Marshall Memo 124

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 20, 2006

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"If I could only get them to do their work!"
A frequent refrain in faculty rooms (see item #1)

"Even if the work is engaging, students won't do it if they don't know how."
Linda Darling-Hammond and Olivia Ifill-Lynch (see item #1)

"Struggling learners benefit when learning goals and the desired quality of learning products are public and explicit."
Ibid.

"The school needs to make it harder *not* to do the work than to do it!"
Jacqueline Ancess, New York City middle-school principal (see item #1)

"I wonder if the problem is not that we have our teachers understand the culture of poverty but rather that we have our students understand the culture of success."
Doug Reeves, Feb. 7, 2006

"The real math problem begins in elementary school, where too few students develop the foundations they will need to succeed in higher-level mathematics."
Philip Daro (see item #6)

"A lot of kids we thought were a year behind were only 15 minutes behind."
A math teacher (*ibid.*)

"Tracking is a failed solution to a real problem and has evil consequences. But untracking takes us back to the original, unsolved problem of how to manage differences in preparation among students."
Philip Daro (*ibid.*)

1. Effective Ways to Get Students to Do Their Homework

In this lead article in the February *Educational Leadership*, Stanford professors Linda Darling-Hammond and Olivia Ifill-Lynch hear the plaintive cry of many teachers – "If I could only get them to do their work!" – and list the reasons so many students don't complete homework: not knowing how to do the assignments; jobs, babysitting, and other family responsibilities; undeveloped time management and planning skills; self-protection ("Don't care about the stupid work"); and general despair and lack of motivation. Teachers usually give failing grades to students who don't turn in homework to "teach them a lesson," but this strategy rarely works; in fact, it may confirm students' feeling that they can't be successful and result in even less homework being turned in.

"A more difficult but effective approach," say Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch, "is to create a strong academic culture that changes students' beliefs and behaviors, convincing them to engage in their schoolwork." Here are some of the strategies successful schools use:

• *Assign work that is worthy of effort*. Before teachers give out a homework assignment, they should ask themselves, Does it make sense? Is it necessary? Is it useful? Is it authentic and engaging? Students are most likely to do homework when it is part of a meaningful curriculum unit and will actually be used in class the next day.

• *Make the work doable*. "Even if the work is engaging," say Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch, "students won't do it if they don't know how." Teachers should be sure the directions are clear and students can complete the assignment without help. "Unless homework is a clear continuation of well-taught classwork," they write, "it can actually exacerbate inequalities in learning instead of closing the gap. Students whose parents understand the homework and can help them with it at home have a major advantage over students whose parents are unable or unavailable to help." One way for teachers to monitor the difficulty level of homework is to allow students to get started on their assignments in class. Another is to discuss homework assignments with other teachers and continuously search for assignments that have the highest return rate.

• *Find out what students need*. "Even when students have engaging work that they can do," say Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch, "they have to be motivated and organized to do it." They recommend that teachers reach out to students who are having difficulty and brainstorm strategies that work for them. Teachers should ask themselves, How does this student learn? What motivates him or her? What are relevant concerns, attitudes, aspirations, and beliefs? The goal is for the process to be "transparent, concrete, manageable, and as simple

as possible." One school conducted a "homework audit" and discovered that the problem was that many students had jobs after school. Teachers decided to devise job-embedded homework assignments.

• *Create space and time for homework.* Some teachers invite students to do homework during their preparation periods or lunch breaks. Some schools set up a structured after-school homework time or "success classes" during the school day (in one school, the success classes were supervised by the principal, showing his commitment to the goal). Some schools mark homework assignments "incomplete" until they are handed in and extend deadlines into the next marking period, vacations, or even the summer. The bottom line, says New York City middle-school principal Jacqueline Ancess: "The school needs to make it harder *not* to do the work than to do it!"

• *Make work public.* "Struggling learners benefit when learning goals and the desired quality of learning products are public and explicit," say Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch. One school made it a policy for all teachers to post the following items in their classrooms:

- The content that the class was currently studying;
- Where the class was in that study;
- A list of products that students were required to create to demonstrate learning;
- The completed student work products.

It's also helpful for teachers to post or make available exemplars of proficient student work on similar projects so students have a clear picture of what is expected. All this helps students to know exactly where they stand with their work and facilitates conversations with students who are falling behind.

• *Encourage collaboration.* This goes for collaboration among students (for example, 9th graders working with 12th graders) and among teachers. "Schools that are organized as supportive learning communities with opportunities for collegial problem solving can better support their students in developing the practices and habits essential to doing schoolwork," conclude Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch.

"If They'd Only Do Their Work" by Linda Darling-Hammond and Olivia Ifill-Lynch in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 8-13)
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_journalmoid=7ce482b332709010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_articlemoid=e41582b332709010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a4932668055 16f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

2. Books That Get African-American Boys Reading

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Northern Illinois University professor Alfred Tatum stresses the importance of using the right books if we are to get 4 million African-American boys (who make up 7 percent of the school-age population) engaged in reading and launched on a "positive life trajectory." Tatum decries the arid, ineffective, "disabling" strategy of using books that focus only on cognitive skills and strategies. He insists that we need "enabling" texts that speak to black adolescents' need for self-definition and contain social,

cultural, political, spiritual, and economic messages. He says that "must-read" books have four characteristics:

• They are intellectually exciting for both students and teachers, connecting the social, the economic, and the political to the educational realm. Using books like these, says Tatum, teachers can engage students in "authentic discussions in which they can analyze their realities in the context of the curriculum and discuss strategies for overcoming academic and societal barriers."

• They serve as a roadmap and provide students with a vicarious apprenticeship. Such books, says Tatum, "serve as soft role models in the absence of physically present male role models by providing motivation, direction, and hope for the future and suggesting what is worthwhile in life."

• They challenge students cognitively. Using these books acknowledges that "developing skills, increasing test scores, and nurturing students' identities are fundamentally compatible," says Tatum.

• They help students apply literacy skills and strategies independently. Using books like these resolves the "either-or dilemma of focusing on skill development versus developing intelligence by offering challenges that satisfy both requirements."

Tatum acknowledges that even the best books can be ruined by bad teaching, and he says that teachers need professional support to get the most out of the books they use. The WestEd Reading Apprenticeship framework is one he recommends. But he returns to the importance of using the right books – texts that can "provide students with the capital they need to be resilient in environments in which they were previously vulnerable. No only can this practice improve the reading outcomes of African-American adolescent males," Tatum concludes, "but it can improve their life outcomes as well."

In a sidebar, Tatum lists some suggested books (this sidebar is quoted verbatim):

<u>Middle School Level:</u>

• *With Every Drop of Blood: A Novel of the Civil War* by James Collier and Christopher Collier (New York: Laurel Leaf, 1992). A 14-year-old white boy from Virginia, attempting to bring food to besieged Richmond, is captured by black Union soldiers, one of whom is a former slave his own age. The boys ultimately become friends.

• *47* by Walter Mosley (New York: Little, Brown, 2005). The narrator remembers himself as a young slave named "47" living in Georgia in 1832. A mystical runaway slave called Tall John inspires him to fulfill his destiny and lead his people to freedom.

• *Handbook for Boys: A Novel* by Walter Dean Myers (New York: HarperTrophy, 2002). A 16-year-old is given the option of participating in barber Duke Wilson's "community mentoring program" instead of serving time in a youth rehabilitation center. The teen's gradual change in perspective shows the value of adult mentoring.

• *The Beast* by Walter Dean Myers (New York, Scholastic, 2003). A young man leaves his neighborhood in Harlem to attend a college prep school and confronts his anxieties about his future when he returns for winter break to discover that his girlfriend has become addicted to drugs.

• *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen (New York: Laurel Leaf, 1993). Nightjohn, a new slave on the Waller plantation, sacrifices his chance for freedom and risks punishment to empower other slaves by helping them learn to read and write.

High School Level

• *Yo, Little Brother: Basic Rules of Survival for Young African-American Males* by Anthony Davis and Jeffrey Jackson (Chicago: African-American Images, 1998). In direct, down-to-earth language, this book offers advice for African-American youth from their older counterparts.

• *Reallionaire: Nine Steps to Becoming Rich from the Inside Out* by Farrah Gray (Deerfield Beach, FL: HCI, 2005). A self-made millionaire and philanthropist at age 20, the author tells his personal story of growing up on the South Side of Chicago and rising to success.

• *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America* by Alex Kotlowitz (New York: Anchor Books, 1991). A *Wall Street Journal* reporter tells the true story of two brothers, ages 11 and 9, who live in a violence-ridden Chicago housing project.

• *Workin' on the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History* by Walter Mosley (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000). This essay about American's enslavement to the economy describes a nation ruled by a small power elite and shows what liberation from consumer capitalism might look like.

• *The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream* by George Jenkins, Sampson Davis, and Rameck Hunt (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002). This true story tells how the three authors grew up in poverty in Newark, New Jersey, became friends at a magnet high school, and made a pact to attend college and become dentists.

• *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* by Ron Suskind (New York: Random House, 1999). A *Wall Street Journal* reporter follows an African-American student through his last two years of high school and his freshman year at Brown University.

• *Rite of Passage* by Richard Wright (New York: HarperTrophy, 1994). Set in Harlem in the late 1940s, this book tells the story of a bright 15-year-old boy who suddenly learns that he is a foster child and is being transferred to a new foster home. He runs away and struggles to survive in a harsh world.

"Engaging African-American Males in Reading" by Alfred Tatum in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 44-49), no free e-link available

3. Four Keys to High Achievement Among African-American Boys

What factors in the lives of African-American males are associated with success in school? According to a study by Jelani Mandara of Northwestern University in the current *Teachers College Record*, four planets need to line up:

• *A uniquely African-American version of authoritative parenting* – Researchers agree that the most effective parenting style is authoritative, i.e., high on warmth and love and also high on firm guidance and demandingness. Less effective parenting styles include authoritarian (strict without warmth), permissive (warm without strictness), and neglectful (neither strict nor warm). But research on African-American families whose boys are high achievers has shown that authoritative parents have a different style from that of European Americans: they tend to be more demanding and less acquiescent to children's demands. Boys with neglectful parents, on the other hand, lack self-control, feelings of personal power, and integrated identities, and tend to be highly cynical, rude, uncooperative, and emotionally unstable.

• *Moderate spanking by parents within the context of a loving and supportive relationship* – Researchers have found that physical discipline has a different effect on African-American children than it does for European-American children (for whom it is often associated with peer aggression, teacher-child conflict, and other disruptive behavior in school). "This body of research," reports Mandara, "lends support to the notion that spanking African-American boys, not excessively harsh or abusive discipline, is effective in reducing their behavior problems at school. This is particularly true when the boy interprets spanking as an accepted form of discipline for misbehavior. Spanking is believed to be more effective if it is done in the context of a warm and supportive home environment and when it is accepted in the boys' social network… However, spanking children, even African-American boys, 2 or more times per week is undoubtedly excessive and may imply a dysfunctional parent, child, and/or parent-child relationship. It should also be noted that these studies do not imply that spanking should be the only or even first means by which African-American parents should discipline their sons."

• *Boys being made aware of their cultural heritage and ability to achieve in spite of barriers* – Parents of high-achieving African-American boys successfully foster a sense of cultural and racial identity in their children, along with a sense of personal power and locus of control. One study traced a link between homes rich in culturally appropriate toys, pictures of African Americans, and African cultural features and higher school achievement.

• *Parents being actively involved in monitoring homework and use of time* – Parents of high-achieving African-American boys were on top of their children's academic work and clamped down on counterproductive uses of time, including television, radio, and video games. They also created an ongoing, positive dialogue with teachers and school officials. One interesting finding in some studies was that the teacher's *perceptions* could either enhance the effect of parental involvement (if teachers believed parents were involved) or undermine it (if teachers believed the opposite).

What are the implications of this research for educators? Mandara believes that it should make teachers and principals more aware than ever of the power of their expectations on the futures of African-American children. She thinks schools can play a part in passing along positive messages to parents about what works best in raising their children. She believes that schools should examine and discuss the differences in adult style that may exist between school and home and move toward bringing them into alignment around the authoritative

model. And she believes that educators should open their minds to the positive effects that appropriate spanking may have on the behavior and achievement of African-American boys.

"The Impact of Family Functioning on African-American Males' Academic Achievement: A Review and Clarification of the Empirical Literature" by Jelani Mandara in *Teachers College Record*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 108, #2, p. 206-223), no free e-link available

4. Boosting African-American Males into Engineering Careers

In this *Teachers College Record* study, Ohio State professor James Moore III links five factors to the success of black males in engineering: (a) interest in science, technology, engineering, and math; (b) family interest and encouragement; (c) aptitude in science and math; (d) meaningful academic experiences and relationships with teachers and other school personnel; and (e) meaningful enrichment programs, opportunities, and academic experiences. What are the implications for educators? Moore suggests the following:

• *Teachers* – "Teachers play a critical role in the educational process of African-American males," says Moore, "particularly those who are interested in engineering." Here are some positive classroom strategies:

- Covering the content that will prepare students for college-level engineering work;
- Exposing students to the rigors of science and math;
- Using culturally appropriate pedagogy;
- Communicating high expectations for student achievement;
- Creating positive relationships with students;
- Pointing out the relationship between schoolwork and careers by using job-related examples in classroom work;
- Finding out about students' interests and relating them to possible careers;
- Stressing the importance of learning skills that are prerequisites for specific careers;
- Emphasizing the link between success in school and success on the job;
- Assuring students that they all have attributes that, "properly coupled with training and aspirations, can lead to a successful and rewarding career."

• *School counselors* – Like teachers, counselors are "well positioned to encourage students to pursue engineering as an academic major or career choice," says Moore. They can offer important advice and experiences in the areas of: course selection, vocational information, school-to-work options, shadowing and mentoring experiences, career days, role models, study skills, test-taking savvy, and ideas for managing time. In many cases, the key task for counselors is to work with teachers to ensure that students' math and science knowledge and skill gaps are filled so they will have access to higher-level courses and college. Moore notes that school counselors tend to be seen as gatekeepers with enormous power and that black male students sometimes avoid them. It's therefore important that counselors be culturally competent and work on being seen as helpful and accommodating.

• *Parents and community* – Schools need to brief parents on career options, their children's academic progress, and the importance of parent involvement with monitoring

homework and encouraging their children's career aspirations. Schools also need to reach out to community agencies and stakeholders and bridge the cultural barriers.

"A Qualitative Investigation of African-American Males' Career Trajectory in Engineering: Implications for Teachers, School Counselors, and Parents" by James Moore III in *Teachers College Record*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 108, #2, p. 246-266), no free e-link available

5. Connecting with Latino Learners

"Just because I talk with an accent doesn't mean I think with an accent," says a character in the movie *A Walk in the Clouds*. Arizona professor Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila uses this quote as a jumping-off point for discussing effective strategies that make maximum use of the prior knowledge that English language learners bring to school and harness it in their acquisition of academic English. She recommends four strategies:

• *Content-area cognates* – It's helpful when teachers point out words that are similar in English and students' native language, since it helps students activate prior knowledge. Some examples in English and Spanish (many have Latin roots):

- bank and *banco*
- angle and *ángulo*
- triangle and *triángulo*
- sphere and *esfera*
- parallel lines and *lineas paralelas*
- peninsula and *peninsula*
- gulf and *golfo*
- arid and *árido*
- volcanic and *volcánico*

Teachers should also point out false cognates – words that sound and look alike but do not share the same meaning. Among them:

- embarrassed and *embarazada* (pregnant)
- exit and *éxito* (success)
- pie and *pie* (foot)
- large and *largo* (long)

• *Graphic organizers* – These help ELLs become familiar with content-area structures common in expository texts. When ELLs can simultaneously hear, read, and see content-related information, it helps them decipher textbooks. For example, a flowchart can illustrate the major events or problems in a passage and show the steps leading to the outcome or resolution in sequence or logical order.

• *Incorporating multiple modalities* – ELLs who don't share other students' background knowledge (about the Civil War, Wounded Knee Massacre, or World War II, for example) can benefit greatly when they combine visual, verbal, and print cues as they view photos, picture books, magazines, websites, and graphic novels; watch documentary films and movies (with

the English subtitles turned on); and listen to songs (while reading the lyrics) and radio dramatizations.

• *Language face to face* – Teachers should maximize the use of cooperative learning (with mixed-language groups) to get students talking with teach other face to face as they do assignments and projects. This helps develop oral and written academic language. Group presentations are also a great way to build language skills among students.

"Connecting with Latino Learners" by Eliane Rubinstein- Ávila in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 38-43), no free e-link available

6. Preparing Students for Success in Math

In this commentary piece in the current *Education Week*, math expert Philip Daro is highly critical of the U.S. K-6 mathematics curriculum. "The real math problem," he says, "begins in elementary school, where too few students develop the foundations they will need to succeed in higher-level mathematics. It's clear from the new analyses of testing data that 4th graders have problems, and what they learn does not stick… Extensive research shows that American elementary schools teach arithmetic with a shortsighted focus on the problems within a chapter of a math book. Little thought is given to building the foundation for later chapters and grade levels."

And it's not just elementary schools. Daro says that many middle schools also miss the boat when it comes to laying the conceptual groundwork for algebra; teachers review elementary arithmetic in pretty much the same way, and when students get to algebra and geometry, their performance "hits a wall" because they don't know the concepts.

Daro gives four examples:

• Elementary students learn a specific procedure like 7 + 4 = ___ but when they are confronted with a slight variation like 7 + ___ = 11, they don't know what to do. Daro believes that only when students learn all the permutations and the connections among them, i.e.,

7 + 4 = ___
__ + 4 = 11
7 + __ = 11
11 - __ = 7

will they have the arithmetic insights that support, rather than undermine, learning algebra in middle school.

• Students are taught that "when you add, subtract, or multiply, line the digits up from the right." This works fine until students confront problems like 3.75 + 12.5.

• Students learn about fractions by working with shaded pie slices. This leads to the misconception that 3/4 + 2/4 = 5/8. To develop a more general idea of "whole," says Daro, teachers should also use rulers where the whole is the unit (one inch, for example) and fractions are parts of the unit. "This is a deeper and more general idea of fractions that readily supports ideas about fractions on the number line needed for algebra," says Daro.

• Students get the idea that the equals sign is a form of punctuation, marking the place where you write the answer. They need to be taught that the equals sign is really a verb that indicates that the quantity on the left has the same value as the quantity on the right. If students are taught how to solve problems like 7 + __ = 11, they will be prepared for algebra problems like 7 + x = y.

Daro believes that the "math wars" between advocates of basic skills (which is labeled "kill and drill" by opponents) and real-world problem solving (labeled "fuzzy math" by opponents) has confused teachers and principals and handed victory to the unsatisfactory status quo. Countries that have better math achievement than the U.S. skillfully balance basic skills, problem-solving, and conceptual understanding.

Finally, Daro tackles the thorny issue of how to differentiate instruction in classrooms where students are all over the map in terms of math achievement. "Tracking is a failed solution to a real problem," he writes, "and has evil consequences. But untracking takes us back to the original, unsolved problem of how to manage differences in preparation among students." He believes that schools should stick to heterogeneous classes, use frequent interim assessments to differentiate among students who can manage well with regular classroom instruction and three levels of students who need extra help, and analyze the data to deliver appropriate help:

• Students who need a little extra help and will benefit from a homework clinic before or after school. Daro quotes one teacher as saying, "A lot of kids we thought were a year behind were only 15 minutes behind."

• Students who struggle with misconceptions that hamper their ability to perform well in math and need targeted assistance to remedy their confusion.

• Students who are so far behind they need serious intervention to get back on course.

Frequent assessments, says Daro – and the time for teachers to analyze students' work – are *key* to identifying which students are in which group and planning effective interventions.

"Math Warriors, Lay Down Your Weapons" by Philip Daro in *Education Week*, Feb. 15, 2006 (Vol. 25, #23, p. 34-35), no free e-link available

7. Teachers Who Make a Difference with High-Risk Students

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant and writer Julie Landsman writes passionately about work that first-rate teachers do to change the lives of at-risk children. "Such teachers," she writes, "hold all they know, all they worry about, all they see of kids in thin jackets or dirty clothes, kids who wolf down three breakfasts, and they continue to believe in the brilliance, creativity, and ability of all their students. These is no condescension or sentimentality in their work with these young people, but there is compassion for them, as well as anger at a country that would allow any young person to go hungry and cold in a Minnesota winter. There is no shrug of acceptance, nor is there a lowering of standards for what they expect from each child."

Here is Landsman's list of the strategies she has observed in classrooms that are successful in reaching economically struggling students:

• Assuming that all students can learn complex and creative material.

• Creating a classroom that gives students as much control as possible while maintaining safety and structure.

• Not assuming common behaviors or states of mind for all low-income students or parents.

• Focusing on the assets that students bring to the classroom: resiliency, perseverance, flexibility, compassion, and hope.

• Understanding that you cannot change the world, but that you can work within your classroom and community to effect change. Advocating for small class size.

• Building a network of colleagues who are working to find ways to boost the achievement of low-income students, and meeting regularly to talk about "what went right this week."

• Maintaining your "other life" so that you can go into the classroom ready to meet kids wholeheartedly and without resentment.

• Finding ways to provide the necessities, such as winter coats, art materials, and a place to wash clothes. Looking in the community for resources – for example, a suitable place for students to do homework if they can't do it at home.

• Finding respectful ways to find out if a student's home situation is interfering with learning. Making yourself available for students to talk with you. Referring them to help when they share serious problems or speak of a lack of basic needs at home.

• Asking students to do jobs for you to help them feel important and in control of something in their lives.

• Not singling out kids or indicating in front of others that you know they are homeless or poor.

• "Cutting deals" with students, helping them find realistic ways to meet work requirements.

• Convincing students that "I believe you can learn and I will listen to you and give you meaningful work to do."

"Bearers of Hope" by Julie Landsman in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 26-32), no free e-link available

8. Using "Your Mama" Jokes to Boost Students' Literary Skills

Northwestern University professor Carol Lee believes that schools should harness the power of playground "signifying" jokes ("Your mama is so skinny she could do the hula hoop in a Cheerio") to help urban youngsters appreciate hyperbole, irony, symbolism, innuendo, and other literary devices in mainstream books, including Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson. "It's realizing, for them, that responding to literature is playful," says Lee, "and this is a game that they already know how to play and one that they value."

Lee has expanded her work to include using rap lyrics, rap videos, and film clips and studied the effects on student achievement. Although she admits that her research doesn't meet the most rigorous standards, she has found marked benefits, with the greatest gains among students who started off the furthest behind. One of her studies showed that 60 to 90 percent of struggling readers, using her methods, could pick out key details and identify implied relationships in an unfamiliar text. "Ninety percent of the kids who come out of these high schools would not buy a Shakespeare play or a Faulkner novel to save their life," said Lee. "I'm hoping that after four years of these kinds of deep experiences, we might create a lifelong reader who might go into Barnes & Noble and buy a book."

"Scholar Finds Gold in Special Brand of Urban Humor" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Feb. 15, 2006 (Vol. 25, #23, p. 10), no free e-link available

9. Short Items:

a. Should we reward students for good attendance? This *New York Times* story reported on the efforts by some school districts to improve attendance by giving students rewards ranging from iPods to a Ford truck. "I was at first taken a little aback by the idea," said Morton Orlov II, headmaster of Chelsea High School in Massachusetts, which started giving students $25 for perfect attendance for a quarter and another $25 for a year's perfect attendance. "We're going to pay kids to come to school? But then I thought perfect attendance is not such a bad behavior to reward. We are sort of putting our money where our mouth is."

Does it work? At Chelsea High, attendance actually went *down* after the incentives were instituted. Why? Because at the same time, the school eased off on docking students' grades for unexcused absences and withholding grades when students had more than two unexcused absences in a quarter. Students realized "that the big hammer is off," said Orlov, and the incentives weren't enough to counteract that message. "It's $25," said Bianca Viggiani, a 17-year-old senior whose attendance was worse than ever. "I mean, almost nobody cares."

So the school put the "hammer" back into effect, while still keeping the incentives, and attendance shot up to 93 percent.

"And for Perfect Attendance, Johnny Gets a Car" by Pam Belluck in *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 2006, p. 1, 20

b. Dropout prevention – "We face a hard battle on two fronts," writes dropout expert Paul Barton in this *Educational Leadership* article; "one to make high school more rigorous, and the other to keep more students in high school through graduation." He describes the discouraging statistics from the last few years and then lists several promising dropout prevention programs:

• *The Talent Development High School* – Operating in 33 high schools in 12 states, this program emphasizes small learning communities, curriculum reforms, professional development, interdisciplinary teams of teachers, longer class periods, and employer advisory boards.

• *Communities in Schools* – This program organizes partnerships of schools and community agencies to deliver case management, counseling, volunteers and mentors, remedial education, tutoring, life skills and employment skills classes, and a variety of after-school programs.

• *Maryland Tomorrow* – This program operates in 75 high schools statewide and organizes counseling, intensive academic instruction during the summer and school year, career guidance and exploration, adult mentors, and a variety of summer activities.

• *The Quantum Opportunities Program* – Funding for this program ended in 1999, but it serves as a roadmap for supplemental services for students at risk of dropping out, involving a case management approach, year-round services through all four years of high school, tutoring and homework help, computer-assisted instruction, life and family skills training, supplemental after-school education, developmental activities, mentoring, community services activities, and financial planning.

"The Dropout Problem: Losing Ground" by Paul Barton in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 14-18)
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=7ce482b332709010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=052582b332709010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

c. Do long words impress? – A study at Stanford University explored the question of what people think of writers who use long words. A panel of 71 undergraduates was asked to evaluate writing samples, some of which were straightforward and some highly complex (with every noun, verb, and adjective replaced with the longest possible synonym). As complexity increased, readers' estimation of the author's intelligence went *down*. Longsuffering English teachers have always known that students who reach for the thesaurus to replace a simple word with a complex one are making their writing muddier. Now there's proof.

"Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly" by Daniel Oppenheimer in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* (spotted in *Atlantic Monthly*, March 2006, p. 50)

Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 36 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of 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 (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

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- How to subscribe or renew
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- Focus topics
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
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- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Jimmy Kilpatrick
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice