

# Marshall Memo 30

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
March 22, 2004

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## Quotes of the Week

"There's pretty wide anecdotal agreement, and agreement in surveys, that the principal's job as it stands is too big. They are working 70 hours a week and can't get to the instructional piece."

Katy Anthes, Education Commission of the States policy analyst (see item #1)

"When you're a teacher, you learn all this theory, and then you go in to teach and the theory goes out the door."

Chicago school teacher (see item #1)

"Nothing changes if classrooms don't change."

Nancy Love (see book review in item #3)

"The question... in the student's mind is, 'Why should I?' If you can answer that question successfully, you can get work from an otherwise unmotivated student. If you cannot come up with a good answer to the question, you get nothing... A successful teacher must be a skillful manager of incentives... If you want kids who have no great internalized work ethic to get on the ball and work, you must give them a reason."

Fred Jones (see item #4)

"A lesson is simply a learning experiment with teaching as the independent variable and learning as the dependent variable."

Fred Jones (*ibid.*)

"It turns out the onset of puberty is really a bad reason to try to move kids to another structure and to another school altogether."

Jaana Juvonen, RAND researcher (see item #6)

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## 1. Distributing Instructional Leadership to Teacher Teams

This feature article in the current *Education Week* reports on the work of researcher James Spillane and his colleagues investigating ways in which Chicago K-8 teachers and teacher teams take responsibility for improving student learning. The starting point of the study is how overwhelmed most principals are and how unsuccessful many are at being instructional leaders (see quote above). The study explores one solution: distributing leadership to teams of teachers and structuring and supporting team activities so that the teams carry the ball on curriculum, data analysis, and classroom improvement. Making an analogy to landing a jet airliner, one researcher said that it's not just the pilot and the co-pilot who land the plane, but a wide array of instrumentation (created by a network of other support personnel).

Spillane described one Chicago school where students were dismissed at 12:30 every Friday afternoon and teachers had schoolwide meetings to share ideas about improving their work. Teachers in this school also formed a "focus group" that held a series of regular small-group meetings to study and discuss specific instructional issues. Another principal in the study had teachers keep writing folders; every month, the principal collected the folders (containing samples of representative student writing) and commented on students' progress to teachers. The study also picked up on the importance of principals hiring teachers who were not only good in the classroom but could also serve as effective curriculum leaders who can lead teacher teams within the school.

These are only a few examples of ways that principals can distribute leadership and get instruction moving forward while they continue to try to dig their way out of their overwhelming responsibilities.

"Weaving Webs" by Jeff Archer in *Education Week*, March 17, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #27 p. 50-53) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=27Leadership.h23>

## 2. Four Kinds of Assessment – All Critical to Student Achievement

In this article, a Seattle research consultant stresses the need to have four kinds of assessment going within each school year:

- *Placement assessments* – These should happen before instruction begins and get solid baseline information on students' knowledge and skills so teachers know where to start and how best to teach their classes.

- *Formative assessments* – These are ongoing “dipsticking” to see how well students are learning, what their confusions are, and how instruction might be modified midstream. Formative assessments also give students positive reinforcement or redirection. They can be observations, quizzes, homework assignments, monitoring and responding to student questions, etc. Formative assessments are not usually used to grade students.

- *Diagnostic assessments* – These more formal, professionally-prepared tests or assessments are a more serious attempt to get detailed information on student learning as the unit or year progresses. They should get at the cause or causes of consistent learning problems so teachers can design remedial interventions for struggling students – or redirect the entire classroom strategy.

- *Summative assessments* – These are the final tests, portfolios, projects, or performances that show whether students learned what was intended.

The author makes a strong argument that too many schools focus only on summative assessment, and these end up being “gotcha” exercises. To be ethical and fair to students, she says, we need to have all four types of assessment going within every school year. This is what drives instructional improvement and closes the achievement gap.

“Assessment’s ‘Fab Four’: They Work Together, Not Solo” by Stephanie Bravmann in *Education Week*, March 17, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #27 p. 56)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=27bravmann.h23>

### **3. Using Data to Get Results in Math and Science**

This review in the *Harvard Educational Review* highly touts a book that sounds like a valuable resource: *Using Data/Getting Results: A Practical Guide for School Improvement in Mathematics and Science* by Nancy Love (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2002).

The guiding principles of the book are: (a) teacher teams looking at student data in an ongoing, iterative cycle of collaborative inquiry *fuel* school reform and high achievement; (b) inquiry and reform must always be aimed at improving instruction; and (c) equity must take center stage in this process Love asserts that data inquiry is not an abstract or academic exercise and should not focus primarily on accountability; rather, it’s about improving instruction. In her words, “nothing changes if classrooms don’t change; school reform must impact teaching and learning.”

Love recommends the following cycle for teachers and school administrators within each school year:

- Commit to student learning;
- Collect and analyze data;
- Formulate learner-centered problems;
- Set measurable learning goals;
- Develop a learner-centered action plan;
- Take action;
- Monitor results;
- Start the cycle again.

Equity is a driving force in the book. Love writes, “By equity, we mean the right of every student to achieve at high levels.” She feels that educators should ask “To what extent do performance gaps in mathematics and science exist among racial, class, cultural, or gender groups in our school?” and “How prevalent are beliefs that block equity in our school? How do they manifest in school and classroom practices?”

Love acknowledges that it is difficult for teachers to engage in what can be hard and possibly threatening conversations around students’ performance and the effectiveness of their own teaching. She offers advice on team dynamics, as well as a host of practical tools (including extensive appendices and a CD-ROM) on the types of data teachers might explore (assessment results, student work, teacher and student surveys, demographic breakdowns of students, interviews, and classroom observations).

Although the stated focus of the book is on math and science, the process that Love describes is equally applicable to other subject areas, and there are resources in the appendix that are helpful for data analysis in the area of literacy.

Book review by *Harvard Educational Review*, Spring 2004 (Vol. 74, #1, p. 100-103). The book is available through Amazon.com.

#### **4. Fred Jones’s Advice on Classroom Incentives**

Fred Jones, the classroom management guru, tackles the subject of motivation in this month’s *Education World* website. “The question... in the student’s mind is, ‘Why should I?’ If you can answer that question successfully, you can get work from an otherwise unmotivated student. If you cannot come up with a good answer to the question, you get nothing.” Jones believes that the answer to the student’s implicit

question, "Why should I?" is *incentives*. "A successful teacher," Jones writes, "must be a skillful manager of incentives." Jones feels that educators have spent far too much time and money on *rewards*, which he believes are distinct from incentives.

Here are two examples of how incentives can work in the classroom. If a teacher tells students that they need to keep working until the bell rings, the teacher has provided a *dawdling incentive*. "If no other goal than endless work is in sight," writes Jones, "many students will slow down and expand the work to fill the time. The only students who will work hard are those ones with an internalized work ethic that is impervious to your classroom management practices."

If, on the other hand, the teacher tells the students they can play a game as soon as they finish their work, the teacher has created a *speed incentive*. Students will surmise that the sooner they finish their work, the sooner they can have fun. "Once again," Jones argues, "the only students who will work conscientiously are the ones with an internalized work ethic that is impervious to your classroom management practices."

If the teacher wants students to work hard while being conscientious, the teacher needs to check the work as it is being done, so students receive the incentive only when the work is done to the teacher's standards. Jones says this is the key: *contemporaneous work checking*. This can only happen if the teacher has a well-managed classroom and has escaped getting bogged down with the "helpless handraisers" by skillful teaching and assignment of do-able work. This leaves the teacher free during guided practice time to circulate with an answer sheet and check for a certain number of consecutive correct responses. He believes that a certain number of consecutive correct responses (3-10, depending on the task) is the best way to determine whether students "get it

"If you want kids who have no great internalized work ethic to get on the ball and work," says Jones, "you must give them a reason. Since those kids do not work well for delayed reinforcers, you must provide reinforcers soon – immediately upon completion of the task, if possible." Fred Jones harks back to a teacher he had as a child who always had students working on on-going art of science or social studies projects. When students meet the criterion of mastery, they are free to get back to their project.

"Adding Motivation to Mastery" by Fred Jones in the *Education World Website*, February 16, 2004 [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/jones/jones007.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/jones/jones007.shtml)

## 5. Do We Need to Re-think Middle Schools?

A new study by the RAND Corporation speaks of American middle schools as an educational “Bermuda Triangle,” places where adolescents feel unsafe, socially isolated, and academically unchallenged. The report questions whether separate middle schools are the best model (versus K-8 schools), asking whether students “teetering at the edge of adolescence should be in separate schools at all during such a critical, emotionally turbulent stage of their lives.” The study cites international survey data comparing students’ attitudes on school climate, with the American students coming in dead last.

The report is critical of the fact that many middle schools do not give teachers common planning time so they can work in interdisciplinary teams or set up advisory groups to support students’ social-emotional learning. In addition, only 12-25 percent of middle school teachers have specialized training for this age group.

Advocates of stand-alone middle schools pushed back. Michael Dietz, a Wisconsin middle school principal, said, “If you’re not addressing what happens in the classroom, it really doesn’t make a difference what grade configuration you have. You have to have programs that are both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate.”

“Report Questions Wisdom of Separate Middle Schools” by Debra Viadero, *Education Week*, March 17, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #27 p. 8)  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=27Research.h23>

## 6. Short Items:

• *Japan on my mind* – Some Georgia educators are adopting Japanese math curriculum objectives and ideas. Several key features attracted them to the Japanese materials:

- Fewer objectives at each grade level, pursued in more depth;
- Introducing algebra, chemistry, and other related concepts in integrated ways;
- Lessons building more directly on previous learning;
- Building a strong base in arithmetic from Kindergarten through Grade 4;
- Learning about proportions and percentages in 4<sup>th</sup> grade;
- In 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, learning algebra and geometry;
- By the time students finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they have finished the equivalent of Algebra I (a full year ahead of standard American practice);

- In high school, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry are blended together, rather than being taught as separate courses.

The Georgia districts adopting Japanese math curriculum are giving their teachers a full year to learn how to implement the proposed curriculum, and plan to phase in the materials over four years.

“Georgia Reaches Out to Japan for Math-Curriculum Model” by Michelle Galley in *Education Week*, March 17, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #27 p. 13)  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=27Georgia.h23>

- ***Social-emotional learning*** – This article (from last summer) stresses the strong relationship between social and emotional learning and academic success. The authors believe that academic subjects should be integrated with competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

“Promoting Academic Achievement Through Social and Emotional Learning” by Katherine Ragozzino, Hank Resnik, Mary Utne-O’Brien, and Roger Weissberg in *Horizon*, Summer 2003 <http://www.pilambda.org/horizons/v81-4/Ragozzino.pdf>

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

*If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should be covered, please e-mail: [kim.marshall8@verizon.net](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# About the Marshall Memo

## ***Mission and focus:***

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

## ***Publications covered:***

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal  
American Educator  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Atlantic Monthly  
Bay State Banner  
Boston Globe  
Commonwealth Magazine  
Curriculum/Education Update (ASCD)  
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Elementary School Journal  
Harpers  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Education Review  
Middle School Journal  
New York Times  
New Yorker  
Newsweek  
PEN Weekly NewsBlast  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal Magazine  
Psychology Today  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Review of Educational Research  
Teachers College Record  
Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible to provide access to the full article. If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

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