Students” by Zoi Philippakos and Charles MacArthur in *Reading Research Quarterly*, October/November/December 2016 (Vol. 51, #4, p. 419-433), available for purchase at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/rrq.149/supinfo>; the authors can be reached at [zphilipp@uncc.edu](mailto:zphilipp@uncc.edu) and [macarthur@udel.edu](mailto:macarthur@udel.edu).

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## 6. Rethinking How Writing Is Taught in High-School English Classes

In this *English Journal* article, Lindy Johnson (The College of William and Mary) and Nicole Sieben (SUNY College at Old Westbury) describe asking their college students, “What do you wish your English teachers would have taught you in high school?” Many students said they wanted:

- More emphasis on generating and refining their own research questions;
- Dealing with flexible assignment structures (versus assignments like five-paragraph essays that place rigid constraints on composing);
- Treating the writing process as creative problem solving;
- Connecting writing to their interests and the real world.

With this in mind, Johnson and Sieben had their students read the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* side-by-side with “How to Get a Job at Google” by Laszlo Bock, the company’s senior vice president of HR. “Doing so helps students to understand that writing a paper in English is not simply about getting a good grade or passing a writing test,” they say. “Rather, developing writing skills and strategies can help students expand habits of mind that connect to the skills and abilities that leading twenty-first-century employers look for in new hires.” The five attributes Google is looking for map nicely with the eight habits of mind in the *Framework*: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.

Here’s an example: A high-school English teacher has his students study *Night*, *Persepolis*, and *Things Fall Apart*, books that focus on problems affecting real and fictional communities, and then asks them to research a topic of concern within their community. Students engage in authentic inquiry using primary and secondary sources, asking themselves, “What are the concerns in my community? Who is already addressing these concerns? How can I help with the issue?” Students contact local organizations involved with this issue, plan and conduct an event or service to benefit the organization, and reflect on the experience and what they learned from their work. Finally, students present their projects at a school family night. Having a large turnout at this event “reinforced the point that what students had to say

about issues in their community mattered to an audience beyond the school,” say Johnson and Sieben. “Ultimately, students were able to make the connection that learning to write in English class could do real work in solving problems in their community.”

The authors conclude by calling for “a systematic reorientation of secondary students’ writing processes around creative problem-solving... [S]tudents should increasingly see high-school English as more closely connected to the demands and opportunities awaiting them in college and in their careers.”

“Minding the Gap: Reframing Writing As Creative Problem-Solving” by Lindy Johnson and Nicole Sieben in *English Journal*, September 2016 (Vol. 106, #1, p. 80-83), no free e-link available; the authors can be reached at [ljohnson@wm.edu](mailto:ljohnson@wm.edu) and [Siebenn@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:Siebenn@oldwestbury.edu).

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## 7. Getting Students Writing in Math Class

In this article in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, Oklahoma educator Melissa Gunter describes how she coaxed her math students into writing short pieces using the four dimensions of the RAFT acronym: Role of the writer; Audience; Format; and Topic. Here are some sample prompts:

- A ratio writing a pen-pal letter to a proportion on their differences and similarities;
- Ratio and proportion writing an owner’s manual to math students;
- Proportion writing an online dating profile to similar figures on how we go together;
- Inequality symbols writing a comic strip to math students on larger, smaller, equal to;
- Exponents writing a defense argument to a jury on the laws of exponents;
- Substitution, elimination, and graphing writing a sitcom script to a TV audience on solving systems of equations;
- Parallel lines writing a love letter to transversal on how we are meant to be together;
- Data writing a news report to math students on data displays.

Gunter read a few samples aloud to her class, then had pairs of students choose one of three possible scenarios on ratio and proportion (a topic they’d recently studied): an owner’s manual, a pen-pal letter, and a dating profile. She gave the class about 20 minutes to come up with a first draft, circulated to help with prompts and suggestions, and then had students read their products before plunging into revisions. Gunter was happy with the results. Two samples:

• *An online dating profile for the Pythagorean Theorem:* Likes right angles, three-sided figures, my men twice as tall, long walks on the graph; Dislikes isosceles triangles, scalene triangles, any other shapes; Age 25, height 16 inches, weight 9 pounds. Looking for a right-angled triangle with a similar figure to mine. Someone to spend the rest of my life with, and have 3 beautiful baby triangles with. I even have their names already picked out: Sea (the oldest, hopefully), Thin bee, and Aye. I want someone whose height, aye, and weight is the same ratio as mine.

• *A pen-pal letter from Rachel (ratio) to Portia (proportion):* Hey Portia, I’m so glad we have been pen pals for a while. We each can talk about how our group of friends relate to us. You just are able to compare to all of them rather than just a select group like me. I have yet

to ask you about how many pets you have. I have three cats and it is 1:2 ratio of them being male. He is neutered of course. How many male pets do you have? I wish I could have birds, but my cats would eat them. Talk to you in the next letter! Rachel

“Riding the RAFT” by Melissa Gunter in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, October 2016 (Vol. 22, #3, p. 172-175), <http://bit.ly/2eEpi42>; Gunter is at [melissag@norman.k12.ok.us](mailto:melissag@norman.k12.ok.us).

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## **8. *Caveat Emptor* on Personalized Learning Programs**

“Too often,” says Michele Molnar in this *Education Week* supplement, “teachers and administrators... find that personalized learning is used by companies as mere buzzwords to promote a run-of-the-mill digital tool.” Here is her “buyers beware” guide of things to watch out for:

- Student agency – Students should be able to take ownership of their own learning, set goals, and track progress.
- Adequate content – A product should have enough material for high-achieving students who work more quickly than their peers; 130 lessons are probably not enough.
- Useful data – The information provided by the program should track what students are actually mastering in a user-friendly way.
- Next steps – Products should provide clear recommendations for teachers’ instructional decisions and interventions, says Molnar.
- Aligned assessments – Embedded assessments should be geared to the kinds of questions asked in high-stakes external assessments.
- Classroom integration – Personalized learning products should be clear about whether the classroom format should be whole-group, small-group, or individual, and ideally give the teacher a choice as to whether they or the software determine the next piece of content.
- Evidence of effectiveness – Don’t put too much stock in testimonials from other users, anecdotes, or five-star ratings on a website, says Molnar. Ask for hard data on outcomes.
- The personal perspective – Few personalized learning products are geared toward students’ individual backgrounds and interests, she says. Ideally there are ways to connect to culture, family background, interests, learning strengths, and social-emotional development.

“8 ‘Red Flags’ to Look for in Products” by Michele Molnar in *Education Week*, October 19, 2016 (Vol. 36, #9, p. 29-30), [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)

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# 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 45 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 64 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 50 issues a year).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

## ***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
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues and podcasts
- An archive of all articles so far, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all issues

## ***Core list of publications covered***

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal  
American Educator  
American Journal of Education  
American School Board Journal  
AMLE Magazine  
ASCA School Counselor  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter  
District Administration  
Ed. Magazine  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Week  
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Educational Horizons  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
Essential Teacher  
Go Teach  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Educational Review  
Independent School  
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy  
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)  
Journal of Staff Development  
Kappa Delta Pi Record  
Knowledge Quest  
Literacy Today  
Middle School Journal  
Peabody Journal of Education  
Perspectives  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Responsive Classroom Newsletter  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
School Administrator  
School Library Journal  
Teacher  
Teachers College Record  
Teaching Children Mathematics  
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children  
The Atlantic  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The District Management Journal  
The Journal of the Learning Sciences  
The Language Educator  
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools  
The New York Times  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
Theory Into Practice  
Time Magazine  
Wharton Leadership Digest