Marshall Memo 396

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 25, 2011

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Quotes of the Week

"It is very difficult to profit from feedback on Tuesday for something that happened on Monday."

Fred Jones (see item #1)

"In giving corrective feedback, *delay is death*. When corrective feedback is delayed, error is learned and then must be unlearned."

Fred Jones (*ibid*.)

"When the teacher says the name of a disruptive student," says Jones, "everyone looks up. Discipline management has now become theater."

Fred Jones (*ibid*.)

"I'm pretty sure that the thing that my principal values most in me as a coach is that I don't bother him much."

An instructional coach (see item #3)

"When children are constantly regulated by adults they face a risk of becoming 'pseudo-regulated' instead of 'self-regulated.'"

Elena Bodrova (see item #5)

"The primary context in which preschool and kindergarten children learn self-regulation is make-believe play."

Elena Bodrova (*ibid*.)

1. Fred Jones on Assessment for Learning: The Sooner the Better

"In education, this is the age of assessment," says author/consultant Fred Jones in this *Tools for Teaching* broadside. "In this anxiety-driven environment it would be useful to step back for a moment and take a fresh look at the nature of assessment. How can it be made to work for you and your students?"

Too much attention is being paid to high-stakes standardized tests and teachers' summative tests, says Jones. Using short-term strategies to pump up test scores doesn't produce long-term learning gains. Even when teachers take students' class work home, grade it, and return it the next day, there are problems – witness the number of papers that wind up in the classroom recycle bin. "The students are sending a message," says Jones. "It is very difficult to profit from feedback on Tuesday for something that happened on Monday… In giving corrective feedback, *delay is death*. When corrective feedback is delayed, error is learned and then must be unlearned."

Far more effective is focusing on assessments that provide feedback in real time on students' daily work. "If you want students to embrace corrective feedback," he continues, "it must *decrease* their workload. It must make learning *easier*. To make learning easier, corrective feedback must occur *while the student is doing the task*. It must serve as a quick and timely mid-course correction that helps the student 'do it right the first time.'"

For this to happen, instruction must be built around assessment. Jones recommends three basic steps within each lesson:

- Divide the lesson into a series of bite-size learning-by-doing steps.
- Have students do each step as soon as you teach it (we learn by doing).
- Watch carefully and give corrective feedback as needed.

Five essential steps make this work in a busy classroom with more than a few needy students:

• *Teacher mobility* – "If you want to see what is going on, you must *move*!" says Jones. Working the crowd, as he calls it, allows the teacher to spot learning problems and suppress goofing off.

• *Room arrangement* – Jones advocates getting away from the desks-in-rows arrangement and clustering desks so the teacher can look at all students' work taking as few steps as possible.

• *Efficient corrective feedback* – Many teachers make the mistake of spending 3-8 minutes re-explaining the lesson to confused students one by one, which prevents the teacher from getting around the class and reinforces what he calls the "helpless handraisers." Instead,

teachers should focus corrective feedback on the answer to one simple question: *What do I do next?* "Be clear, be brief, and be gone," says Jones.

• *Visual instructional plan* – A step-by-step lesson plan should be posted at the front of the room, prepackaging the corrective feedback for struggling students and allowing for 5-10-second interventions. Working with other teachers to construct visual instructional plans sharpens teachers' skills in designing lessons as a series of input-output steps.

• *Inconspicuous discipline* – "When the teacher says the name of a disruptive student," says Jones, "everyone looks up. Discipline management has now become theater." But if the teacher is constantly moving around the classroom delivering short bursts of corrective feedback, he or she can deal with disruptive behavior in a whisper and other students don't even notice.

"Making Assessment Work for You" by Fred Jones in a *Tools for Teaching* broadside, May 2011, http://www.fredjones.com.

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2. How Should Teachers Handle Tattling?

In this thoughtful *Responsive Classroom* article, Margaret Berry Wilson describes a mistake that many well-meaning teachers make: to avoid the annoyance and wasted time of dealing with students who are constantly telling on each other, they have a rule against tattling. Wilson believes this approach ends up causing more problems than it solves. It creates a "culture of silence" about misbehavior and sending children a confusing message – *Adults say they care, but they won't listen to my problems*. In many schools, bullying festers because students think they're not supposed to speak up. "Above all," says Wilson, "children need to know that when someone's behavior worries them, adults will listen."

Why is there so much tattling? Students may have legitimate concerns about other children's behavior. They may be testing the teacher's limits and trying to find out whether certain rules will be enforced. They may be seeking attention and recognition for following the rules. Or they may lack the problem-solving skills to handle the issue themselves. Here are Wilson's suggestions for a better way to handle tattling:

• *Teachers should explain their expectations about tattling up front*. Acknowledge that others may have a rule against tattling, but there are many times when it's important for students to tell about behaviors they're noticing.

• *Help students know when to report incidents*. Students might brainstorm incidents and decide which "bucket" they go into: Tell an adult, Handle it yourself, or Let it go.
The class should review and add to the list at regular intervals, and children should get the message that when in doubt, they should tell an adult. There might also be a nonverbal signal that students give the teacher when they've handled an issue on their own or let it go.

• *Respond respectfully to tattlers*. Even when a report is inappropriate (for example, telling on a classmate who isn't lined up properly), acknowledge it with a statement like, "Oh, you're right. I did say that's how we should line up. I'll watch more carefully next time."

• *Let students report incidents privately*. Some teachers keep "conversational journals" for messages or a box into which students can place confidential communications. These give students a way to pass the word to their teacher without interrupting instruction or exposing themselves to retaliation.

• *Help parents understand and support the approach being used*. Some parents may need to be guided to a more nuanced approach to tattling. Others may need to be dissuaded from telling their children to report every little thing to the teacher. Parent meetings, the weekly newsletter, or the school or class website are a good forum for this kind of explaining.

• *Give students positive ways to win recognition*. Some students tattle to get attention, and they need other avenues – perhaps showcasing a talent at a morning meeting.

• *Teach conflict resolution*. "If you expect students to address problems independently, you must teach them how," says Wilson.

"What to Do About Tattling" by Margaret Berry Wilson in *Responsive Classroom*, April 2011 (Vol. 23, #2, p. 8-10), http://www.responsiveclassroom.org

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3. The Key to Instructional Coaching: Combining Pressure and Support

In this thoughtful *Elementary School Journal* article, Salem State University (MA) researcher Jacy Ippolito describes the fine line that literacy coaches must tread between being supportive and directive with teachers. "We're neither fish nor fowl," said one literacy coach. On the one hand, coaches are expected to raise student achievement and push for "fidelity" in teacher implementation of certain practices and materials; on the other hand, they must forge collegial bonds with teachers, some of whom are openly hostile to the idea of being coached. Ippolito conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with literacy coaches and gleaned several suggestions for balancing these two polarities:

• *Combine responsive and directive moves within each coaching session*. Experienced coaches find it effective to shift seamlessly back and forth between supporting and challenging teachers as they work with them one on one. Coaches always try to understand teachers' and students' needs, but there are times when they feel the need to say something like, "This is what needs to get done."

• *Use protocols to balance responsive and directive moves*. Experienced coaches say they find that protocols help structure interactions and force transparency in conversations with blurry boundaries between listening and talking, describing and judging, proposing and giving feedback. Protocols range from brief agendas that guide turn-taking between coach and teacher to more elaborate guides to balance and merge teacher and coach goals – for example, brainstorming, focusing, and problem-solving. One high-school coach guides discussions with her teachers with these questions:

- What is the *big idea* you want students thinking about in the text they are reading or unit you are teaching?
- Please connect the *big idea* of the lesson to students' existing experiences, and consider which predicting strategies might be most appropriate.

- What will you model for students?
- How will you get students to synthesize and reflect on new knowledge?

Two boxes on the back of the protocol sheet give teachers space to brainstorm and clarify their thinking and reflect on what recent student work and behavior might reveal. A third box asks teachers to anticipate parts of the lesson where students might encounter difficulty and how that might be prevented. In the discussion structured by this protocol, the coach draws teachers out and shifts to the responsive mode.

• *Align teacher, coach, and principal goals*. Experienced coaches say the goal is to explicitly share the way in which their role as coaches, principals' role as evaluators, and teachers' role as instructors can align in service of student achievement. Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. One coach says, "I'm pretty sure that the thing that my principal values most in me as a coach is that I don't bother him much." Other coaches feel like middle managers, pushing teachers to implement administrative policies and district materials. But a few coaches describe collaborative, shared leadership in which the interests of all three roles really are aligned.

"Three Ways That Literacy Coaches Balance Responsive and Directive Relationships with Teachers" by Jacy Ippolito in *Elementary School Journal*, September 2010 (Vol. 111, #1, p. 164-190),
http://0-www.eric.ed.gov.novacat.nova.edu/ERICWebPortal/search/recordDetails.jsp?ERICExtSearch_Descriptor=%22Teaching+Methods%22&ERICExtSearch_Facet_0=facet_jn&ERICExtSearch_FacetValue_0=%22Elementary+School+Journal%22&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&accno=EJ913204&_nfls=false

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4. The Role of Literacy Coaches in Reading First Schools

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, University of Pittsburgh researchers Rita Bean, Jason Draper, Virginia Hall, Jill Vandermolen, and Naomi Zigmond report on their study of 20 literacy coaches and the impact they had on teachers in Reading First schools. The findings:

• There was tremendous variability in how the coaches worked with teachers, including observation, modeling, co-teaching, planning, providing individual and group professional development, helping with struggling students, and conducting quick corridor chats. Few coaches were change agents for general school improvement; instead, they were problem solvers, resource coordinators, data managers, and consultants to teachers.

• Coaches' focus was on student learning, especially the learning of struggling students. "Coach-teacher conversations revolved around approaches for differentiating instruction for particular students and identifying interventions, materials, strategies, or grouping arrangements that would work best for students experiencing difficulties," say the authors. Coaches seemed to be less focused on changing teacher behavior than on "making instruction effective for particular students."

• Focusing on students may have been key to changing classroom practices. This indirect approach seems to have worked, say the authors, because it created "the atmosphere, attitude, and need for changes in beliefs and practice. Such a student focus also emphasizes the end goal of improving student outcomes, while placing coaches and teachers into more collegial, problem-solving roles." Of course, it was still essential that coaches be expert in pedagogy, assessments, materials, etc.

• Coaches also served as student services coordinators, working with other school personnel – tutors, volunteers, special-education teachers, administrators, and others – to bring needed services to at-risk students.

• The more time coaches spent on administrative duties, the less value teachers placed on their work.

• Teachers noticed when coaches weren't spending time with them, and were negative on coaches' roles in such cases.

• The more time coaches spent coaching teachers, the greater the gains in student achievement.

"Coaches and Coaching in Reading First Schools: A Reality Check" by Rita Bean, Jason Draper, Virginia Hall, Jill Vandermolen, and Naomi Zigmond in *Elementary School Journal*, September 2010 (Vol. 111, #1, p. 87-114), http://www.citeulike.org/article/7766794

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5. Developing Self-Regulation in Preschool and Kindergarten

In this helpful article in *Changing Schools*, researcher Elena Bodrova identifies self-regulation as one of the key factors associated with student success in school. Self-regulation, also called executive function, is the ability to focus attention, hold information in working memory, engage in and persist with learning tasks, inhibit "gut" responses, shift attention from one thing to another, plan and follow through, and manage positive and negative emotions when interacting with others. Self-regulation is a better predictor of primary-school success than children's I.Q., socioeconomic background, or math and literacy knowledge.

"The numbers of young children with poor self-regulation seem to be on the rise," says Bodrova, "with up to half of incoming kindergarteners unable to benefit from instruction." Increasing numbers of children are getting expelled from preschool because of these issues. Children whose self-regulation doesn't improve are often caught in a downward spiral in which their academic performance deteriorates and they get involved in truancy, peer victimization, substance abuse, dropping out, and other problems.

While self-regulation can be shaped by children's temperament and home environment, and while more children from low-income families have poor self-regulation than their middle-income peers, schools can make a difference. Bodrova lists the following practices that improve children's executive functions:

• *Explicitly teach self-regulation*. It won't develop by itself; teachers need to be intentional in teaching the key elements, using visual and tangible reminders. "Instead of expecting young children to act like older students (e.g., raising a hand and waiting to be called

on), teachers can instantly boost children's level of self-regulation by teaching them to use simple 'self-regulation manipulatives'," says Bodrova – for example, having students pass around a pretend microphone during a group discussion and teaching that only the child with the mike can be "heard."

• *Be systematic*. Self-regulation won't improve through occasional, isolated lessons or artificial situations. There must be a consistent approach during everyday school activities.

• *Teach the skills to all children*. Although children with executive-function deficits benefit most, all children gain from following simple rules in games, following multi-step directions to complete projects, and so on.

• *Give students some initiative*. To internalize behavior rules and be able to apply them in a new situation, children need to practice them in three contexts:

- Following the rules while being regulated by an adult;
- Regulating other children as they follow the rules;
- Applying the rules themselves.

"At any grade level, but especially in preschool and kindergarten, balance teacher-directed and child-initiated activities," says Bodrova. "When children are constantly regulated by adults they face a risk of becoming 'pseudo-regulated' instead of 'self-regulated.'"

• *Teach students to anticipate conflicts and plan how to resolve them*. "For most children, aggression is not a premeditated choice," says Bodrova. "Rather, it is the result of an under-developed ability to control impulses." For example, a teacher might anticipate that children might fight over a single chef's hat in the restaurant play area and have children discuss alternative and equally attractive roles they might play.

• *Take play seriously*. "The primary context in which preschool and kindergarten children learn self-regulation is make-believe play," says Bodrova. "Play should not be pushed out of the preschool and kindergarten classroom to make room for more 'academic' learning." But play won't help unless it is intentional, imaginative, and extended. Children benefit most when they take on different roles, discuss and act out a pretend scenario, and use props in an imaginative way.

"Research Names Self-Regulation a 'Critical Competency' for All Learners" by Elena Bodrova in *Changing Schools*, Summer 2011 (Vol. 63, p. 1-3), http://www.mcrel.org/contactinforequest/contactinforequest.aspx ; Bodrova can be reached at ebodrova@mcrel.org.

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6. The Most Productive Kinds of Preschool Play

In this article in *Changing Schools*, McREL writer/editor Heather Hein says that preschool and kindergarten students with weak self-regulation skills fall behind, often irreversibly, by the time they get to third grade. The good news is that high-quality instruction in the primary grades can stop this downward spiral. Children's I.Q. scores can be boosted 13-14 points and special-education referral and dropout rates can be reduced. Hein describes

Scaffolding Early Learning (SEL), a three-year McREL program designed to give teachers the tools to make all this happen, with instructional coaches to support the work.

Play is the essential ingredient – intentional and systematic play. SEL classrooms have theme-based centers such as an airport or grocery store that operate for several weeks, and children spend time talking, drawing, and writing before making their play plans. Students get role badges and sheets, which show in pictures and words what they should be doing – for example, a veterinarian checking temperatures and giving medicine. If there is a dispute among children, they consult their play plans and, if necessary, flip a coin or roll a die to see who uses which props. Role responsibilities are broken down for students with developing language skills – for example, feeding the baby is teased out into mixing the formula in the bottle, putting the bottle in the microwave, setting the timer, and checking the temperature.

"With more structured play, the classroom environment changes almost immediately," says Hein. "Classrooms are quieter and calmer, and there are fewer behavior problems." Teachers see children as more capable and think in terms of "growing" key skills. And teachers also see themselves as more capable. SEL sites have produced impressive results – if they keep the momentum going. As Bryan Goodwin of McREL says, "like almost anything, whether it's exercising, dieting, or learning to play the saxophone in the marching band – the benefits lessen if the practice is not sustained."

"Playing to Learn: How Early Interventions Can Lead to a Lifetime of Success" by Heather Hein in *Changing Schools*, Summer 2011 (Vol. 63, p. 6-8), http://www.mcrel.org/contactinforequest/contactinforequest.aspx; Hein can be reached at hhein@mcrel.org.

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7. Douglas Reeves on Successfully Launching Change Efforts

In this *American School Board Journal* article, author/consultant Douglas Reeves offers five suggestions for bringing about successful improvements in school districts:

• *A lean strategic plan* – Less is more, says Reeves. Strategic plans should be no longer than a few pages at the district level and a single page for individual schools.

• *Rapid results* – The common assumption used to be that change takes 5-7 years. Reeves says we would never accept that kind of timeline if there were health and safety issues in a school cafeteria or at a crosswalk used by students every day. And isn't student learning a matter of health and safety? Districts should demand rapid results.

• *Skip the implementation dip* – Another piece of conventional wisdom is that new programs are inevitably followed by a short-term decline in student achievement. With today's programs and analytics, says Reeves, this doesn't have to happen: "If past efforts resulted in a dip, then the cause of that dip should be rigorously analyzed and adjustments should be made before the next change effort."

• *Vision and execution* – "An exciting vision that is not implemented effectively does not inspire employees," says Reeves. "Instead, it breeds cynicism among people who have seen one vision after another introduced with great fanfare only to quickly fade away, eclipsed by

the next grand vision." Leadership should be closely linked to managerial competence so lofty plans become reality.

• *Avoid phony buy-in* – A lack of dissent may mean there's agreement, but it may also mean that colleagues believe that dissent is dangerous and unwelcome. Successful implementation of new programs is far more likely if leaders welcome constructive criticism and ask questions like, *What other decisions could we consider? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative? How will we know if we made the right decision? How will we know that mid-course corrections are necessary? What will we do if we chose badly?* "[E]mployees who disagree with a decision are far more likely to support its implementation when they believe the process was fair and they had the opportunity to express their views in a safe and open environment," says Reeves, citing Kim and Mauborgne.

"Changing the System" by Douglas Reeves in *American School Board Journal*, August 2011 (Vol. 198, #8, p. 38-39), http://www.asbj.com/; Reeves is at dreeves@leadandlearn.com.

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8. The Impact of Literacy Collaborative on K-2 Students

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Gina Biancarosa (University of Oregon), Anthony Bryk (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), and Emily Dexter (Lesley University) report on a four-year value-added study of Literacy Collaborative on kindergarten through second-grade students in 17 schools. The impact on students' literacy achievement increased each year – .22 the first year, .37 the second, and .43 the third – and the benefits persisted through subsequent summers.

Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter credit the Literacy Collaborative coaching model, which differs from the coaching in other literacy programs. Literacy Collaborative gives a full year of professional development to coaches before they begin working with teachers, and follows a detailed and well-specified literacy instructional system. The authors believe the steadily improving achievement of students can be attributed to the increasing proficiency of coaches as they grew in their roles, and also to the changing professional culture within each school as coaches worked one on one with teachers.

"Assessing the Value-Added Effects of Literacy Collaborative Professional Development on Student Learning" by Gina Biancarosa, Anthony Bryk, and Emily Dexter in *Elementary School Journal*, September 2010 (Vol. 111, #1, p. 7-34), http://literacycollaborative.org/docs/research/ESJ-value-added.pdf

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9. Improving Students' Problem-Solving by Visualizing

In this *Education Week* article, Sarah Sparks reports on research indicating that when elementary students act out the words in a math story problem, they are more likely to understand the problem, screen out distractions, and solve it successfully. This happens because acting out words helps children "embody" the words, mentally mapping them with

real experiences and perceptions – for example, linking the word *kick* with a foot movement, *lick* with a tongue movement, and *wheel* with a gesture toward the ground. An experiment in Wisconsin showed that first and second graders who read a story about a farm and manipulated toys on their desks or pictures on a computer screen had better comprehension and were able to make inferences more successfully than students who merely read the story.

"'Acting Out' Text Found to Promote Pupils' Learning" by Sarah Sparks in *Education Week*, July 13, 2011 (Vol. 30, #36, p. 19), http://www.edweek.org

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10. Can Science Instructional Videos Dislodge Students' Misconceptions?

This YouTube clip is an interesting rejoinder to the Salman Khan video in Marshall Memo 379: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=eVtCO84MDj8. The author's contention is that math and science videos like Khan's are too passive and allow students to persist with their misconceptions. For incorrect beliefs to be dislodged, students need to be confronted with their wrong beliefs and pushed out of their comfort zone.

"Khan Academy and the Effectiveness of Science Videos" by Veritasium, July 2011

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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
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
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Principal
Principal Leadership
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Teachers College Record
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