Marshall Memo 404

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
October 3, 2011

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"I felt like I was working harder and harder, and the students were working less and less hard, and we weren't being as successful."

High-school science teacher Susan Kramer (see item #5)

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by e-mail folders and labels."

Sam Grobart (see item #2)

"Children do not always learn what we teach. That is why the most important assessment does not happen at the end of the learning – it happens during the learning, when there is still time to do something with the information."

Dylan Wiliam (quoted in item #3)

"Every teacher needs to be getting better – not because they're not good enough, but because they can be even better. Every teacher needs to get better at something that will make a difference to their students, such as classroom assessment."

Dylan Wiliam (*ibid*.)

"Does 2 + 2 = 4? No! Because two cats plus two sausages is what? Two cats. Two drops of water plus two drops of water? One drop of water."

Vasiliy Georgievich Bogin, eccentric principal of New Humanitarian School in Moscow, quoted in "My Family's Experiment in Extreme Schooling" by Clifford Levy, *The New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 15, 2011, http://nyti.ms/rcxne8

1. David Brooks on the Shortcomings of Trying to Teaching Empathy

In this provocative *New York Times* column, David Brooks writes about the gap that sometimes exists between *feeling* empathy toward another human being and actually *doing something* to help. "Empathy makes you more aware of other people's suffering," he says, "but it's not clear it actually motivates you to take moral action or prevents you from taking immoral action." He cites the Milgram experiments in which subjects cold-heartedly gave electric shocks to others because someone in authority told them to do so.

CUNY professor Jesse Prinz wrote recently that "empathy is not a major player when it comes to moral motivation. Its contribution is negligible in children, modest in adults, and non-existent when costs are significant." Other researchers have labeled empathy a "fragile flower" that's easily sidetracked by self-interest. Moreover, says Prinz, empathy can distort judgment. People care more for victims who are cute than for those who are unattractive. Juries give lighter sentences to defendants who show contrition. People are more empathetic toward victims of a dramatic event like a hurricane than they are for those who suffer from long-standing conditions like hunger or preventable diseases.

What motivates people to make moral judgments and take action on behalf of others is a moral code – religious, social, philosophical, or military. "People who actually perform pro-social action don't only feel for those who are suffering," says Brooks, "they feel compelled to act by a sense of duty. Their lives are structured by sacred codes… They would feel a sense of shame or guilt if they didn't live up to the code."

Brooks concludes that empathy is "a sideshow", "a shortcut", and not worthy of the attention it's getting in character-education programs and a slew of books. "It has become a way to experience delicious moral emotions without confronting the weaknesses in our nature that prevent us from actually acting upon them. It has become a way to experience the illusion of moral progress without having to do the nasty work of making moral judgments… [T]eaching empathy is a safe way for schools and other institutions to seem virtuous without risking controversy or hurting anybody's feelings."

"If you want to make the world a better place," Brooks concludes, "help people debate, understand, reform, revere, and enact their codes."

"The Limits of Empathy" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2011, http://nyti.ms/qK9G1p

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2. A Better Way to Deal with E-Mail

In this *New York Times* article, Sam Grobart casts doubt on the e-mail system in David Allen's highly-regarded time management book, *Getting Things Done*. Grobart is concerned that the GTD system, and others, may "replace one anxiety ('My stuff's not organized') with another ('My stuff's not organized according to this specific system')." Grobart suggests five general strategies for getting control of the flood of e-mail:

• *Stop organizing, start searching*. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by e-mail folders and labels," he says. It's logical to sort e-mails into folders, but the problem is keeping up with them – and remembering where you put everything. "Maintaining a label or folder regimen requires constant and furious vigilance," he says. A better alternative is to use the search features that almost all e-mail programs and operating systems have, which allow us to locate old e-mails by a key word, phrase, or number. "Keeping a folder may be a good idea when there's more than one thing to look for," says Grobart, "when you have e-mails related to a specific long-term project like family vacations or home renovations – but for the most part, you can leave your in-box messy."

• *Be ruthless about blocking*. It's essential to unsubscribe all non-essential e-mail senders to minimize the amount of junk mail. "To that end," says Grobart, "consider 'block sender' your brutish but loyal sidekick in this continuing battle." He also recommends turning off the alerts that come from other in-boxes like Facebook, Twitter, and personal accounts. You can go to those in-boxes without the extra clutter that comes with automatic alerts.

• *Build a digital nag*. An in-box can serve as a helpful to-do list, says Grobart. To prevent important e-mails from getting buried by others, he suggests services like Nudgemail, Followup, Followupthen, and Boomerang, which can schedule a message to reappear as new in your in-box after a specified period of time.

• *Use your in-box as an address book*. Grobart believes that lovingly compiling an address book is not a good use of time. "If you can save all your e-mails," he says, "you will have a searchable database of everyone who has ever e-mailed you." It's easy to locate people by name, organization, or e-mail domain. He mentions Xobni, which can automate address book tasks in Outlook every time you receive an e-mail.

• *Make your peace*. "This system is not bulletproof," concludes Grobart. "No system is. Part of living with e-mail is knowing that there is a lot of it and there always will be, so relax. Don't beat yourself up about it."

"Five Easy Steps to Stanch the E-Mail Flood" by Sam Grobart in *The New York Times*, Sept. 8, 2011, http://nyti.ms/ntNiaU

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3. Dylan Wiliam on the Power of Classroom Assessments

In this *Huff Post Education* article, C.M. Rubin interviews British researcher Dylan Wiliam on embedded formative assessments, which he has piloted with more than 1,000 teacher learning communities around the world. Wiliam says that in one study in Great Britain,

students whose teachers used this approach effectively learned 75 percent more than those taught by other teachers in the same schools.

"When a teacher teaches, no matter how well he or she might design a lesson, what a child learns is unpredictable," says Wiliam. "Children do not always learn what we teach. That is why the most important assessment does not happen at the end of the learning – it happens during the learning, when there is still time to do something with the information. Our goal is to get teachers to pay more attention to what is being learned while the actual learning is taking place."

Wiliam bemoans the fact that schools don't require teachers to improve their competence every year. "Instead, teachers are required to show that they have endured a certain amount of professional development (and these are usually specified in number of hours) to continue to be employed, or acquire new qualifications, but they don't need to get better at teaching. Every teacher needs to be getting better – not because they're not good enough, but because they can be even better. Every teacher needs to get better at something that will make a difference to their students, such as classroom assessment."

Ideally, all teachers are required to do that, but the way they do it should be up to them. It's also a helpful practice for teachers to make promises about how they will improve to a group of peers and then report back on a monthly basis.

Wiliam believes there are five key strategies necessary for embedded assessments to work well:

- Sharing learning intentions with students;
- Eliciting evidence of achievement through on-the-spot assessments;
- Providing feedback to students that moves learning forward;
- Activating students as learning resources for one another;
- Activating students as owners of their own learning.

Keeping Learning on Track is a curriculum package designed by Wiliam and his colleagues for use in schools over a two-year period, available from the Northwest Evaluation Association in Portland, OR.

"The Global Search for Education: What Did You Learn Today?" by C.M. Rubin in *Huff Post Education*, Sept. 20, 2011, http://huff.to/pamxsR

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4. A Veteran New York City Principal Shows How It's Done

In this *New York Times* article, Michael Winerip profiles Jacqui Getz, 51, a New York City principal who has just begun her third school leadership position at P.S. 126 in Chinatown (her mother is a long-time New York City teacher, and all three of Getz's children have attended city public schools). Winerip highlights these characteristics:

• *Sensitivity to the troops* – "You're the principal," says Getz, "but you have to know how a teacher feels and how a teacher thinks." Her nine years as a teacher and four years as an assistant principal stand her in good stead.

• *Supervising and evaluating teachers* – Getz is in classrooms every day, looks at lesson plans and the written materials teachers send to the office and to families, drops in on teacher team meetings, and watches teachers during professional development and staff meetings (are they taking notes, showing signs of being reflective and curious about the art of teaching?).

• *Acting as a buffer for teachers* – Getz believes that the New York City Education Department's attempt to quantify teachers' effectiveness with a 32-variable equation (with test scores counting heavily) is bogus. "How can this formula tell me about the teacher in front of me?" she asks. "These tests are so unreliable; I wouldn't count them 10 percent, 8 percent, 1 percent. You don't want teachers feeling belittled; you want them to keep their dignity so they can be at their best… I want my people to feel I have their backs."

• *Working well with union representatives* – "We're glad she's here," says the school's UFT chapter leader.

• *Supporting staff members* – Getz compliments her secretary on her work ethic and brings her Diet Cokes.

• *A distinctive style* – Getz wears high heels and bracelets, and people know she's coming when she's still around the corner.

• *Being attuned to students* – Supervising breakfast, Getz chats with students about *Maniac McGee* books and brings a box of cereal and a carton of milk to a boy whose head is down on the table. "You have to eat," she whispers.

• *Making her office inviting and functional* – Getz bought bookcases from Ikea and stocked them with hundreds of books from her home that children and teachers can borrow. Even official visits by downtown officials are interruptible by students seeking books.

• *Getting out into the community* – Getz immediately accepted an invitation from the local tenants' association to come to a meeting. "She's on the mark," said Aixa Torres, the organization's president.

• *A work ethic, soldiering on* – Getz wakes up in the middle of the night fretting about class size (the school's sixth-grade classes went from 20 to 30 students because of budget cuts). She's often in the school into the evening hours, and her weekend to-do list is formidable. But her public face is upbeat, her expectations high.

"The Secrets of a Principal Who Makes Things Work" by Michael Winerip in *The New York Times*, Sept. 26, 2011 (p. A22), http://nyti.ms/qRMuST

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5. Homework: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

In this *Principal Leadership* article, San Diego State University professors Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher list their criteria for effective homework:

• It should come after high-quality teacher modeling of the thinking and procedures required.

• It should come after students have had a chance to practice with their peers in productive group settings, explain their thinking, and hear the thinking of their peers.

• It should come after teachers have checked for understanding with questions, prompts, and cues and given students corrective feedback.

• In other words, homework should be a chance for students to practice something they know how to do. They believe it's not the time to introduce new material.

When teachers break these rules and assign homework that breaks new ground or ask students to do work they're not prepared to do alone, there are four categories of student reaction:

- *Completers* – These students finish all their homework, often with the help of a family member or paid tutor. The teacher assumes students have mastery and moves on.
- *Neglecters* – Because they don't understand the homework or are too busy with other stuff, these students blow it off, giving the teacher limited options.
- *Error-makers* – These students try, but get most of it wrong, leaving the teacher with difficult choices on how to follow up.
- *Cheaters* – These students take the easy way out and copy the homework from a classmate, giving the illusion of mastery.

"In reality," say Frey and Fisher, "schools and classrooms are filled with a mix of all of these types of students, which likely contributes to the lack of consistent evidence on the effect of homework on student learning… What educators need to figure out is how to ensure that students understand the homework that they are assigned so that they actually complete it. To change a maxim, only perfect practice makes perfect."

So what are ideal homework assignments? Frey and Fisher believe there are four kinds that produce results:

• *Fluency practice* – Students practice one or two skills they already know how to do in order to improve – for example, reading every night from books at their reading level builds reading power as well as vocabulary and background knowledge.

• *Application* – Students apply something they have learned to a new situation, which can involve inquiry and investigation – for example, students might be asked to write about what would have happened if the Civil War had been fought in 1920.

• *Spiral review* – Students do problems and questions that reach back to curriculum areas covered before the current unit. This keeps memories sharp, relates current to earlier content, and reduces the need for weeks of review before high-stakes tests.

• *Extension* – Students are asked to extend what they already know into new domains, which opens the door for different students working on different things – for example, some students in a biology class are reading press articles about genetics, others are having a discussion with the teacher after school, and others are working on independent research projects.

"High-Quality Homework" by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher in *Principal Leadership*, October 2011 (Vol. 12, #2, p. 56-58), no e-link available; Frey can be reached at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu and Fisher at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu.

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6. More on "Flipped" Classrooms

In this *Education Week* article, Sarah Sparks reports on the growing phenomenon of teachers "flipping" the normal classwork/homework sequence by having students listen to lectures at home (via website videos) and then engage in labs, group practice, projects, simulations, and interactive follow-ups in class. This maximizes teachers' in-person ability as coaches, supporters, and facilitators of learning and, say proponents, improves student learning. The flip model depends, of course, on good technology in school and at home, and also an initial investment of time as teachers videotape their lectures and other activities.

Khan Academy, one of the pioneers of the big flip, is working with the Los Altos, California schools this year [see Marshall Memo 379]. In the first year of the Khan experiment during 2010-11, state-test proficiency rose from 23% to 40%, and this year, the district has expanded the program to 1,000 students. "It's not just about the kids watching the same lecture the night before," says Alyssa Gallagher, a district leader. "For us, the big piece is having teachers use data to make instructional decisions about their students."

Los Altos teachers are getting students to work their way through the entire Khan math sequence and using the assessments to spotlight where understanding breaks down. Teachers can also track which videos and individual exercises students spend the most time on and how long it takes them to correctly solve 10 problems in a row – the requirement for moving on to the next step. "I was able to identify those learning gaps in real time," says teacher Courtney Cadwell, "whether it was from 3rd or 4th or 5th grade, and I was able to remediate and saw those learning gaps begin to disappear… The math class that they dreaded became something they really loved."

At the Gwinnett Charter School of Math, Science, and Technology in Georgia, veteran teacher Susan Kramer had come to believe that the traditional lecture/lab/test approach she was using in her AP science classes was less and less productive. "I felt like I was working harder and harder, and the students were working less and less hard, and we weren't being as successful," she said. "I really felt like they need to be interacting with the material more than I am." One of Kramer's colleagues, John Willis, began having students watch lectures online for homework two or three nights a week, gave short "clicker" quizzes at the beginning of class to make sure they had viewed the material, and then used class time for demonstrations and experiments.

Kramer began using the same approach and found that it allowed her to move much more quickly through the curriculum. Before, it took a double period to set up for an experiment; now she was able to accomplish the same amount of learning with homework and one double period. "It allows me to improve connections I'm making with students, because now I can get into the material in a deeper way," she says. Some of the at-home YouTube videos she uses are of scientists discussing the equipment, some are photos of the school's microscopes for student to label, and some are student-made videos explaining common problems with the experiment.

Flipped classrooms do require students to commit to doing a lot more work on their own – but the benefit is increased student engagement. A student in a Gwinnett physics class

said, "It basically led us to a set of conclusions without him telling us the conclusions. We had to test it out on this little applet and figure it out. It was a much better explanation than the really boring one in the book."

"Schools 'Flip' for Lesson Model Promoted by Khan Academy" by Sarah Sparks in *Education Week*, Sept. 28, 2011 (Vol. 31, #5, p. 1, 14); subscribers can access this article at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/28/05khan_ep.h31.html.

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7. A Massachusetts School Addresses Its Boy-Girl Achievement Gap

In this *American School Board Journal* article, suburban elementary principal Sheryl Boris-Schacter describes her school's reaction to the fact that girls consistently did better than boys in ELA and math standardized tests, and boys were over-represented in special education, reading interventions, and disciplinary referrals. Boris-Schacter read Peg Tyre's book, *The Trouble With Boys*, and two ideas rang true: schools ask students to be unnaturally inactive, and boys are more likely than girls to have problems with such constraints.

The school had already made one change the previous year: allowing students to play for 15 minutes before entering school in the morning instead of lining up, listening to announcements, and waiting. But this clearly wasn't enough.

Boris-Schacter presented the staff with five years of test scores vividly showing the gender achievement gap and asked if there were ways teachers were already addressing students' need to be more active. A first-grade teacher said she allowed some students to sweep the room while she read stories. Other teachers had students do "brain gym" activities just before whole-class instruction – for example, wall push-ups, jumping jacks, and dancing. These teachers assured skeptical colleagues that students could concentrate on a story while sweeping and that the brief exercises got the wiggles out and resulted in more-productive classroom time.

Boris-Schacter next got teachers reading *Misreading Masculinity* by Thomas Newkirk and bought balance boards and fidget toys for any teachers who requested them (previously, only students in occupational therapy had access to these). The school's literacy specialists suggested another intervention: getting more books that would capture boys' imaginations and increase their skills (including graphic novels) and assigning writing topics that related more directly to their interests. "The greatest response to these changes came from boys," says Boris-Schacter, "but some girls also benefited. Every elementary school in America has girls who need to move often and who like nonfiction and graphic novels."

Finally, the school created an event called "Men Read at Hunnewell" to counteract the fact that students almost never saw male role models reading. Two PTO meetings focused on "Calling All Dads" to urge fathers (and other male members of the school and community) to participate. The result was men participating more actively in chaperoning field trips and other school events, as well as reading more with their children at home.

Has all this made a difference in student achievement? In an e-mail last week, Boris-Schacter reported that the school's gender gap has all but disappeared in the Proficient level of

the Massachusetts high-stakes test and has narrowed considerably at the Advanced level. Girls are still doing better, but the boys are closing the gap.

"Gender, Wiggles, and Dads" by Sheryl Boris-Schacter in *American School Board Journal*, October 2011 (Vol. 198, #10, p. 32-33), ftp://64.14.13.138/others/ASBJ/ASBJ_20111001_Oct_2011.pdf; Boris-Schacter can be reached at sheryl_boris-schacter@wellesley.k12.ma.us.

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8. Supporting Students After Trauma and Loss

In this article in *ASCA School Counselor*, Robin Gurwitch and David Schonfeld of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center note that by high-school graduation, 90 percent of American students have experienced the death of a family member, relative, or loved one and 40 percent have experienced the death of someone their own age. Many have also dealt with divorce, domestic violence, child maltreatment, parental substance abuse, and accidents. "These experiences will affect their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physical well-being," say Gurwitch and Schonfeld, including how they perform academically and relate to peers and adults. Here are some reactions:

Thoughts:

- Difficulty concentrating, paying attention, making decisions, and learning new information;
- Intrusive thoughts and memories;
- Concerns about their own safety and security and that of others;
- Worries about an additional loss or the recurrence of the event;
- Self-blame, thinking they were responsible for what happened;
- Preoccupation with death, including suicidal ideation;

Feelings:

- Fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, helplessness, irritability, loss of interest in things they used to enjoy, isolation, feeling different from others, guilt, mood swings;

Physical complaints:

- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares;
- Fatigue;
- Increased activity level;
- Changes in appetite;
- Easily startled;
- Agitation, being on high alert;
- Headaches and stomachaches;

Behaviors:

- Crying;
- Difficulty getting along with family members, friends, and classmates;
- Aggression or disruptive behaviors;
- Avoiding people, places, or situations that are reminders of the trauma or loss;

- Difficulty separating from family, including refusal to attend school;
- Acting younger than their age;
- Withdrawal;
- Defiance;
- Repeatedly asking questions about trauma or loss or telling stories of the event;
- Reliving the events through play (younger children);
- Engaging in high-risk behaviors (adolescents).

These students need the school's support, but they won't necessarily reach out to counselors or other adults. Gurwitch and Schonfeld have the following suggestions:

• *Initiate the conversation*. "Students may not want to feel different or may sense that the adults are not comfortable discussing the event," say the authors. "Let the student know you are aware of the recent experience and are thinking of him or her. Let the student know you are available to talk and to listen. Remember, listen more than you talk."

• *Validate feelings and experiences*. The student needs to know that you're really taking in what's being said. Reflective listening is important.

• *Answer questions and reassure*. Students may have misinformation and misattributions, which lead to guilt or shame. Questions need to be answered simply and directly, and mistaken impressions corrected.

• *Educate students and caregivers about common reactions*. There are a number of predictable reactions to trauma and loss, among them difficulties with schoolwork. Students and their families need to know about these, and teachers may want to modify assignments and provide extra help with homework.

• *Help students identify positive coping strategies*. It might be helpful to remind the student about what worked with earlier difficulties, or new strategies might be needed, including skills for anxiety management, relaxation exercises, maintaining regular routines, and stopping intrusive thoughts.

• *Identify triggers*. These might be the sound of a siren, a word or phrase, a song, a holiday or birthday, or part of a story. It's helpful for the student to be aware of possible triggers and have an understanding with teachers about being able to leave the class and go to a safe location if he or she feels overwhelmed.

• *Encourage return to positive extracurricular activities*. This can help students get back to a semblance of normalcy, reconnect them with supportive friends and adults, and give them "permission" to feel normal again.

• *Encourage activities that promote healing*. Helping others who have experienced trauma or loss can facilitate a student's own healing process.

• *Counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents should keep in touch with each other*. This can help establish how well the student is coping and what additional support might be needed.

• *Be available for the immediate-, short-, and long-term*. "It only takes a moment to ask, 'Tell me how things are going,'" say Gurwitch and Schonfeld. "This lets students know you care and you remember about their trauma or loss."

"Support Traumatized Students" by Robin Gurwitch and David Schonfeld in *ASCA School Counselor*, September/October 2011 (Vol. 49, #1, p. 10-13), http://www.schoolcounselor.org; the authors can be reached at robin.gurwitch@cchmc.org and david.schonfeld@cchmc.org.

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9. Preventing Youth Suicide

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Los Angeles school psychologist Richard Lieberman and National Association of School Psychologists communications director Katherine Cowan report some good news – the rate of teenage suicide has declined steadily for the last two decades – and some sobering news – suicide remains the third leading cause of death for the 15-19 age-group and the fourth leading cause of death for the 10-14 age-group. Bullying can lead to suicides and suicidal ideation, and those most likely to be the victims of bullying are students with disabilities and mental-health problems; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth; and students who experience cyberbullying. According to a 2010 study, 85% of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed, 40% reported physical harassment, and 19% reported being physically assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation.

Bullying can exacerbate other issues, including depression, self-medicating with alcohol, drugs, and other substances, and conduct disorder. This leads the authors to say that all students who are involved in bullying, either as victims or perpetrators, should be screened for mental-health problems and given appropriate follow-up treatment.

But the best medicine is prevention. Lieberman and Cowan suggest the following steps all schools should take to reduce the risk of teen suicides:

• Establish a positive, supportive school culture in which bullying and harassment of any type is unacceptable. This includes policies, consequences, and adult modeling.

• Strengthen connections between students and adults. Each student should have a strong relationship with at least one trusted adult.

• Train staff. Teachers and others in the school must know the signals exhibited by students who are struggling or being bullied.

• Educate and empower students. "All students should understand the difference between reporting and ratting and have an anonymous means of reporting their concerns if they don't feel comfortable going directly to an adult," say the authors.

• Reinforce positive behaviors to replace bullying behaviors. Bullying can be unlearned, say Lieberman and Cowan. Positive behavior supports and interventions, as well as good supervision, go a long way.

• Ensure access to mental-health services and supports. School-based psychologists, counselors, and social workers are the front line against youth suicide, using screening, identification, counseling, and referrals.

• Protect particularly vulnerable students. This includes LGBTQ students and students with special needs.

• Improve school, family, and community collaboration. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere for this purpose: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/stryve.

• Create a specific plan for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Be prepared for the worst.

"Bullying and Youth Suicide: Breaking the Connection" by Richard Lieberman and Katherine Cowan in *Principal Leadership*, October 2011 (Vol. 12, #2, p. 12-17), no e-link available

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10. Debunking Single-Sex Classrooms

In this article in *Science*, a team of researchers attacks the idea of separating boys and girls in K-12 classrooms. Here's their abstract: "In attempting to improve schools, it is critical to remember that not all reforms lead to meaningful gains for students. We argue that one change in particular—sex-segregated education—is deeply misguided, and often justified by weak, cherry-picked, or misconstrued scientific claims rather than by valid scientific evidence. There is no well-designed research showing that single-sex education improves students' academic performance, but there is evidence that sex segregation increases gender stereotyping and legitimizes institutional sexism."

"The Pseudoscience of Single-Sex Schooling" by Diane Halpern, Lise Eliot, Rebecca Bigler, Richard Fabes, Laura Hanish, Janet Hyde, Lynn Liben, and Carol Lynn Martin in *Science*, Sept. 23, 2011, spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Sept. 30, 2011

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11. *My* School versus *Our* School

In this short piece in *Principal Leadership*, Michigan high-school principal Steven Beyer says he flinches when he hears school leaders refer to *My building* or *My school* or *My teachers*. "Principals might be responsible for the school's achievement results," he says, "but the school doesn't belong to its principal. It belongs to the students, the parents, and the community members, and they're the only people who should use *my* when describing a school." Referring to *my teachers* makes them feel like second-class citizens, he believes.

Beyer suggests using the word *our* instead – "a subtle change in language and mind-set that can help build a collaborative culture. *We* – students, parents, and staff members – need one another's support to make *our* vision of improved student achievement a reality."

"Our School" by Steven Beyer in *Principal Leadership*, October 2011 (Vol. 12, #2, p. 7), no e-link available

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7. Short Item:

Online video lessons – LearnZillion http://www.learnzillion.com has hundreds of short video lessons on a variety of topics. Worth checking out!

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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.marshall48@gmail.com

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 41 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 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 about 50 issues a year).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
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Education Week
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New York Times
Newsweek
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