

# News notes

December 2007

Volume 3 Issue 5

**Congratulations Barb Baker for going beyond the typical! You are getting it done with a very difficult student. YEA! BARB!**

**Congratulations Elizabeth Weathersby for going above and beyond your job in providing MR with students picture music!**

**“You won't remember me!”**

In 1967 a small book was published in Italy that today is gaining quite a following in North America. "Letter to a Teacher" ("Lettera a una professoressa") consisted of a single letter to a teacher, the content of which was drawn from the letters of eight Italian schoolboys who were flunked by their teacher. The schoolboys were of the "lower class" while their teacher was described as "bourgeois." The schoolboys brought a myriad of negative school experiences with them when they came to a small school operated by priest Don Lorenzo Milani. The new students had been told by former teachers that their futures were limited. But Milani told them differently: you will succeed. And they did. They learned to write and think for themselves.

They wrote essays in the form of letters to voice their thoughts about social class and to challenge their former teachers. Their essays were collected in a book, "Letter to a Teacher" and published in 1967. At the time it became a challenge to the way these students had been treated in Italian schools. It also became a best seller. Hoffman takes a new look at the book to see what lessons it might hold for educators today.

"Dear Miss,

You won't remember me or my name. You have flunked so many of us. On the other hand I have often had thoughts about you, and the other teachers, and about that institution which you call 'school' and about the kids that you flunk. You flunk us right out into the fields and factories and there you forget us."

In 1970 the book was introduced to English-speakers and recently has been published in a new edition by Marvin Hoffman, a veteran teacher and administrator. Mr. Hoffman reminds us that the experiences of disadvantaged Italian schoolboys forty years ago can inspire us still to overcome what some might soberly term "discouragement" by their teacher.

"You Won't Remember Me: The Schoolboys of Barbiana Speak to Today," published by Teacher's College Press at Columbia University, is an account of the school where students learned to overcome their social-class limitations. "It resonates today as educators help socially disadvantaged students realize their potentials," said Marvin Hoffman, founding director of the University of Chicago's North Kenwood Oakland Charter School.

"I'm not sure how any book, in literature or social sciences, earns the classics label. For me, it simply means that it had a major impact on a whole generation - - my generation -- of teachers, and it confirmed the belief that teaching could be a means to bring greater equity to our inequitable society," Hoffman said.

The school organized by Milani respected the boys as learners, while also respecting their backgrounds, practices that made his school flourish. Hoffman encourages educators to keep that in mind as they plan their lessons and the programs that will challenge our schoolchildren.

The Results Now book by Schmoker will help- also a book called ONE TEACHER at a TIME- and a book called Getting to GOT IT! I have these if you want to read them.

I encourage you to share this information with general education teachers. The Results Now book carefully describes how reading and writing need to be taught so that students get it.

The One teacher at a time book helps teachers not to get so obsessed with scoring everything and to coach students into learning.

The Getting it book is about how to help students build the brain structures they need to connect information you are teaching to their lives so they learn it and can apply it.

Everyone is busy, and some are so busy with busy that they work too hard to make progress. In Steven Covey's work they is a statement about taking time to sharpen the saw. If we continue to cut through the tree no matter what and we are too busy to sharpen the saw, our output suffers. Take time to at least read one of these books. SHARPEN the saw so that your work is easier.

By now you have had a chance to see the test scores from last year on all your students. You have had time to plan and begin to teach the indicators that were missed. Remember to work on the near miss indicators with students, is their best chance at success. Remember that the indicators for standards should be in the IEP goal section. A progress report then tells how the student is acquiring the skill. It is not appropriate to report a grade for a class as a progress report. The report must be about the acquisition of skills and would tell the teacher where to begin with the student. MAPP scores if it is given at the beginning of a reporting period and again at the end of that reporting period would be meaningful.

**Good web site about research: Doing What Works**  
<http://dww.ed.gov>.

Algebra for ALL? High School mathematics is the ultimate exercise in deferred gratification. Its payoff comes years later, and then only for the minority who struggle through it.

If students are to be prepared for the high tech world and also for college then they need at least Alg II. (American Diploma Project, 2004).

Algebra advocated say that: Because of a growing shortage of US citizens having the technical skills that build on courses of Alg. II, (Committee on Science and Engineering and Public Policy 2007)and because Alg. II is a threshold course for high-paying jobs, (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003), and because Alg. II is a prerequisite for College Algebra, and students most likely to opt out of alg. II when it is not required are those whose parents are least engaged in their children's education, the high school student must have alg. I & II in high school.

However,...

One in three students who enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade fails to graduate with his or her class. This leaves the US with the highest secondary school dropout rate among industrialized nations, (Barton, 2006) More than half of all black, Hispanics, and American Indians fail to graduate with their class. Math is not to blame solely, but it is the course most often failed.

One in three students who do go to college must take remediate courses to pass Elementary statistics or College Alg.

Extra help for struggling learners must be more than additional practice.

Essentials strategies are needed to be successful with a struggling math student.

Determine and scaffold the essential math content

Pace lessons carefully

Build a routine of support

Foster student interaction

Make connections explicit

Encourage mental calculations

Help students use written calculations to track thinking

Provide practice

Build in vocabulary instruction

For more details contact [mburns@mathsolutions.com](mailto:mburns@mathsolutions.com)

**How do we help floundering students who lack basic math concepts?** "I've realized that in every class a handful of students are at serious risk of failure in mathematics and aren't being adequately served by the instruction offered. What should we do for such students?"

- It's important to help students make connections among mathematical ideas so they do not see these ideas as disconnected facts.
- It's important to build students' new understandings on the foundation of their prior learning.
- It's important to remember, students' correct answers, without accompanying explanations of how they reason, are not sufficient for judging mathematical understanding.

By Marilyn Burns

**Mary M. Lindquist, Professor of Mathematics Education, Columbus College, Georgia. Winner of Mathematics Lifetime Achievement Award** "My 'aha' moment came long after I had finished a masters in mathematics taught mathematics in secondary school and college, and completed a doctorate in mathematics education. Although I enjoyed the rigor of learning and applying rules, mathematics was more like a puzzle than an elegant body of knowledge.

Many years of work on a mathematics program for elementary schools led to that moment. I realized that mathematics was more than rules—even the beginnings of mathematics were interesting. Working with elementary students and teachers, I saw that students could make sense of basic mathematical concepts and procedures, and teachers could help them do so. The teachers also posed problems to move students forward, gently let them struggle, and valued their approaches. What a contrast to how I had taught and learned mathematics!

With vivid memories of a number-theory course in which I memorized the proofs to 40 theorems for the final exam, I cautiously began teaching a number-theory course for prospective middle school teachers. My aha moment with these students was a semester long. We investigated number-theory ideas, I made sense of what I had memorized, and my students learned along with me. My teaching was changed forever."