

Marshall Memo 70

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 17, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

"I am in a confident mood. We must go to school and learn."

Fatima Nusrath, Sri Lankan 10th grader re-entering school after the tsunami
(*New York Times*, January 11, 2005)

"Leadership is not about pretending to have all the answers but about having the courage to search with others to discover solutions."

Barry Jentz and Jerry Murphy (see item #1)

"I think some people think if you change the clothes, everything else is going to change magically. But it all has to be part of a package."

Rudolph Saunders, Maryland principal, on school uniforms (see item #2)

"After all the research I've done on sleep problems over the past four decades, my most significant finding is that ignorance is the worst sleep disorder of them all."

William Dement, authority on sleep and sleep disorders (see item #3)

"Talk less and let the students talk more."

Janis Harmon, Susan Keehn, Michelle Kenney, and Karen Wood (see item #4)

"There are 86,400 seconds in a 24-hour day – no more, no less. Each is used or lost. There can be no storage of time or borrowing from tomorrow."

Leon Beckerman, New York principal (see item #6a)

"What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, not knowledge in pursuit of the child."

George Bernard Shaw

1. Can a Leader Admit Confusion and Still Lead?

“[C]onfusion is not a weakness to be ashamed of but a regular and inevitable condition of leadership,” say Barry Jentz and Jerry Murphy in this intriguing article in the new *Kappan*. They describe a five-step process for taking advantage of “Oh, no!” moments to “embrace confusion,” open up better lines of communication, test old assumptions and values against changing realities, and develop more creative approaches to problem solving.

The authors present a case study of a school leader hit with unexpectedly low test scores (25 percent of eighth graders are non-readers!), followed by demands from parents and community groups to *do something* and defensive reactions from teachers who are not about to be blamed for poor student achievement. Like others in this kind of predicament, the leader feels under tremendous pressure to act and churns with the following thoughts and emotions:

- Shame and loss of face: “I’ll look like a fool!”
- Panic and loss of control: “I’ve let this get out of hand!”
- Incompetence and incapacitation: “I don’t know what I’m doing!”
- Shame: “I’m at a loss here. I’m not fit to lead.”

The last thing the leader is inclined to do is admit confusion, which seems like weakness.

Looking at this situation from the point of view of the school leader’s subordinates, the last thing they want is a boss who:

- Instinctively blames circumstances or other people when things go wrong;
- Claims to be open to input but sees feedback as criticism and doesn’t listen;
- Hates uncertainty and opts for action even when totally confused;
- Believes that anything less than take-charge decision making is weak;
- Habitually resorts to the “art of the bluff” to avoid looking stupid.

Yet when leaders are disoriented and confused by developments that just don’t make sense and have no idea what to do, these tendencies often take hold. After all, leaders are supposed to know what to do! In a crisis, they tend to deny their confusion and reflexively and unilaterally impose quick fixes to solve the problem. These kind of shoot-from-the-hip decisions, say Jentz and Murphy, “rarely address underlying

causes. More often, they lead to bad decision making, undermine crucial communication with colleagues and subordinates, and make managers seem distant and out of touch. In the long run, managers who hide their confusion also damage their organizations' ability to learn from experience and grow."

How can a leader get out of this box? Jentz and Murphy suggest a five-step process for turning confusion into a resource, maintaining your authority, avoiding premature closure, and enlisting your team in finding the best way to move forward:

- *Step 1 – Embrace your confusion.* "When confronted with disorienting problems," they write, "you need to do the one thing you least want to do – acknowledge to yourself that you are confused *and* that you see this condition as a weakness... You might take a deep breath and say to yourself, 'I'm confused and that makes me feel weak.' Paradoxically, fully embracing where you start will not lead you to wallow in your confusion, but rather frees you to move beyond your inner conflict." Doing this is difficult, and Jentz and Murphy recommend developing a personal mantra for crisis moments, for example, "Leadership is not about pretending to have all the answers but about having the courage to search with others to discover solutions."

- *Step 2 – Assert your need to make sense.* Sit down with your colleagues and say something like, "This new information just doesn't make sense to me. Before I can make a decision, I need help in understanding this situation and our options for dealing with it." It's critically important to 'fess up to your confusion: "Unless you unambiguously assert, with conviction and without apology, your sense of being confused, others will fulfill your worst expectations – concluding that you *are* weak – and they will be less willing to engage in a shared process of interpersonal learning." If the leader is faking confidence and competence as the ship goes down, the crew will be in no mood to admit their own distress and find new ways to plug the leaks.

- *Step 3 – Structure the interaction.* "Without skipping a beat," say Jentz and Murphy, "you must next provide a structure for the search for new bearings that both asserts your authority and creates the conditions for others to join you." The leader needs to state the purpose for the joint inquiry, lay out specific steps to fulfill that purpose, provide a timetable, and identify the criteria and methods by which decisions will be made. These actions show team members that although you have admitted you are confused, you are not incapacitated; you may not know what course to take, but you know the next step, you are "asking for directions" (difficult for some guys!) but you are still in charge of a process that will produce a clear outcome, and

you give suggestions about the type of data you need to clarify and resolve the problem.

Jentz and Murphy illustrate this point with another case study of a leader in a pickle. *The alarm sounds in a nuclear power plant, signaling that something is seriously wrong. The manager makes an educated guess about what the problem might be, but then a team member reports a piece of data from the reactor that doesn't fit the manager's hypothesis – in fact, it's the exact opposite of what it should be. The manager is stunned and sits staring at the console as the team anxiously awaits a decision.* Following Step 3, here is what the manager might say: “Listen up! We’ve got two minutes, and then you’ll get my decision. Between then and now, I’m going to talk about what’s got me confused, and you are going to give me new information, feedback, or explanations for what is going on.”

- *Step 4 – Listen reflectively and learn.* As your team begins to respond with data, ideas, and push-back, the leader needs to shift gears and engage in what Thomas Gordon called “active listening” – putting yourself in other people’s shoes and, with an open mind, really listening to what they are saying (often reflecting it back to be sure you have heard it accurately). For example:

- “You seem to be saying that x caused y . Do I have that right?”
- “You’re torn between two explanations. On one hand, you think x accounts for z ; on the other hand, you think y does?”
- “So you’re angry because I am saying one thing and yet doing quite another?”

Reflective listening doesn’t come naturally and takes lots of practice, like hitting a backhand in a fast-paced tennis game.

The opposite of active listening is what bad listeners do all the time: reflexive responding. This happens when people immediately judge the worth of what was said and say whether they agree or disagree. “This typically leads to a confrontation, not a joint inquiry” say Jentz and Murphy. “Indeed, our habit of responding in kind is such a powerful force that it has a name: the Norm of Reciprocity. (‘If you don’t listen to me, I’ll be damned if I’ll listen to you.’)”

- *Step 5 – Openly process your effort to make sense.* Having heard what your colleagues have to say (some of which may be puzzling and upsetting), it’s important to think through your responses *out loud*. This works much better than what we usually do, which is think it through silently and then announce our decision. Here are some examples of open processing:

- “That’s news to me. I haven’t heard that before.”
- “That really throws me. How did you get to that from what you were saying?”
- “That helps me a lot by pointing out *x*.”

“When you find the courage to externalize your intellectual process,” say Jentz and Murphy, “you invite others to engage in interpersonal learning. Working together, you can discover the limitations of one another’s thinking – limitations that you cannot know as long as you process privately.”

Returning to the case of the bad test scores, here is how these five steps might be applied. The leader meets privately with all parties (administrators, teachers, union representatives, board members) and asserts his confusion about the test scores. Listening reflectively to accusations, explanations, and demands from all sides (More phonics! Remedial reading for all students! A “shape up” memo to teachers!), he argues that they should not take action until they understand the mystery of such low scores. He uses a similar approach with parents, media, and community leaders (although with them he is not quite as open about his confusion). The leader then sets up a committee to analyze student achievement data and evaluate competing explanations for the results. The group is confused at first; none of their assumptions or preconceptions seem to explain the low test scores. Having admitted their confusion, members of the group keep working and finally figure out that:

- Most of the non-reading eighth graders entered the district after third grade, missing the district’s exemplary phonics program.
- The non-readers all come from a particularly impoverished neighborhood.
- As students moved from one grade to another, remedial services were totally uncoordinated and these students fell through the cracks.

Based on this deeper and more nuanced understanding of the problem, the team implements a series of targeted programs that brings about significant gains in student achievement the following year.

Jentz and Murphy conclude with a broader message for leaders: “In the 21st century, as rapid change makes confusion a defining characteristic of management, the competence of managers will be measured not only by *what they know* but increasingly by *how they behave* when they lose their sense of direction and become confused. Organizational cultures that cling to the ideal of an all-knowing, omniscient executive will pay a high cost in time, resources, and progress, and will be sending the message to managers that it is better to hide their confusion than

to address it openly and constructively... Managers can be confused yet still be able to exercise competent leadership by structuring a process of reflective inquiry and action.”

“Embracing Confusion: What Leaders Do When They Don’t Know What to Do” by Barry Jentz and Jerome Murphy in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2005 (Vol. 86, #5, p. 358-366), no e-link available

2. Do Uniforms Help?

As of 2000, about 27 percent of U.S. public elementary school students were wearing some type of school uniform, most often in disadvantaged school districts or predominantly minority areas like Prince George’s County, Maryland. But the research on whether uniforms have positive effects is murky at best. One problem is that most studies on the subject are sponsored by the companies that manufacture school uniforms (Lands End and French Toast among them); research from within this multimillion-dollar business may be less than objective.

David Brunnsma, a Missouri researcher, has been studying school uniforms since 1996 and just published a book, *The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education*. His conclusion is that uniforms by themselves don’t curb violence or discipline problems, don’t boost students’ self-esteem, don’t improve academic achievement (in fact, reading scores may be a little lower in schools that require uniforms), and don’t level the playing field in the status wars (there are always subtle things that some students are teased about). Brunnsma says that the positive stories people hear (such as the seeming success of uniforms in Long Beach, California) aren’t convincing because other initiatives or demographic shifts may account for at least some of the gains.

Students aren’t always crazy about uniform requirements. “[U]niforms are uncomfortable,” said Aaron Morton, a seventh grader at Decatur Middle School in Prince George’s County, Maryland. “They make you feel all stiff like robots or something.” But administrators at Aaron’s school think uniforms have helped – and like the fact that it’s easier to spot outsiders in the school and pick up students trying to blend in on city streets after cutting out of school in the middle of the day.

The secret to getting academic and behavioral gains from uniforms may be introducing them in tandem with more substantive reforms. If they are part of a broader set of reforms, uniforms may play an important symbolic role, signaling to students, parents, and staff that things are changing for the better, that school is now

serious business. "I think some people think if you change the clothes, everything else is going to change magically," said Decatur principal Rudolph Saunders. "But it all has to be part of a package."

"Uniform Effects?" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Jan. 12, 2005 (Vol. 24, #18, p. 27-29) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/12/18uniform.h24.html>

3. Teenage Sleep Patterns: What Schools Can Do

Doctors agree that adolescents need about nine hours of sleep to function optimally, but less than 15 percent of American teenagers are getting 8½ or more hours of sleep on most school nights. This is not because they are defiant but because when kids reach puberty, their circadian rhythms are thrown off and they don't feel tired enough to go to sleep before 11:00 p.m. "Even adolescents who are sleep deprived tend to feel alert in the evening," explains New Hampshire psychologist Peg Dawson. "The pattern and timing of melatonin secretion makes it hard for adolescents to fall asleep and wake up at the times necessary to get enough restful sleep. Schools with start times before 8:30 a.m. place students at a disadvantage in terms of arousal and alertness, not only for early morning classes but also through the day because adolescents' biological rhythms are out of sync with typical school routines."

Dawson says that chronic "sleep debt" may be connected with teenage school problems such as tardiness, inattention, irritability, impatience, poor impulse control, low tolerance for frustration, depression, and disruptive behavior. Paradoxically, sleep deprivation can even trigger symptoms similar to ADHD. And yet few American schools have tuned in to the impact of such an obvious problem among adolescents. William Dement, a leading authority on sleep and sleep disorders, writes, "After all the research I've done on sleep problems over the past four decades, my most significant finding is that ignorance is the worst sleep disorder of them all."

Dawson suggests that when school administrators, psychologists, and social workers are looking into these problems, they should ask parents about the student's typical bedtime and waking-up time on school days and weekends and, if there are indications of more serious problems, suggest that parents take the child to a health professional to check for the possibility of sleep disorders, including delayed sleep-phase syndrome (experienced by about 7 percent of adolescents, who are up as late as 4:00 a.m.) and obstructive sleep apnea.

But there is something else that secondary schools can do to alleviate chronic

sleep deprivation and its consequences: open school at 8:30 or later! A study of 17 Minnesota school districts found that later start times resulted in:

- Students going to bed no later than before and getting significantly more sleep;
- Less tardiness and absenteeism;
- Students having less difficulty staying awake in class and doing homework;
- Fewer depressive symptoms;
- Higher grades;
- No increase in problems at dismissal;
- No reduction in participation in after-school sports and other activities;
- Teachers having more time to prepare for classes before school;
- Teachers feeling more alert during faculty meetings held before school;
- Very few teachers in favor of returning to the previous 7:15 a.m. start time;
- 93% of parents pleased with the later start time for their high-school kids.

“Sleep and Adolescents” by Peg Dawson in *Principal Leadership*, January 2005 (Vol. 5, #5, p. 11-15), no e-link available

4. Effective Tutoring for Struggling Middle-School Students

In this article in *Middle School Journal*, four researchers from Texas and North Carolina share their accumulated wisdom on tutoring programs for struggling middle-school students. They believe that to be effective, tutoring should include:

- *Student commitment* – It helps for the tutor and tutee to have an initial conversation about the purpose of the sessions and perhaps sign a contract with specific goals.
- *Assessment* – It’s important to get data on the student’s reading level, interests, and attitude at the beginning.
- *Self-selection of books* – Tutees should be able choose reading matter from a good selection of young adolescent books.
- *Explicit strategy instruction* – The authors recommend the “think aloud protocol,” which involves being very explicit about predicting, connecting and summarizing reading matter.
- *Metacognitive awareness* – Students need to learn how to monitor and verbalize the strategies they are using as they struggle with difficult words and concepts.

The authors recommend the following six-step lesson sequence for every tutoring session:

a. *Recap.* At the beginning of each tutoring session, students talk about strategies they used the night before and what they wrote in their response logs (students read 20-30 minutes of a self-selected book each night and write about it in a log), and the tutor acknowledges the student's effort.

b. *Review.* Tutor and tutee go over the reading strategies they worked on in the previous session and activate background knowledge.

c. *Explain and model.* The tutor introduces a new comprehension strategy, models it with a book, and has the tutee practice it. They both refer to a laminated card with all comprehension strategies printed on it.

d. *Read and write together.* Tutor and tutee take turns reading and thinking aloud, stopping to talk about strategies used. They write journal entries about using comprehension strategies.

e. *Examine words.* The tutor has the student point out unfamiliar words and they work together to understand their meaning.

f. *Summarize.* The tutor has the student summarize and write about the strategy they worked on that day, comments on the tutee's use of the strategy and general progress, and urges the student to do the reading that night.

The authors conclude with three additional tips for tutoring struggling adolescents:

- Provide as many tutoring sessions as possible (although any amount helps).
- Constantly reinforce strategies and always encourage students to be mindful of their own reading.
- Talk less and let the students talk more.

"A Tutoring Program for Struggling Adolescent Readers" by Janis Harmon, Susan Keehn, Michelle Kenney, and Karen Wood in *Middle School Journal*, January 2005 (Vol. 36, #3, p. 57-62), no e-link available

5. Time Management Tips for Principals

Former secondary school administrator Linda Marrs Morford has these time management suggestions for principals:

- *Create a master calendar.* This should include all the special events for the entire school year. To compile such a calendar, it's best to convene key staff members in the spring, use the previous year's master calendar as a template (hopefully it's in electronic form), try to think of all the important events in the upcoming school year,

and then constantly update the calendar during the year to keep it current. Among the items on a master calendar might be:

- Holidays and vacation days
- Faculty meetings
- Parent meetings
- School board meetings
- Athletic and fine arts events
- Field trips
- Report cards and progress reports
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Interim testing dates
- Standardized test dates
- Teacher evaluation deadlines
- Final exams
- Due dates for district and state reports
- Drop and add class deadlines
- College and career planning deadlines
- Awards ceremonies

Morford suggests giving copies of the master calendar to all staff members, posting a large-format version in the main office, and putting it on the school's website. Some of the items on the master calendar should also appear in student planners, and an updated month-by-month slice of the master calendar can also be given to parents and staff members at the beginning of each month.

- *Create special events checklists.* For major annual events that involve many planning steps (e.g., graduation), it's a good idea to capture the details and keep them for the next year, constantly refining and adding to the basic template with new ideas on what worked and what didn't work. For graduation, such a list might include: site arrangements, determining graduation eligibility, meeting with senior class officers, sending invitations, ordering caps and gowns, selecting ushers, deciding on awards, ordering diplomas, arranging for speakers, setting up the graduation platform, arranging luncheon and reception, finalizing the graduation program, conducting rehearsals, and last-minute items on graduation day.

- *Keep an administrative checklist.* Morford recommends using a list of all routine meetings that must happen each month, for example: board meeting, faculty meeting, maintenance staff, office staff, PTA, department and grade-level meetings, IEP meetings, budget review, committee meetings, teacher evaluations, parent-teacher conferences, holiday program planning, fire drills, hiring, etc.

"3 Tools to Get You Organized" by Linda Marrs Morford in *Principal Leadership*, January 2005 (Vol. 5, #5, p. 24-27), no e-link available but Morford can be reached at cflmm2@eiu.edu

6. Short Items:

a. The long and short of time management – New York high-school principal Leon Beckerman has three insights on managing time:

- There are 86,400 seconds in a 24-hour day – no more, no less. Each is used or lost. There can be no storage of time or borrowing from tomorrow.
- Everybody gets the same amount of time and everybody gets all there is.
- Managing time really means managing oneself in relation to time.”

He also cautions principals against what he calls *Administrative Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy*. This is when principals withhold information that staff members need to do their jobs successfully so the fearless leader can ride in and save the day.

“Building Blocks for the New Principal” by Leon Beckerman in *Principal Leadership*, January 2005 (Vol. 5, #5, p. 43-46), no e-link available but the author can be reached at leon.beckerman@esc.edu

b. Debunking three urban legends – Nina Zolt, who founded In2Books, a pen pal program in Washington, D.C. and Chicago (see Marshall Memo 69, #7), has a commentary piece in the current *Education Week* about some “urban myths” she’s encountered over the last few years:

- *Myth #1: The community doesn’t care about urban schools.* Zolt’s program has had no problem finding hundreds of willing pen pals in Washington and Chicago to correspond with students about books.

- *Myth #2: Teachers in urban schools are unable or unwilling to learn new skills.* More than 300 teachers have volunteered after-hours time to attend 21 hours of intensive professional development as part of the In2Books program.

- *Myth #3: To raise student achievement, urban teachers need to stick to the script.* “The 21st century’s essential skills are reading closely, thinking critically and communicating orally and in writing,” says Zolt; “therefore, students need to see their teacher modeling these skills, not reading from a script... And yes, this type of instruction also produces better student work and standardized-test scores.” She cites an independent evaluation conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago showing students in her program significantly outperforming district students not in the program.

“Urban Mythbusters: Rethinking Some Things We ‘Know’ About Urban Schools” by Nina Zolt in *Education Week*, Jan. 12, 2005 (Vol. 24, #18, p. 31)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/12/18zolt.h24.html>

c. Induction programs for new teachers: learning from abroad - According to this article in *Kappan*, induction programs for new teachers in the U.S. are often sporadic, incoherent, poorly aligned, and lacking in adequate follow-up. The authors looked to induction programs in five other countries (Switzerland, China (Shanghai), New Zealand, Japan, and France) for lessons on how it can be done right:

- Effective induction programs are highly structured, comprehensive, rigorous, and seriously monitored, with well-defined roles for staff developers, administrators, instructors, and mentors.

- Effective induction should be the first phase of a lifelong professional development program for all teachers, using a variety of methods and approaches over time.

- Effective induction introduces new teachers to a shared, collaborative professional culture, engendering a sense of group identity and membership. Collaborative group work should be seen as an integral part of the teaching culture, with shared experiences, practices, tools, and language.

“What the World Can Teach Us About New Teacher Induction” by Harry Wong, Ted Britton, and Tom Ganser in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 2005 (Vol. 86, #5, p. 379-384), no e-link available. This article is drawn from a book edited by Edward Britton et al.: *Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Systems for Early Career Learning*, which is available at <http://www.WestEd.org>.

d. Dealing with ADHD - In this thorough article in the new *American Educator* magazine, cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham describes the consequences that ADHD can have if educators do not intervene early: academic failure, social isolation, and increased risk of drug abuse and other self-destructive behaviors. He then provides a checklist for spotting ADHD in students (see the link below), gives guidelines for distinguishing between the two types of ADHD (Inattentive and Hyperactive/Impulsive), affirms the helpfulness of medications and counseling for most children with ADHD, and gives suggestions for structuring the classroom to maximize the success of these students, including the following:

- Make it easier for the child to pay attention (e.g., sit the child close to you).
- Give immediate and frequent consequences for negative and positive behavior.
- Break tasks into smaller chunks (especially big projects like research papers).
- Use prompts and reminders, especially for rules and time intervals.
- Use artificial rewards (e.g., tokens or play money to be redeemed later).
- Stay in touch with parents, perhaps with a daily progress report.

“Understanding ADHD” by Daniel Willingham in *American Educator*, Winter 2004/05 (Vol. 28, #4, p. 41) http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/winter04-05/cogsci.htm

e. Advice on literacy coaches – The full text of a monograph from the Carnegie Corporation, *Literacy Coaches: An Evolving Role* by Barbara Hall, is available on line at: <http://www.carnegie.org/reporter/09/literacy/index.html>

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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.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals and other educators very well-informed on important research and ideas in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 years of experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, coach of principals, and writer, acts as “designated reader.” Kim searches through 39 publications the week they come out, chooses the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning, and summarizes them in a brief e-mail. Some ideas will be familiar, reinforcing what readers already know; others will be new and genuinely thought-provoking.

Subscriptions:

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- 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
Curriculum Update (ASCD)
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
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
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Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

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