

# Marshall Memo 125

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

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## Quotes of the Week

“Creativity is a habit. The problem is that schools sometimes treat it as a bad habit.”

Robert Sternberg (see item #2)

“Knowledge is a necessary, but in no way sufficient, condition for creativity.”

Robert Sternberg (*ibid.*)

“Students who struggle with writing feel frustrated and unsuccessful, always fearfully anticipating their next mistake.”

Jeff Anderson, Texas sixth-grade teacher (see item #1)

“I believe that the main culprit behind older students’ distaste for writing is the well-intentioned teacher or parent who focuses on the easier-to-correct conventions of grammar and mechanics rather than on the deeper content of writing.”

Jeff Anderson (*ibid.*)

“What is celebrated will be repeated.”

Jeff Anderson (*ibid.*)

“I never knew I had so much to say until I became a writer.”

A student in Shaw Island, Washington (from “The Year of Writing” by Sheila Gaquin in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006, p. 80-81)

“Multiple-choice questions are another quick fix. They can make interim assessments very efficient. But for diagnostic purposes, nothing beats seeing actual student work.”

Stuart Kahl in *Education Week*, Feb. 22, 2006, p. 31

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## 1. A Texas Teacher Gets His Students *Writing*

In this compelling *Educational Leadership* article, San Antonio sixth-grade teacher Jeff Anderson describes how he works with struggling writers until they become “proficient beyond their wildest imaginations.” By the end of each school year, he reports, “most of my student writers produce creative and confident writing, share it with exuberance, and value themselves as thinkers and writers.”

But getting there is not a walk in the park. At the beginning of the year, many of Anderson’s fledgling writers are “frustrated and unsuccessful, always fearfully anticipating their next mistake.” To them, writing has become “a way to be wrong,” and they can’t begin to imagine it as a way to “express and make sense of their thoughts, experiences and feelings.” Worst of all, many students believe they have nothing worth saying.

Anderson sees his challenge as changing that belief and allaying his students’ fear of the red pen. His writing program has three basic principles:

- *Value what students have to say* – “I believe that the main culprit behind older students’ distaste for writing,” he says, “is the well-intentioned teacher or parent who focuses on the easier-to-correct conventions of grammar and mechanics rather than on the deeper content of writing... After years of facing such well-meaning corrections, too many students begin to erase holes in the paper on their third attempt at a first draft, afraid another error will be caught and rubbed in their faces. Like this sheet of notebook paper, an eager attitude toward writing can get worn down.” As an antidote, Anderson recommends that teachers:

- “Say something good about the content of students’ writing before saying anything else... rummage for and celebrate what they’ve done well.”
- Require students to write every day in writer’s notebooks, reflections, and essays.
- Collect and share well-written sentences – “powerful snippets of text in all kinds of writing to help students hear what good writing sounds like rhythmically and syntactically.” Students should be encouraged to be “sentence stalkers” too.
- “Ask students to recopy their most successful bits of writing on transparencies, on sentence strips, on index cards, or in their journals,” he recommends. “Have them read aloud their efforts that hit the mark, whether it’s a lead, a concluding paragraph, or a whole essay. What is celebrated will be repeated.”
- “Help students notice what is good with their writing and what is moving in the right direction. Revel in attempts that work and in those that almost work.”

- *Love their mistakes* – “Errors,” says Anderson, quoting Weaver (1996), “...are actually evidence of the writer’s thinking, and in some cases, clear indicators of the writer’s

growth.” Anderson wants his students to take a *thinking* stance. “The heart of teaching good grammar,” he says, “is appreciating students’ errors and approximations enough to understand the reasoning behind these errors, even when that reasoning is flawed.” Students often make mistakes by over-applying a rule – for example, putting an apostrophe in the possessive *it’s*. Mistakes like these help teachers see where they need to go next with their instruction.

Anderson tells how one of his students, Francisco, wrote, “When I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. I got sent to the principal for the second time.” Anderson resisted the urge to pounce on the sentence fragment. Instead, he saw that Francisco was ready to write a complex sentence – but needed to be taught how. “Look, you’re writing complex sentences,” he said to Francisco. “You’re putting two thoughts together in the same sentence. You tell me you were in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and that this experience was the second time you went to the office. Not only is this a great lead, but this is also a perfect complex sentence. Can I show you a writer’s secret?”

Then he wrote on a large sticky note, “When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was called to the office for the first time,” and asked Francisco how this sentence differed from his own. After a quick interchange about why Anderson was sent to the principal (content, always content!), Anderson got back to the point and said to Francisco, “Writers have a secret they use when they want to combine two ideas like you did. Instead of putting a period after ‘When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade,’ writers put a comma to show that the two ideas go together. The commas tell the reader to pause. ‘When I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade’ all by itself leaves your reader hanging. It is also a fragment, or an incomplete sentence. We need to hook it up to the other part of the sentence.”

Francisco *got* it, put the comma in the right place, and copied his polished sentence onto a transparency, which became part of a lesson shared with his peers. “Although I can’t have a conference like this with every student every day,” says Anderson, “the fruits of one conference can be shared with the whole class.”

- *Plaster the walls* – Over the years, Anderson has groped for the best way to help his students improve their mechanics and usage – especially important for English language learners. Along the way, he’s found what *doesn’t* work: worksheets and having students correct error-riddled sentences. Much more successful, he’s found, are wall charts that summarize often-misused mechanical rules and patterns. “My classroom looks like Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* exploded on the walls,” he says. “I cover every inch of wall with charts that give pithy visual reminders about grammatical patterns.” Students work with him to create many of these charts (on apostrophes for possessives and contractions, for example), drawing from classroom examples and works of literature. “These visual scaffolds highlight patterns,” says Anderson. “During discussions on writing conventions, I point to the appropriate chart and connect it to the concept at hand.” He says that even when the charts are removed for testing, students can look where the chart was and remember the rule.

“Helping Writers Find Power” by Jeff Anderson in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 70-73), no e-link available

## 2. Developing Creativity in Students

“Creativity is a habit,” writes Tufts University psychologist Robert Sternberg in this commentary piece in the current *Education Week*. “The problem is that schools sometimes treat it as a bad habit.” Sternberg says that teachers, anxious to prepare their students for standardized tests, unwittingly discourage creativity. Because most tests (including a lot of classroom tests) have one right answer and many wrong answers, they tend to push divergent thinking – where there are several right answers – out of the curriculum.

What about essay questions? Don’t they allow for creativity? Sternberg is worried that if teachers grade essays using set scoring criteria and model answers, they look for conformity to those rubrics and exemplars rather than flair and creativity. If the accountability movement is too narrowly interpreted, he says, it stifles creativity

Teachers need to push back against these forces, says Sternberg, because creativity is a crucial life skill. “It is important because the world is changing at a far greater pace than it ever has before, and people need constantly to cope with new and unusual kinds of tasks and situations... The problems we confront, whether in our families, communities, or nations, are novel and difficult, and we need to think creatively and divergently to solve these problems. The technologies, social customs, and tools available to us in our lives are replaced almost as quickly as they are introduced. We need to think creatively to thrive, and, at times, even to survive.”

Teachers also have to push back against the common belief that creativity is a fixed trait that some people have and others don’t. On the contrary, says Sternberg, it’s a habit that can be developed. “It may sound paradoxical,” he writes, “that creativity – a novel response – is a habit, a routine response. But creative people are creative largely not by any particular inborn trait, but because of an attitude toward their work and even toward life: They habitually respond to problems in fresh and novel ways, rather than allowing themselves to respond in conventional and sometimes automatic ways.”

So how can teachers help their students develop their creativity? To promote any habit, says Sternberg, people need:

- Opportunities to engage in it;
- Encouragement when they avail themselves of those opportunities;
- Rewards when they follow through.

For example, if a school wants to foster the habit of healthy eating, it should (a) give students opportunities to eat well; (b) encourage them to take advantage of healthy eating opportunities; and (c) praise them when they eat well.

To become more creative, students need opportunities, encouragement, and praise for creative habits. These include:

- Looking for ways to see problems that other people don’t look for;
- Taking risks that other people are afraid to take;
- Having the courage to defy the crowd and stand up for their own beliefs;
- Believing in their own ability to be creative;
- Seeking to overcome obstacles and challenges to their views;

- Working hard to achieve creative solutions.

Here's how this might play out in each of the major subject areas:

- *History* – Students can be encouraged to think creatively about how we can learn from the mistakes of the past and do better in the future; about what might have happened if certain historical events had not occurred, for example, the defeat of the Nazis in World War II.

- *Science* – Students can design experiments whose outcome is not simple and clear-cut.

- *Literature* – Students can be asked to come up with alternative endings to stories, or how the story might have been different if it took place in another era.

- *Mathematics* – Students can be asked to invent and think with novel number systems.

- *Foreign languages* – Students can invent dialogue with people from other cultures.

There's no reason teachers can't evaluate their students on creativity and even give them grades on it, says Sternberg. Essays, projects, and performances can be assessed based on how novel they are (originality), how good they are (quality), and how appropriate they are to the assignment that was given. Sternberg cites research showing that raters can be trained to assess creative thinking in ways that are valid and reliable.

Although he is an advocate of fostering creativity, Sternberg is not against teaching facts and knowledge. "On the contrary," he says, "we cannot think creatively with knowledge unless we have the knowledge with which to think creatively. Knowledge is a necessary, but in no way sufficient, condition for creativity." The problem, Sternberg writes, is that teachers and parents are often content with facts and knowledge, which is what many tests measure. That knowledge becomes inert, sitting in students' heads yet inaccessible for actual use. "We may end up with 'walking encyclopedias,'" says Sternberg, "who show all the creativity of an encyclopedia."

"Creativity Is a Habit" by Robert Sternberg in *Education Week*, Feb. 22, 2006 (Vol. 25, #24, p. 64, 47), no free e-link available

### **3. Math Learning – and Much More – in a California High School**

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Stanford professor Jo Boaler reports on a study of how a low-SES urban high school in the San Francisco area outstripped two suburban schools by combining effective math instruction with a "hidden curriculum" about respect. So effective was the urban school's approach that by the time the lead cohort of students were seniors, 41 percent were in advanced classes of pre-calculus and calculus compared to 27 percent in the suburban schools. The main success factors, according to Boaler's study, were: collaboration among the school's 12 math teachers designing curriculum and sharing teaching methods; recruitment and support of like-minded teachers; heterogeneous math classes; cooperative learning groups working on complex conceptual problems centered on the "big ideas" of mathematics; a shared commitment to equity; and teaching students to respect each other. The last component had three parts:

- *Committing to the learning of others* – Working in cooperative groups, says Boaler, “encouraged high levels of respect that transcended race, class, and gender boundaries.” In this school, researchers did not see students commenting on classmates being “smart” or “dumb.” Teachers worked to create classrooms where learning was a collective, rather than an individual, endeavor. Students were responsible for making sure everyone in the group understood, and reinforced this by grading group discussions and occasionally giving group tests in which the whole group received the grade of one student.

In the first year, higher-achieving students complained about having to spend time explaining things to their peers. But by the second year, these students had come to appreciate the communal ethic and how much they learned from teaching other students. “Thank God I’m in a group!” exclaimed one senior before an AP Calculus exam. Attitudes about innate versus developed intelligence were markedly different between the schools. Asked if anyone can be good at math if they try, 84 percent of students at the urban school agreed versus 52 percent in the two suburban schools.

- *Respecting the ideas of others* – Interestingly, the teachers in the urban school did not use a social justice curriculum or spend a lot of time relating math to students’ cultures. Instead, they dove into high-level mathematics and had students tackle challenging, open-ended, “group-worthy” problems in their cooperative groups. “Classroom discussions were often abstract and mathematical,” reports Boaler, “but as students learned to value the contributions of different methods, perspectives, and partially correct or even incorrect ideas, they also came to value different people’s insights.” Teachers also used an unconventional grading system: students got high grades, explains Boaler, “not only because they got the correct answers but also because they asked good questions, rephrased problems, explained ideas, worked logically, justified their methods, or brought a different perspective to a problem. Simply put, there were many more ways to be successful, so many more students were successful.”

- *Learning to communicate* – Students were taught how to gauge their classmates’ understanding by asking probing questions. If a student says, “I don’t get it,” other students ask, “What is the question asking you?” or “When have you seen this kind of problem before?” This doesn’t always work, and some students are loners. But students keep trying. One student, Susan, explained how she tackled her group’s problem: “There’s a person in our group – I won’t say no names – who just kind of lies around. Another guy just likes doing stuff by himself. I go over and talk with this one, and once I’m done, I go over and sit by the one who really doesn’t care. I ask him, ‘Are you understanding this stuff?’”

The gains these students made in their math achievement were remarkable. Even more remarkable were the gains they made in interpersonal skills. They learned they could “solve complex problems through persistence and by collaborating with others,” concludes Boaler. “They learned the varied ways in which people solve problems. They learned to respect students regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social class. They learned effective methods of communication. These are valuable practices that the students will take with them into the rest of their lives.”

“Promoting Respectful Learning” by Jo Boaler in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 74-78), no e-link available

#### **4. Tackling Low Literacy Skills in Rhode Island**

In this article in the February issue of *Educational Leadership*, literacy coordinator Bill Clarke describes how his Pawtucket high school addressed the problem of students who entered with underdeveloped literacy skills and hated to read. The staff decided to make literacy a pillar of the school’s culture and began systematically measuring students’ reading progress. Teachers give the NWEA assessment to all entering students and to below-level sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Students could take the test at other points during the year to check their progress.

At first the test wasn’t taken seriously, but when kids had to take it a second time and saw progress (or regression), they got hooked. The school’s leaders reinforced this by publicly announcing in morning assemblies the names of students who had made strong gains in their reading scores. Students began to cheer their peers’ progress and apply themselves to improving their reading, aiming for their “personal best.”

Recognizing that frequent reading was critical to improvement, the school started a sustained silent reading program, requiring all students to read for 20 minutes a day, four days a week. Students were able to choose from novels, newspapers, magazines, and anthologies. Teachers who modeled reading and talked about what they read got the greatest degree of student involvement.

Students two or more years below grade level were “invited” (actually required) to take part in a reading intervention program pegged to three different levels. Classes were taught by Clarke, reading specialists, and semi-retired teachers. Staff began with an inventory of students’ learning style and attitudes toward reading. Teachers then focused on building good reading habits, reinforcing reading strategies, helping students establish a purpose for reading, showing them how to attack different kinds of texts, and most important, providing compelling reading materials.

In regular classes, the school chose one literacy strategy each quarter – directed notes, questioning, and think-alouds, for example – and had all teachers weave them into their lessons. This meant that students were exposed to the same strategies in all their classes. Teachers also read and discussed literacy-related books, starting with *Literacy with an Attitude* by Patrick Finn, which explores the impact that schools have on many working-class children. Clarke says that the book energized the staff, helping teachers see the urgency of building students’ reading, writing, and problem-solving skills in ways that were relevant to their lives. “We are attempting to rewire our students’ expectations of high school, literacy, and their futures,” says Clarke.

These initiatives paid off: Clarke reports that students made an average increase of almost two grade levels in their reading skills from 2003 to 2005. “It’s been exciting to see struggling readers shift from hating reading to reveling in their own skills,” he concludes.

“Breaking Through to Reluctant Readers” by Bill Clarke in *Educational Leadership*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 63, #5, p. 66-69), no e-link available

## **5. An In-School Mentoring Program**

At the end of the 2004-05 school year, Larry Lewis, the superintendent of a mixed-income, predominantly African-American school district just outside Dallas, noticed that a number of students were held back from graduating from Lancaster High School. The students were college-ready but didn't graduate because they hadn't fulfilled certain requirements. “It kills you at graduation to see those kids sitting out there in the audience,” recalled Lewis. “We said this will never, ever happen again.”

This year, Lancaster High has assigned a mentor from within the school to each of its 300 seniors, with the goal of encouraging students to stay in school, finish their academic work, and move on to college. Teachers, administrators, secretaries, instructional aides, and custodians serve as mentors and have a “caseload” of 10-15 students each. They try to talk to each of their mentees at least once every six weeks, often more frequently. Meetings are sometimes scheduled but are often impromptu chats in the hallways, pulling a student out of class, or on the phone.

Mentors focus on the basics – attendance, grades, scores on statewide tests, and fulfillment of the school's community service requirements. Patti MacRae of the National Mentoring Center in Oregon, thinks this narrow focus is a good idea. “It's not helpful to just tell seniors that they're going to have one more friend,” she said. The likely response is, “Why do I need another friend?” As it is, students have responded favorably. “I thought it was going to be another teacher on my back,” said Marco Saucedo, 17, “but it was nothing like that.”

Verdie Sadberry, the assistant principal who organized the program, believes that in-school mentors are more helpful than those from outside because they have access to academic records and can easily consult with teachers about students' progress. “People from the outside don't get that,” she said. The reaction to the program was negative at first (“Oh my God, more work!” said one teacher), but that's changed and the school is now thinking of assigning mentors to all students.

“All Seniors in Texas High School Get Mentors” by Dean Cavanagh in *Education Week*, Feb. 22, 2006 (Vol. 25, #24, p. 8), no free e-link available

## **6. Should Twins Be Together in the Same Classroom?**

This front-page *New York Times* article revisits the perennial question of whether twins should be in the same classroom. Separating twins is standard practice in most schools and the majority of parents accept it. But some parents are getting feisty about keeping their twins (and triplets) together. Queens mother Kathy Dolan took 1,000 signatures to her state senator and demanded legislation to make placement the parents' choice. Minnesota has such a law, enacted last year, Illinois is considering legislation, and several other states have parents lobbying for similar bills.

These parents argue that twins, especially identical twins, do better when they are together, and some recent studies back them up. “In our culture we appreciate uniqueness,” said Nancy Segal, director of the Twins Studies Center at California State University, “and people wrongly equate twin closeness with a lack of individuality. There’s research that suggests that when friends are in the same class, they’re more exploratory and cling to the teacher less. So if we’re worried about individuality, why do we let best friends go to school together?”

But many educators disagree. Sandra Bridges, principal of P.S. 234 in Manhattan, notes that one twin is usually more verbal and does the talking for the other. And Bonnie Maslin, a New York psychologist, thinks the trend toward parental micromanagement may be involved in trying to keep twins together. “They can, in essence, be trophy children,” she said. “And parents of trophy children are unusually focused on outcomes and the belief that they can control them.”

Issues of convenience are part of this debate – on both sides. For principals, separating twins and triplets may be part of achieving the right sex, race, and achievement balance in each classroom. For parents, having kids in the same classroom makes life easier. “This isn’t for them so much as it is for me,” said Gabriella Mackin, who pulled her quadruplets out of a Houston school that refused to put them in the same classroom. “I also have a 5-year-old son, and I work full time. When you have four or five different teachers with four or five sets of homework, all the children too young to do the homework on their own, it’s impossible.”

But for other parents, separation makes sense. Marian Schneider, the president of the Manhattan Mothers of Twins club, became convinced that her twin girls should be placed in different classrooms in kindergarten after they spent their pre-school year in the same room. “They have different skills, and we didn’t want them constantly compared,” she said. “When they were together all day, they fought too much at home. They were like two old married women.”

“Born Together, Raised Together, So Why Not in the Classroom, Too?” by Ginia Bellafante in New York Times, Feb. 24, 2006 (p. 1, A20)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/24/national/24twins.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/24/national/24twins.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

## **7. Rekindling the Flame for Mid-Career Employees**

In yet another *Harvard Business Review* article that is directly applicable to the world of schools, two Texas executives and a California consultant offer advice on managing mid-career employees. The authors list the most common sources of frustration among folks in their forties and fifties:

- *Career bottleneck* – A lot of other boomers are competing for the same next-level-up jobs and there aren’t enough slots for everyone.
- *Work/life tension* – A lot of mid-career employees are sandwiched between commitments to children and parents, often at the same time their work responsibilities are peaking.

- *Lengthening horizon* – Employees who are not accumulating enough wealth for retirement (a good many boomers have been lavish spenders and sparse savers) face the prospect of having to work longer than they thought they would have to.
- *Skills obsolescence* – Skills that have served well over the years may have become obsolete.
- *Disillusionment with employer* – Enough said.
- *Burnout* – People who were energetic in their early work years get stretched and stressed, find their work unexciting and repetitive, and are running low on energy and the ability to cope.
- *Career disappointment* – The roles employees play and the impact of their work fail to measure up to their youthful ideals and ambitions.

The authors have two general pieces of advice for managers: (a) remove institutional barriers that prevent job flexibility (think union restrictions in education); and (b) identify your most valuable employees and make sure your interventions go to the *rest* of the staff (the rationale is that the “keepers” are usually getting a lot of strokes already). The authors go on to recommend six solutions for staving off mid-career blues:

- *Fresh assignments* – Lateral moves with new responsibilities can be rejuvenating.
- *Career changes* – “Middlescents often dream of – and in some cases end up pursuing – something fundamentally new,” write the authors. Being an empty-nester can sometimes make these dreams possible.
- *Mentoring colleagues* – Getting mid-career employees involved in mentoring, professional development, and other knowledge-sharing roles can re-engage them and benefit others.
- *Fresh training* – Having mid-career employees learn completely new skills can sometimes open new avenues and reboot their morale.
- *Sabbaticals* – A year’s break from the routine can make all the difference.
- *Expanding leadership development* – Some mid-career folks may be ready to take on a leadership role with the proper training and encouragement.

“Managing Middlecence” by Robert Morison, Tamara Erickson, and Ken Dychtwald in *Harvard Business Review*, March 2006 (Vol. 84, #3, p. 78-86), no e-link available

## **8. Does Accelerated Reader Work?**

This study, conducted in several high-poverty, largely African-American schools in the south, evaluated the impact of the Accelerated Reading/Reading Renaissance program on the reading achievement of 978 students in grades 3-6. Accelerated Reader uses computers to monitor students’ reading levels (using the adaptive STAR tests), gives students quizzes on the leveled books they read, and provides diagnostic feedback to students and their teachers.

This article starts off by helpfully listing the six key principles of Accelerated Reader – the “theory of action” that drives the program:

- Students need a lot of practice to get better at reading.

- Students accelerate their reading proficiency when they are operating at a high level of success – 85% or better comprehension.
- Optimal acceleration happens when students read books in their zone of proximal development; reading too-easy books does little to improve skills and reading too-difficult books leads to frustration.
- Students need regular feedback on their reading comprehension to improve.
- Instruction is most effective when it is customized to the level and needs of each student.
- Students do best when they are aiming for measurable reading targets.

Accelerated Reader operationalizes these principles by: (a) providing a 30-60-minute block of reading time every day; (b) having students take the STAR computerized reading test at least three times a year to peg their current reading level; (c) making sure students are reading books that are “just right” for their reading level, either in group settings, with a partner, or independently; (d) having students take computer quizzes with literal comprehension questions on each book they complete and using 85% as the criterion of success; and (e) having the teacher use diagnostic information from the computer and their conferences with students to follow up with appropriate instruction.

Does the program work? Yes, at least as measured by results on STAR tests over time. Accelerated Reader students had “significantly higher growth rates in reading compared to students in control classrooms... with larger effects in the earlier grades and small effects in the upper grades.” The authors note that for the most part, the degree to which teachers faithfully implemented the program did not affect how well their students did – except that “children with learning disabilities in high-implementation classrooms had significantly higher achievement gains than children with learning disabilities in either control or low-implementation classrooms.”

“A Randomized Experimental Evaluation of the Impact of Accelerated Reader/Reading Renaissance Implementation on Reading Achievement in Grades 3 to 6” by John Nunnery, Steven Ross, and Aaron McDonald in *JESPAR (Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk)*, Feb. 2006 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 1-18), no e-link available

## **9. Does Voyager Work?**

This one-year study of the Voyager Universal Literacy System compared early literacy results in four Voyager and four non-Voyager inner-city schools, involving 398 kindergarten students. The study found significantly better results for students whose teachers used the Voyager program, especially in classrooms that most faithfully implemented the program, and attributed them to four key elements:

- Content that includes phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension in a developmentally appropriate sequence.

- Availability and regular use of assessment information to monitor student progress and inform, fine-tune, and adjust instruction. This includes homogeneous reading groups for some instruction.

- An appropriate mixture of small- and large-group instruction designed to introduce and reinforce knowledge and skills that students need to master.

- Supports for struggling readers who may need more time to learn or may need to be taught using alternative means.

The study notes that the Voyager program has highly scripted lesson plans and detailed sequences for lesson presentation and scheduling. “Although this feature of the program may not be attractive to some practitioners,” note the authors, “its strength lies in its provision of a failsafe mechanism and clear expectations for material to be covered and skills to be learned. Being scripted does not mean, however, that the program does not also demand teachers to be active listeners and skilled in managing the classroom environment.” The management challenges of handling the 90-120-minute reading block and small- and large-group activities are significant, say the authors, especially for teachers who do not have an instructional aide.

“The Voyager Universal Literacy System: Results from a Study of Kindergarten Students in Inner-City Schools” by Joy Frechtling, Xiaodong Zhang, and Gary Silverstein in *JESPAR*, February 2006 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 75-95), no e-link available

## 10. Short Items:

*a. Advice on advice* – Harvard Business School lecturer Francesca Gino has found that when people seek advice, their instincts are often flawed. Here’s what her studies revealed:

- People tend to blindly follow recommendations from people who have a similar level of knowledge – or ignorance. “You may not be well-informed about the problem,” writes Gino, “but beware of being too willing to listen to others who are no better informed than you are.”

- When a problem is hard, people tend to overvalue the advice they receive. Often their own gut instincts are better than what they hear from others.

- When people think the solution to a problem is simple, they tend to wave off advice-givers. Think again, says Gino: “You may know a lot about the problem, but that doesn’t mean you won’t benefit from the opinions of others who know a lot, too.”

- People tend to overvalue advice they pay for, giving it more credence than it warrants. This comes from “sunk-cost bias” and the nearly instinctual belief that cost and quality are linked. “[B]efore acting on those premium-priced recommendations from your consultancy,” concludes Gino, “ask what you’d do if you had gotten the same advice for free.”

“Let Me Give You Some Advice” by Francesca Gino in *Harvard Business Review*, March 2006 (Vol. 84, #3, p. 24-25), no e-link available

*b. After-school program success factors* – A recent study confirmed that after-school programs can contribute to improved student achievement – and don’t have to focus on academics to get results. If an after-school program is a safety zone where students get

homework help, explore new interests and ideas (including arts, recreation, and literacy), and develop long-term supportive relationships with peers and adults, they can get a significant achievement bump in the regular school day. The report found that high-impact programs share these characteristics:

- A broad array of enrichment opportunities;
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery;
- Intentional relationship-building;
- A strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff;
- Administrative, fiscal, and professional-development support from the sponsoring organization.

“Shared Features of High-Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation” by Jennifer Birmingham, Ellen Pechman, Christina Russell, and Monica Mielke from Policy Studies Associates, November 2005; for the full report, go to: <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/fam107/fam107.pdf>  
(Spotted in *PEN Weekly Newsblast*, Feb. 24, 2006)

**c. What works with ELLs?** – This report from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in conjunction with WestEd found that in the years since California’s Proposition 227 ended bilingual education, no one instructional model has emerged as superior for educating English language learners. In schools, a variety of factors influence outcomes, and there is no magic bullet for high student achievement. The report recommends: (a) Identifying schools and districts that are successfully educating ELLs; (b) Ensuring that ELLs have full access to the core curriculum; (c) Limiting prolonged separation of ELLs from English-speaking students to situations where it’s absolutely necessary; (d) Ensuring that instructional plans for ELLs are articulated across classes within grades, across grades within schools, and across the district.

“Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12” from AIR and WestEd: <http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/rs/804>  
(Spotted in *PEN Weekly Newsblast*, Feb. 24, 2006)

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***Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?***

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

## ***Website:***

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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

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

## ***Publications covered***

*Those read this week are underlined.*

American 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  
JESPAR  
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  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
Teacher Magazine  
Teachers College Record  
Theory Into Practice