Marshall Memo 97

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 25, 2005

In This Issue:

1. When a student is grieving, what should the school do?
2. Difficult conversations: the manager's emotions
3. A New York City teacher blows the whistle on test cheating
4. Middle-school scheduling ideas
5. Teaching sportsmanship to student athletes
6. The academic benefits of frequent physical activity
7. Short item: (a) Turnaround advice from parochial schools in Washington, D.C.

Quotes of the Week

"Miracle-Gro for the brain."

John Raty, Harvard clinical psychiatry professor, on physical exercise for kids (see item #6)

"Keep things normal and be kind."

A principal's advice to a teacher after a student lost a parent (see item #1)

"[Doing harm to do good] lies at the heart of professional responsibility. How you handle a necessary evil bears fundamentally on your moral character."

Joshua Margolis, Harvard Business School professor (see item #2)

"Oh yeah, I have done emotional harm. How did I react in that moment? I was scared to death, and hurt for her, and I was disappointed that I couldn't get her to an acceptable level, but I couldn't do the work for her and I had to come to terms with that."

A manager reflecting on a firing an employee (*ibid*.)

---

1. When a Student Is Grieving, What Should the School Do?

"I felt that a piece of me was missing," said Robert, 14, after his mother died of cancer. He is one of countless American schoolchildren who deal with grief every year. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that more than two million children and adolescents under 18 have experienced the death of a parent, and many more grieve over the loss of a close relative or friend.

Sometimes a school or classroom is hit particularly hard. "My first year of teaching was a total trauma," recalls a middle-school English teacher. "First, a seventh-grader's dad was crushed by a falling steel beam at work. On Thanksgiving Day, a girl's mother died from choking during their family's holiday dinner. In early spring, a girl walked home with her two younger sisters, both in elementary school, and found their mother hanging from a rope tied to a chandelier in the entryway."

This teacher went to her principal for advice. "Keep things normal and be kind," he counseled. But the teacher was haunted by the hollow eyes and empty expressions of her bereaved students, and ended up feeling badly that she followed the principal's advice. "I let those kids down," she said. "I went on as though nothing had changed. But, in truth, for these children everything had changed."

So what should a school do when students are dealing with the death of a loved one? In this very helpful research article in the current *American School Board Journal*, Susan Black presents several levels of advice:

What <u>not</u> to do:

- Suggest that a student has been sad and has grieved long enough.
- Tell a student it's time to move on.
- Act as if nothing has happened.
- Make comments such as: "It could be worse," "You were lucky it didn't happen to you," "I know how you feel," and "You'll be stronger for this."
- Expect students to go through a short grieving process and completely recover.
- Punish grieving students for being forgetful, preoccupied, and unprepared for class.

What to expect at different ages:

• *3- to 5-year-olds* do not understand the permanence of death; ask repeatedly when the deceased person is coming back; are frightened by adults' grieving; demand

a replacement for the deceased. Complicated grief includes anxiety and regressive behaviors longer than six months after the death.

• *6- to 8-year-olds* understand that death is universal and permanent; assume blame and guilt for the death; mourn through stories, pictures, and remembrances. Complicated grief includes school refusal, physical symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and regressive emotions and behaviors.

• *9- to 11-year-olds* demand detailed information about the death; avoid sadness and other strong emotions; increasingly express anger; feel a sense of the deceased's presence. Complicated grief includes shunning friends and increased moodiness and misbehavior three to six months after the death.

• *12- to 14-year-olds* act callous, indifferent, and egocentric; strongly sense the deceased person's presence; describe ongoing conversations with the deceased and take comfort in the deceased's clothing and possessions. Complicated grief includes refusing to attend school, persistent depression, drug or alcohol use, associating with delinquents, and precocious sexual behavior.

• *15- to 17-year-olds* express thoughtfulness and empathy; resist excessive demands at home; feel overwhelmed by survivors' emotional dependence and grief; grieve in adult-like ways with sadness and painful memories, but grief is of shorter duration; worry about their own vulnerability and death; have private conversations with the deceased. Complicated grief includes mood swings, withdrawal from friends and group activities, poor school performance, and high-risk behaviors such as drug use.

Possible actions by the principal:

Helen McLaughlin, a school counselor in Maine, recently wrote an article for Portland's Center for Grieving Children recommending the following steps:

• Create a support team that deals with grieving children. It should meet at least four times a year to review bereavement research and methods of supporting children at various ages.

• Communicate to all school staff that children's grief is a natural, normal, and healthy response to death and that grieving children need emotional support at school as well as at home.

• Consider each grieving child as an individual case, taking into account the child's age, experiences with death, and home life.

• Teach staff how to answer grieving children's questions and how to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

• Ask teachers to watch for grieving students who are disoriented, confused, forgetful, impatient, sad, inattentive, and disruptive, as well as those whose grief resurfaces months after a death.

• Help students resume their regular schedules and studies; provide counseling for children who struggle with "the deep and exhausting inner work of grief."

Peer advice from other teens:

Most grieving kids benefit from sharing their stories with others in small support groups. Mary Perschy, a teacher, counselor, and school administrator, recalls the following advice from peers in a teen support group in Columbia, Maryland:

- Join a support group. You'll realize that others have the same feelings and you won't feel so abnormal. If you can't be in a group, find a friend who will stick with you, or find a counselor or psychologist to talk with.
- Don't block out your grief or it will only get worse. I write in my journal and then go back and read my entries to see how far I have come.
- Listen to music. It helps to not feel so alone.
- Cry alone if you don't want to cry in front of anyone.
- Don't be afraid to use the word death or the name of the one who died. Let your friends and teachers know that it hurts more if they avoid talking about the death.
- Tell your teachers that it helps to know they care – but that you don't want to be pressured to express your grief.
- Ask teachers to talk to you first before sharing your personal information with others in your class, especially kids you hardly know.

Three tiers of response depending on the severity of the trauma:

• *Tier 1* – Support is provided by teachers, school nurses, and counselors, parents, friends, church members, and others; support is based on caring and friendship, but is not therapeutic.

• *Tier 2* – Therapeutic interventions are provided by trained staff and volunteers who have expertise in grief counseling.

• Tier 3 – Therapy for severely grief-impaired children is provided by highly skilled clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and family therapists who specialize in bereavement counseling. Tier 3 grief is more common when the cause of death was suicide.

Signs that a child should be referred for therapy:

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry advises parents and teachers to consider referring a child for therapeutic counseling if these grief-related symptoms persist for an extended period of time:

- Severe depression that results in little interest in daily activities;
- Inability to eat and sleep normally;
- Fear of being alone;
- Imitation of the deceased;

- Repeatedly wishing to join the deceased;
- Loss of interest in play and friends;
- Refusal to attend school;
- Steady drop in school achievement.

"When Children Grieve" by Susan Black in *American School Board Journal*, August 2005 (p. 28-30), no e-link available

2. Difficult Conversations: the Manager's Emotions

This article from the *Boston Globe* reports on a study done by business professors Joshua Margolis and Andrew Molinsky of practitioners who have to inflict pain as part of their work:

- Business managers responsible for delivering critical performance reviews, denying raises, laying off employees, or shutting down operations;
- Doctors who perform intrusive procedures on patients;
- Police officers charged with evicting people from their homes;
- Counselors who offer a "tough love" regimen to drug addicts.

How can people act effectively and ethically under these challenging circumstances? What is their "moral choreography" as they engage in difficult conversations? What strategies work best?

Margolis and Molinsky found that the stereotype of Donald Trump blithely firing people on "The Apprentice" is far from the everyday reality. "The internal drama, the cocktail of emotions that gets released in these situations, is much more complex," says Molinsky. People charged with inflicting pain on their subordinates or patients are churning with emotions about their own personal safety, their competence to get the job done, and the impact their words will have on others – physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Doing harm to do good, says Margolis, "lies at the heart of professional responsibility. How you handle a necessary evil bears fundamentally on your moral character."

A manager reflected on one of these conversations: "Oh yeah, I have done emotional harm. How did I react in that moment? I was scared to death, and hurt for her, and I was disappointed that I couldn't get her to an acceptable level, but I couldn't do the work for her and I had to come to terms with that."

Margolis and Molinsky have some preliminary recommendations from their study. Managers should:

- Equip themselves psychologically by assuring themselves that they are doing the right thing.
- Rehearse the situation in advance to familiarize themselves with the emotional territory they are about to enter.
- Seek to relate on a human level to those on whom they're inflicting harm.

"A fair number of people across the occupational groups seek to reach out and have some kind of relationship with the person they're about to harm," says Margolis. One manager said, "I think part of the professional delivery, if you are able to, is the follow-up. Going back and seeing how they are doing and if they have any questions. Then they realize that there is some emotional connection, that it is not just, OK, I'm done, next victim."

"Managers Who Dispense Bad News Also Feel the Pain" by Robert Weisman in *The Boston Globe*, June 12, 2005,
http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2005/06/12/managers_who_dispense_bad_news_also_feel_the_pain?mode=PF

3. A New York City Teacher Blows the Whistle on Test Cheating

In last week's *New York Times* education column, Samuel Freedman tells the story of a New York City high-school teacher who blew the whistle on administrators in his school illegally boosting students' scores on high-stakes Regents examinations.

The teacher, Philip Nobile, became concerned in June of 2002 when his assistant principal sent him an e-mail message before the essay test was given to students saying, "In a pinch they can get points from writing any old garbage down." When it was time for teachers to score the Regents tests, the assistant principal assigned teachers to reread and re-grade ("scrub" in school slang) any exams that fell slightly below the passing mark of 65. Several dozen students ended up getting grades between 65 and 69 on the Global and American History tests. A colleague e-mailed Nobile saying "The whole thing is a sham. The essays were terrible all around and received points when they should have gotten zero."

"I call it 'affirmative cheating,'" said Nobile. "It turns teachers into liars and hypocrites. They feel a natural sympathy with students and want to help them. And there's a desire of administrators to pump up scores to look good. And most of the teachers – especially the young, untenured, easily intimidated – simply won't come forward to complain without protection."

Nobile spoke to his principal about the testing irregularities and got this response: "I don't want to hear that." When the testing irregularities occurred again in June of 2003, Nobile, on advice from the union, sent the principal a formal memo detailing what was happening. Over the next few months, administrators made a series of evaluation visits to Nobile's classroom and rated him unsatisfactory, paving the way for dismissal (all his evaluations up to that point had been satisfactory). Nobile continued to report the cheating, and finally went to the district office, which sent an investigator.

At first, other teachers would not confirm the cheating, which made Nobile look like a crank. But when the investigator returned and offered teachers immunity from disciplinary action, they corroborated Nobile's accusations. The final report from the district said that Nobile's accusations "have been proven correct in every detail."

The assistant principal who was involved in the testing scandal resigned (she continued to protest her innocence), and the principal was removed.

"In Exposing a Grading Scandal, Harsh Lessons Are Learned" by Samuel Freedman, New York Times, July 20, 2005 http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/20/education/20EDUC.html?

4. Middle-School Scheduling Ideas

This article describes some scheduling ideas adopted by a South Carolina middle school to create time for teachers to give extra help and enrichment to students:

• *Early morning time* – Many students arrive at school early and have dead-time before the day begins. The principal decided to limit the number of students allowed in the gym to 50 and reassign some teachers who were on duty in the cafeteria, schoolyard, and gym from 7:30 – 8:00 to a homework center, two computer labs, and the media center.

• *Half time* – Noting that many students were not reading on grade level, the school shaved time off each class period and created "Half-time," a 45-minute block around students' lunches. During this period, some students read independently while others get individual or small-group help. Here's what the rotation looks like:

	Sixth Grade	**Seventh Grade**	**Eighth Grade**
10:11 - 10:57	Lunch	3rd Period	3rd Period
11:00 – 11:46	Half-time	Lunch	4th Period
11:49 - 12:35	3rd Period	Half-time	Lunch
12:38 – 1:24	4th Period	4th Period	Half-time

• Team collaboration – Each team (language arts, math, science, and social studies teachers) has common planning time when their students go to specialist classes, and they are empowered to use the time in a way that works for them. Teams meet once a week to discuss how they will use the Half-time blocks and other openings to deliver extra help to students. One team, for example, used Half-time and the Academy block (when band and chorus students go to those classes) to bring an extra period of reading and math to needy students every day.

"Kick Off, Half-Time, and Over-Time: Flexible Scheduling Scores Points" by Jadé McLeod, *Middle Ground*, April 2005 (Vol. 8, #4), http://www.nmsa.org/services/middle_ground/mg_apr2005.htm#a

5. Teaching Sportsmanship to Student Athletes

For many students, especially in high school, sports are no longer fun. This is because of intense competitive pressure, overly critical coaches, maniacal parents, and others who have lost perspective on youth sports. Sports Done Right is an

organization based in Maine that has made a point of teaching sportsmanship and spreading the word about a less pressured, more enjoyable approach to youth sports. Its belief is that learning and personal growth are the underlying goals of any good interscholastic and intramural sports program, and that all kids should have a chance to play. Here are the core principles developed by Sports Done Right:

- *Philosophy, values, and sportsmanship* – Athletic participation must be healthful, positive, and safe for everyone involved, conducted in an environment that teaches values and ethics, strengthens the community, promotes competition without conflict, and enriches the lives of the athletes.
- *Sports and learning* – Learning and personal growth form the foundation for interscholastic and intramural sports.
- *Parents and community* – Parents and community are actively involved in creating and supporting an environment that fosters positive athletic experiences for student-athletes.
- *Quality of coaching* – The coach is the key to making the student-athlete experience appropriate, positive, and educational.
- *Opportunity to play* – Each student who meets the eligibility standards has the opportunity to participate and learn through sports.
- *Health and fitness* – Participation in sports builds self-confidence while teaching good health and fitness habits to last a lifetime.
- *Leadership, policy, and organization* – High-quality athletic programs are built upon a foundation of strong leadership, clear policy, adequate resources, and effective organization.

"Doing Sports Right" by Robert Cobb and Duke Albanese in *American School Board Journal*, August 2005 (p. 20-22), no e-link available. For more information on Sports Done Right, go to http://www.mcce.umaine.edu/sportsdoneright

6. The Academic Benefits of Frequent Physical Exercise

This *American School Board Journal* article argues that frequent physical activity has an academic payoff in schools. "Miracle-Gro for the brain," is how Harvard psychiatry professor John Raty describes the impact. And a 2002 study by the California Department of Education said there is "a distinct relationship between academic achievement and physical fitness." An interesting sideline: girls are more likely to benefit academically from increased physical education than boys, especially in the early grades. An additional hour of physical activity each week can significantly reduce obesity rates among girls, according to one study.

How much physical activity is enough? Thomas Templin, a Purdue University professor, says that two periods of physical education a week is insufficient. The recommended dose is sixty minutes of physical activity *a day*. California now mandates daily physical education in middle school and the first two grades of high

school. And starting in 2007, students who don't pass a ninth-grade physical fitness test must take four years of physical education in high school.

Ken Reed, director of the PE4Life's Center for the Advancement of Physical Education, suggests that districts develop an individualized fitness program and use heart-rate monitors and pedometers to keep tabs on students' fitness levels. Real data on improving fitness and making inroads on obesity can be the best defense when cost-cutters zero in on the Phys. Ed. budget.

"Cut to Fit" by Glenn Cook in *American School Board Journal*, August 2005 (p. 16-19), no e-link available

7. Short Item:

a. Turnaround advice from parochial schools in Washington, D.C. – A new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation tells the story of how Mary Anne Stanton led 13 inner-city Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. to much better performance. The report is available at: http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/Fwd-2.2.pdf

Spotted in *The Education Gadfly*, July 21, 2005

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. 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.

Website:

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for issues 1-68
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

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
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harper's
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Journal of Staff Development
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record

E-links will be provided whenever possible.