Marshall Memo 76

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 28, 2005

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will break my spirit."
Rebekah Saxon, Virginia middle-school teacher (see item #1)

"In district after district, wealthy white kids are taught Algebra II while low-income minority kids are taught to balance a checkbook."
Bill Gates to the nation's governors (*New York Times*, Feb. 27, 2005, p. 14)

"Raising test scores is a result of realizing the vision, not the goal itself."
Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Leading by Design*, 2005 draft

"Always remember that great managing is about release, not transformation. It's about constantly tweaking your environment so that the unique contribution, the unique needs, and the unique style of each employee can be given free rein. Your success as a manager will depend almost entirely on your ability to do this."
Marcus Buckingham (see item #6)

"Well, I think it's pretty hypocritical. I mean, they had to kill the cow to get the milk, anyway."
A suburban Massachusetts high-school student, criticizing his vegetarian teacher for drinking milk (see item #7)

1. Dealing with Verbal Harassment and Bullying of Students

In this article, Rebekah Saxon, a Virginia middle-school teacher who also heads up a human relations and civil rights group, decries the amount of bullying and name-calling among young people today: "stupid," "ugly," "retard," "fatso," "gay," "trailer trash," and other choice terms are bandied about in schools on a daily basis. Saxon believes that a more accurate rendition of the old adage would be, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will break my spirit." Students who are the targets of verbal bullying and harassment often suffer a drop in grades because of the hostile learning environment, and bullied students are more likely to skip school, drop out, and suffer from depression and anxiety. In extreme cases, bullying can lead to suicide or violence against others. Even if an epithet isn't aimed at anyone in particular, it can still be hurtful if a student who hears it has a friend or family member who fits the negative description.

Saxon thinks it's tragic when adults are party to name-calling (nearly 25 percent of gay students reported hearing derogatory comments from teachers and other staff). But it's almost as bad when school personnel stand idly by or pretend not to hear when these words are used. Saxon says that schools should have firm policies that all personnel – teachers, paraprofessionals, librarians, administrators, guidance counselors, secretaries, custodians, food service workers, and bus drivers – must intervene swiftly and consistently when they hear epithets.

But what is the most effective way to intervene? According to Saxon, "Name calling that is based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, appearance, social class, disability, or sexuality differences needs to be addressed as what it is: a form of discrimination and harassment." She suggests the following approach for stopping race-based, ethnic, gender, or religious slurs: "That is a racist term. Do you want people to think that you are a racist?" If this doesn't work, a phone call home or a visit to the office will usually do the trick. The key message is that slurs are not tolerated.

Dealing with name-calling based on money, sexuality, appearance, and disability are more difficult to address, since many adults are struggling with some of the same hang-ups kids have – intolerance, discomfort, and ignorance about human differences. Saxon says that we should speak to students about this kind of slur with

extreme care; if we tell students not to use such "bad" words or exclaim, "How dare you say something so terrible about someone else!" we are unwittingly compounding the message that these differences are negative. "Instead," she writes, "we need to explain to our students that some characteristics are not within people's control, and it is not appropriate to use such differences to make fun of others." She recommends two strategies:

• *Name the behavior that the name-calling fits*. Saxon tells about a student in her school referring to his science teacher as "retarded." The adult who overheard the remark said, "Your use of the term retarded here is hurtful to people who have handicaps or have friends and family members with handicaps. Your science teacher is not mentally retarded. Use a term that means what you are trying to say without putting down a group of people." The student responded, "Oh, you know what I mean. Mr. Smith doesn't understand that it takes a while to get up from the gym between classes. He gave me a detention for being late, and it wasn't my fault." The student expressed what was really on his mind – and hopefully got the message about using "retarded" in a hurtful manner.

• *Clarify the meaning of the term being used.* For example, a student refers to a book as "gay," meaning it is distasteful. A good response would be, "I'm confused. Are you saying that the book is a homosexual?" Typically, the student responds, "No, I mean that the book is boring." The end of this exchange might be the teacher saying, "Please use vocabulary words that mean what you are trying to say."

Of course it's also important that students broaden their horizons about human differences related to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, appearance, class, sexuality, and ability. "When our children are more aware of and exposed to these differences," writes Saxon, "they are less likely to mock or taunt out of ignorance. If we teach our children empathy, they will be able to see the world from multiple perspectives. Children who learn to put themselves in someone else's shoes are less likely to mock or taunt out of meanness."

Saxon concludes by urging educators to teach children the importance of standing up for and befriending the ostracized. Adults can support this by standing up to name-calling whenever it rears its head and setting explicit rules and guidelines for unacceptable language. Students can formulate classroom standards for the kinds of joking, nicknames, and behavior that are not permitted, along with consequences for violations. Saxon describes how she has her students make YOU ARE ENTERING A HATE-FREE ZONE signs for other classrooms and track the use of negative terms

around the school. All this takes time, but Saxon insists: "All and all, the four or five hours of time at the beginning of the year are more than worth it as the year progresses. Teaching respect for others and ourselves is a lesson that lasts a lifetime."

"Kindness Curbs Kids' Name-Calling" by Rebekah Saxon in *Virginia Journal of Education*, January 2004 (#97, p. 6010) spotted in *Education Digest*, February 2005 (Vol. 70, #6, p. 8-13), no e-links available

2. Listening to Bullies' Victims

Virginia elementary school counselor Mary Pat McCartney describes her school's shock when only 30 percent of students said in a survey that they felt "very safe" from putdowns in school. It was apparent that, despite a schoolwide "no putdowns" policy, a conflict resolution curriculum, and other interventions, a lot of quiet, sneaky bullying was getting under adults' radar and finding a target. By questioning a sampling of older students, the school got some important insights about why most victims of bullying weren't reporting it:

- They didn't believe adults could do anything about it.
- They didn't want other students to know they had a problem.
- They were afraid of being laughed at or not believed.
- They were afraid it would get worse if they told.
- They were shy and lacked the confidence to speak up.
- They were tired of adults saying "Ignore it."

The school followed up by asking all fourth and fifth graders to rank-order this list, tell where they were most likely to encounter bullying at school, and complete two sentences:

- Students would be more likely to speak up about bully problems if…
- To really stop the bullying and putdowns at school, the adults need to…

The top-ranked reason for not telling an adult was #4 on the list: fear that the problem with the bully would get worse if they "snitched." Students expressed a desire for adults to reach out and ask more about bullying problems, provide opportunities to speak privately, and listen better. They also said that adults needed to keep an eye out for bullying and give bullies more serious consequences (i.e., detention or no recess, not just a lecture).

The school's staff absorbed the feedback and then swung into action with the following plan:

- *In-service training* – This included uniform steps to take when bullying is reported.
- *Class meetings* – These are held bi-weekly to build cohesiveness and address students' concerns.
- "*Bully buzz*" – A special sheet on which students can anonymously describe any bullying problem.
- *Assertiveness training* – The school counselor has group sessions to help students build self-confidence and communication skills.
- *Tips for parents* – The parent newsletter tells parents the warning signs of bullying or being bullied and counselors offer parent workshops on prevention.
- *Classroom guidance* – Teachers conduct role plays of actual situations at the school to develop students' empathy and develop effective strategies.
- *Peer mediation* – The number of peer mediators was expanded.
- *Bully pulpit* – At grade-level assemblies, the principal and counselor described the new plan, encouraged students to write anonymous "Bully Buzz" notes and seek out adults for private talks if they had a problem, and assured students that bullies would get specific consequences.

"Surveying the Bullied to Set Policy" by Mary Pat McCartney in *Leadership Compass*, Winter 2004-05, (Vol. 2, p. 5), spotted in *Education Digest*, February 2005 (Vol. 70, #6 ,p. 14-15), no e-links available

3. Children Who Can Deal with Teasing and Children Who Can't

Authors Michael Thompson and Lawrence Cohen echo the two previous articles on the need for aggressive measures to combat bullying and prevent children from becoming victims, but they say there is "a certain irreducible minimum of social cruelty that goes on in all schools." The challenge for teachers and administrators is to distinguish between "normal social pain" that is experienced by countless students as they go through childhood and real victimization (often glossed over with phrases like "We were just kidding") that causes lifelong scars and destructive behavior.

Thompson and Cohen say that elementary schools have a natural status hierarchy revolving around what children call "popularity":

- The top 15 percent of students are considered "very popular."
- The next 45 percent are "accepted."
- The next 20 percent are "average" or "ambiguous."

Children in these three categories (who make up 80 percent of the student body) all have friends and are, according to the research, not seriously at risk of persistent teasing. Friends protect each other when one of them is a victim of occasional teasing, helping to bandage each other's psychic wounds by saying things like, "Don't pay attention to them. They're all jerks; they're all snobs."

The remaining 20 percent of students don't have friends and are at serious risk of persistent teasing and bullying. Thompson and Cohen says these children fall into four categories:

• *Neglected kids* – These children are left out of friendship groups; they may be very bright but are shy and lack the magnetism to attract friends. Because these children keep a low profile and stay out of trouble, teachers often miss their isolation.

• *Controversial kids* – These students behave in ways that both attract and annoy others. "They can be admired for outrageous antics," write Thompson and Cohen, "but condemned for going too far. They might be the class clowns who get laughs but don't get invited to sleepovers. Or they might be bullies who are popular within their cliques, but feared and disliked by others."

• *Rejected-submissive kids* – Unpopular children who are submissive are classic targets for aggression; they have no friends to protect them and don't stand up for themselves. Some become so stigmatized that nobody will risk being their friend. "She's totally weird. No one wants to be her friend!" is the kind of thing that might be whispered about one of these rejected students by the more "popular" girls.

• *Rejected-aggressive kids* – The boys at Columbine are an extreme example of this group, lashing out against those who shun and torment them. Many in this group have psychiatric issues and severe family troubles. Tragically, it's a common "game" for other students to take turns taunting one of these students until he explodes and gets into trouble.

Thompson and Cohen say that the focus of a school's anti-bullying efforts should not be on the top 80 percent of students. They have friends and can almost always deal with teasing without adult intervention (although their mothers may need to be reassured if students have riled them up by complaining about petty teasing). Rather, a school's focus should be on friendless students in the bottom 20 percent, all of whom need the school's help and protection. Here are some suggestions:

• Rejected kids who are shy and introverted can be helped out of their isolation if teachers organize classroom groupings and project teams that require them to interact with other students and open up opportunities to make friends.

• Controversial kids should get coaching to help them build on their strengths and extinguish behaviors that drive away friends.

• Rejected kids need organized friendship groups and may require individual or group therapy to address frightening behaviors that make their lives isolated and supremely at risk.

• The school should implement one of a number of good anti-bullying programs and implement it faithfully.

• An excellent adjunct to such programs is recruiting and training student leaders to help out: every school has a few students who are super-popular and don't abuse their power, don't form an exclusive clique, and never put people down. Students with this kind of "benevolent leadership style" are great leaders for peer mediation and can do an excellent job training other student leaders to create a positive, safe environment for all students.

"When the Bullied Must Adjust" by Michael Thompson and Lawrence Cohen in *Leadership Compass*, Winter 2004-05, (Vol. 2, p. 1-3), spotted in *Education Digest*, February 2005, Vol. 70, #6 ,p. 16-19), no e-links available

4. Are Quarterly Assessments a Waste of Time?

In this month's "Questions and Answers from the Real World," Doug Reeves fields a question from a high-school math and physics teacher who is upset that his district is requiring teachers to give quarterly assessments. The teacher complains that (a) valuable class time being wasted; (b) the district tests will limit his own in-class testing (he doesn't want to over-test his students); (c) some of the material on the quarterlies hasn't been covered yet; and (d) multiple-choice tests can't adequately assess students' mastery of math standards. Here is a summary of Reeves's response:

• *Why quarterly?* Actually, says Reeves, every nine weeks is not frequent enough! He cites one high-performing district where in-school assessments range from weekly to monthly. Whatever the frequency, it's vital that tests are scored promptly and put to work right away to improve teaching and learning. "If students need help or if they need additional challenge," he writes, "teachers need to know immediately." And students need specific feedback on what they have mastered and what they need to work on improving.

• *Why common?* "If we don't all expect the same thing and if we don't share a common definition of the word 'proficient' then there is little chance we will have a fair system for students," writes Reeves. "If we were watching a high school basketball game and each player, coach, and official expressed different opinions about what was in or out of bounds, it would be a pretty strange game. In fact, the kids would quit playing because they would have no idea how to improve or score points."

• *What if the material hasn't been covered?* Most teachers assume that if they have taught something, students will score higher on the corresponding items on a quarterly assessment, and if they haven't taught it yet, students will score lower. But this is not always true! Sometimes material was taught and not learned, and sometimes students already know material that hasn't been taught. It's very useful for teachers to get interim data on anomalies like these.

• *Why multiple-choice?* Reeves is critical of tests with all multiple-choice items. He advocates a mixture of four types of assessment items: multiple-choice, short answer, extended response, and performance assessments. The key is having a common, fair, and consistent definition of what "proficient" means; it can't be the idiosyncratic judgment of one person.

"Questions and Answers from the Real World" by Douglas Reeves in *Center for Performance Assessment Monthly Email Newsletter*, February 2005

5. A "Balanced Scorecard" for School Data

The Center for Reinventing Public Education has just published a guide to help schools and districts prioritize and make sense of data. The guide recommends that seven leading indicators be monitored on an on-going basis:

- Student achievement in reading and math;
- Elimination of the achievement gap;
- Ability to attract students;
- Student engagement with the school;
- Student retention and completion;
- Teacher attraction and retention;
- Funding equity.

The Center's approach goes beyond looking only at test scores and avoids the opposite extreme of managing only through inputs and process. It's similar to the

corporate world's "balanced scorecard," which was developed to judge a business not merely on the bottom line but also on key factors needed for long-term success.

The authors say that several implications flow from their analysis. Among them:

• *Less may be more*. "The human capacity to absorb information is of necessity limited. Indicator systems should respect that reality."

• *The principles of parsimony and power should be respected*. "The temptation to develop 17 indicators, or even 127 different pieces of information capable of satisfying everyone with a question about anything in every individual school, must be avoided. The key to success will lie in parsimoniously selecting a few indicators and judging them against the standards of data, proxy, and communications power."

• *Current status is necessary but not sufficient*. People may be confused by year-to-year pronouncements about how well (or poorly) things are going; they need perspective grounded over time.

• *Smart use of data can improve relationships with the board.* Data that identify problems and promise to "get at" real issues help leaders target scarce resources where they can do the most good.

The full report, "Buried Treasure: Developing a Management Guide from Mountains of School Data" by Mary Beth Celio and James Harvey (January 2005) is user-friendly and full of examples, and is available online at: http://www.crpe.org/pubs/introBuried%20Treasure.shtml.

Spotted in *Education Gadfly*, Feb. 24, 2005 (Vol. 5, #8)

6. Releasing the Full Talent and Energy of Employees

Management consultant Marcus Buckingham says there are countless management styles but all great managers know three things about each employee:

- What are his or her strengths?
- What are the triggers that activate those strengths?
- What is his or her learning style?

Buckingham believes there are three basic learning styles, each needing a different approach:

- *Analyzers* learn by taking a task apart before they perform it; the best way to develop their skills is in workshops, role-plays, and post-mortems.

- *Doers* learn by trial and error as they perform a task; the best way to develop them is allow them to plunge into manageable tasks, learn from their mistakes, and gradually take on more difficult tasks.
- *Watchers* hold back and learn best by seeing how the whole operation works; the best way to develop their skills is having them "ride shotgun" with a highly experienced performer and get the hang of what they need to know.

Learning about each employee's unique strengths and learning style might seem too time-consuming, but Buckingham believes that this approach can end up *saving* time. If we apply rigid agendas and try to have people go against the grain of their learning styles and strengths, he says, we are far less likely to elicit their buy-in and get top-notch performance. According to Buckingham: "Great managers don't try to change a person's style. They never try to push a knight to move in the same way as a bishop. They know that their employees will differ in how they think, how they build relationships, how altruistic they are, how patient they can be, how much of an expert they need to be, how prepared they need to feel, what drives them, what challenges them, and what their goals are. These differences of trait and talent are like blood types; they cut across the superficial variations of race, sex, and age and capture the essential uniqueness of each individual.

"Like blood types, the majority of these differences are enduring and resistant to change. A manager's most precious resource is time, and great managers know that the most effective way to invest their time is to identify exactly how each employee is different and then to figure out how best to incorporate those enduring idiosyncrasies into the overall plan…

"Always remember that great managing is about release, not transformation. It's about constantly tweaking your environment so that the unique contribution, the unique needs, and the unique style of each employee can be given free rein. Your success as a manager will depend almost entirely on your ability to do this."

"What Great Managers Do" by Marcus Buckingham in *Harvard Business Review*, March 2005 (p. 70-79), no e-link available

7. A Farm Girl Struts Her Stuff in a Suburban Classroom

In this wonderfully written account of a "teachable moment" in a high-school classroom, Carla Panciera, who grew up on a working farm and now teaches English in suburban Massachusetts, describes a classroom incident that took place after she

had been teaching for a few years. A boy was boasting about his meat-eating exploits and, knowing that Panciera was a vegetarian, got her to admit that she drank milk. He then challenged her: "Well, I think it's pretty hypocritical. I mean, they had to kill the cow to get the milk, anyway." Other students seemed uncertain about whether what he said was true.

"Stop!" said Panciera, snapping her book shut. "Put your books away. Today, we will learn how to milk a cow." Students watched in hushed silence as she drew an outline of a cow on the board ("What's this? The United States?" asked the meat-eater) and told them that the protrusion near Disney World was the udder (no t's, she said). "Now I'm going to blow the udder up for you," she continued, "because that, ladies and gentlemen who grew up too close to a mall, is where the milk comes from. And contrary to some theories, the cow is very much alive when she produces it." She taught them the correct pronunciation of the word "teats," described artificial insemination, gestation, and lactation, diagrammed a milking parlor, and had them pantomime after her the process of milking a cow. "Not the end of your thumb," she prompted. "Flatten it out with the whole side of your hand." "Gross," said the meat-lover, wiping his hand on his jeans. "How could you do that?"

"But I did do it," writes Panciera, "and standing in my classroom that day with a view of the soccer practice fields and the roofs of three strip malls, I finally felt as though I could put to use the other half of my brain. For the remainder of the class, I answered questions from kids who hadn't stuck their hands up all year. How much milk do cows give? Did you drive a tractor? Did you have horses, chickens, pigs, goats, sheep, llama? What's a cow weigh, anyway? Aren't bulls the ones with horns?"

After the bell rang, one boy approached her and said, "Great class." Another said, "Hard to believe you really did all that stuff."

"I did," said Panciera.

"Cool," they chorused.

Alone in the classroom at last, Panciera reflected. "I collected my notes on pentameter and shoved them in with the rest of my files from my new life. When I looked out across the practice fields, I imagined cows dotting the green, and it was a good thought, a thought that made me feel at home."

"The Cows Come Home" by Carla Panciera in *Teacher*, March/April, 2005 (p. 42-44) http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2005/03/01/05first.h16.html I highly recommend reading the full article!

8. Using Technology to Keep Parents in Touch

Doug Johnson, a public school technology director in Minnesota, describes how his district uses *ParentCONNECTxp* (one of several programs of its kind) to give parents on-line access to their children's attendance, health and discipline records, course descriptions, grades, class rank, and course histories. The program can also give parents access to teachers' grade books so they can look at scores on daily work, tests, and projects and view upcoming assignments. If they request it, parents can also be sent an automated e-mail if a child is tardy or absent, fails to turn in an assignment, or performs poorly on a test.

"For those accustomed to accessing back account, flight status, and shipment information online," writes Johnson, "checking a child's school progress in this way is intuitive. Rather than relying on brief parent-teacher conferences or on quarterly report cards that say little about student performance, they can monitor work on a daily basis. They can also check the accuracy of health, disciplinary, and demographic information. Supper-time conversation changes from a casual 'How's school going?' and a grunted reply of 'Fine' to a genuine discussion of what's happening *this* week."

Johnson reports that teachers in his district were wary at first, concerned about additional work, confidentiality of student records, and getting flooded with parent e-mails. But he says that the system is now popular with teachers and parents (but not with students!). Because the program imports data directly from a school's student information system and electronic grade books, parents' questions are answered without extra work for teachers or frequent e-mails and phone calls. Strict server security and a formal procedure for registering parent logins and passwords have ensured students' privacy. It is necessary for teachers to stay up to date entering their grades and have a defensible system for how they grade students – but teachers agree that these are good professional practices that they should be following anyway. The only downside is that some parents don't have Internet access.

Johnson says that his district is now considering giving parents online access to how specific assignments and projects align with curriculum standards and displaying the tests and rubrics that will be used to grade them.

"Class Monitors" by Doug Johnson in *Teacher*, March/April, 2005 (p. 51)
http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2005/03/01/05classtech.h16.html

9. Short Items:

a. A guide to secondary school reform – The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has produced a guide describing nearly 100 approaches to comprehensive reform for middle and high schools. The booklet is designed to help school leaders review critical issues facing secondary schools and make decisions about ways to improve student achievement. "Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs" is available at http://www.csrq.org (click on Our Reports).

"100 Reform Models Described in Guide" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, Feb. 23, 2005 (Vol. 24, #24, p. 14)

b. Laptop incentive for attendance – Lowell High School in Massachusetts, faced with the challenge of improving student attendance from 85 to 95 percent to avoid sanctions, decided that every senior who misses fewer than 9 days this year, meets graduation standards, and is accepted by a college or the military will be presented with a $1,200 laptop computer. The school reasons that students could use the extra incentive, and those who don't already own a computer would benefit from the technological leg up. By the late fall, attendance had risen to 91 percent.

Massachusetts resident Alfie Kohn, scourge of extrinsic rewards, had this to say about Lowell's laptop program: "Treating students like pets by dangling goodies in front of them for exemplary attendance is… an excellent way to make school even less appealing to them than it already is. The more we reward people for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward."

"Perks 'R' Us" by Emily Goodman in *Teacher*, March/April 2005 (p. 14)
http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2005/03/01/05student.h16.html

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

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 best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 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 39 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, provide e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2003-04).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year ($25 for a half-year, beginning late January). 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.

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Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
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E-links will be provided whenever possible.