

# Marshall Memo 597

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

August 3, 2015

## In This Issue:

1. [Instructional leadership, teamwork, efficacy, and student achievement](#)
2. [Improving the quality of middle-school classroom discussions](#)
3. [How teachers can get the year off to a good start](#)
4. [Are young people on their devices too much for their own good?](#)
5. [Another study of single-sex schooling](#)
6. [Mastery goals that help and mastery goals that don't](#)
7. Short item: [Accents of the British Isles](#)

## Quotes of the Week

“Leaders have tremendous potential to influence the collective work and beliefs of teachers in their schools.”

Roger Goddard, Yvonne Goddard, Eun Sook Kim, and Robert Miller (see item #1)

“On the first day of school, the first question in the students’ minds is, ‘Who are you?’”

Fred Jones (see item #3)

“Students do better in class both academically and socially when they are comfortable, relaxed, and ‘at home.’ They do not do so well in an impersonal environment.”

Fred Jones (*ibid.*)

“Reading nonverbal communication is an underappreciated skill. For most of our history, humans had no choice but to communicate face to face.”

Bruce Feiler (see item #4)

“We can’t become fully human until we learn to look into other people’s eyes.”

Bruce Feiler (*ibid.*)

---

## **1. Instructional Leadership, Teamwork, Efficacy, and Student Achievement**

In this *American Journal of Education* article, Roger Goddard and Yvonne Goddard (The Ohio State University), Eun Sook Kim (University of South Florida), and Robert Miller (independent consultant) report on their study of the impact of principals' instructional leadership in 93 rural, high-poverty elementary schools in a Midwestern state. The researchers found a strong causal relationship down this chain:

- Principals' instructional leadership;
- Teacher collaboration;
- Teachers' efficacy beliefs;
- Fourth graders' achievement in reading and math.

Here are the details in the first three areas, with strong results in each leading to strong results in those that follow:

Instructional leadership – Characteristics of principals who were strong instructional leaders:

- Very knowledgeable about effective instructional practices and curriculum;
- Very knowledgeable about effective classroom assessment practices;
- Provide conceptual guidance for teachers on effective classroom practices;
- Set high standards for teaching and student learning;
- Directly involved in helping teachers address instructional issues in classrooms;
- Push teachers to implement what they have learned in professional development;
- Actively monitor the quality of teaching in the school through systematic and frequent classroom visits;
- Develop a shared vision of what the school could be like;
- Encourage people to express opinions that might be contrary to the leader's.

Teacher collaboration – Strong instructional leadership produced these types of teamwork:

- Regular, frequent common planning times for team meetings;
- The principal participating in team meetings
- Agendas in meetings focused on specific goals;
- Collaboration on developing materials and activities for classes;
- Collaboration on instructional strategies and analyzing student assessment data;
- Collaboration on what helps students learn best;
- Collective work to select instructional methods and activities and evaluate curriculum and programs;
- Collective work determining professional development needs and planning PD;
- Collaboration with the principal on school improvement and effective operations.

Collective efficacy – Instructional leadership and teacher teamwork fostered these beliefs, which in turn resulted in higher student achievement:

- We believe that every child can learn;

- We have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning;
- We can motivate students;
- We can get through to the most difficult students;
- We don't give up when students don't want to learn;
- We have the skills to deal with student disciplinary issues;
- These students come to school ready to learn;
- Students' families provide advantages and motivation that help students learn;
- The opportunities in this community help ensure that students will learn;
- Students feel safe in this school;
- Drug and alcohol abuse in the community are not preventing students from learning.

“Leaders have tremendous potential to influence the collective work and beliefs of teachers in their schools,” conclude Goddard, Goddard, Kim, and Miller. “Our results... confirm that principals’ instructional leadership is a significant positive predictor of collective efficacy beliefs through its influence on teachers’ collaborative work... The more robust the sense of collective efficacy characterizing the schools in our sample, the greater their levels of student achievement, even after controlling for school and student background characteristics and prior levels of student achievement.”

“A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of the Roles of Instructional Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, and Collective Efficacy Beliefs in Support of Student Learning” by Roger Goddard, Yvonne Goddard, Eun Sook Kim, and Robert Miller in *American Journal of Education*, August 2015 (Vol. 121, #4, p. 501-530), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/1Hm0KRY>; Goddard can be reached at [goddard.9@osu.edu](mailto:goddard.9@osu.edu).

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

## **2. Improving the Quality of Middle-School Classroom Discussions**

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Joshua Lawrence (University of California/Irvine), Amy Crosson (University of Pittsburgh), Juliana Paré-Blagoev (George Washington University), and Catherine Snow (Harvard University) report on their study of Word Generation, a cross-disciplinary middle-school program. Developed by Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP) and the Boston Public Schools, Word Generation introduces target academic vocabulary words (e.g., *relevant*, *presume*, *indicate*) in brief texts, highlights them by providing student-friendly definitions, and gets students involved in discussions of civic and moral dilemmas in which the words are used for a week in ELA, math, science, and social studies classes, culminating in a writing activity on Friday in which students argue their position on the dilemma of the week. Some sample dilemmas: Should you be able to rent a pet? Should there be federal funding for stem cell research? Should students attend all-boy and all-girl classes? (See <http://wg.serpmedia.org> for more information and free downloads of materials.)

Although the program didn't have a large impact on students' learning of the target words (effect size .25), it brought about dramatic improvements in students' discussion skills, which the authors believe will pay off in reading comprehension and general academic

achievement. This is important since there is so little high-quality discussion in the average U.S. classroom – less than two minutes per hour, according to one study. “The low incidence of discussion is alarming,” say the authors, “in light of its strong relation to desirable academic outcomes, the importance of authentic language experience for English language learners, and the focus in the Common Core State Standards on oral language and discussion skills as domains in which there are high expectations for student performance. A formidable challenge, then, is to develop procedures for expanding the amount and improving the quality of classroom discussion.”

Lawrence, Crosson, Paré-Blagoev, and Snow deconstruct what’s going on in good classroom discussions (a.k.a. exploratory talk, accountable talk, or instructional dialogue):

- Distinct from teacher monologues and the pervasive initiate-response-evaluate sequence;
- A high ratio of student-to-teacher talk;
- High student engagement – attentive listening and eagerness to contribute;
- Students responding directly to one another;
- Peer perspective-taking and responding to each others’ reasoning;
- Students embracing newly introduced ideas and making connections to their own experiences and prior learning;
- Claims, warrants, and conclusions related to a topic or question;
- Developing strong reasoning skills and connecting factual knowledge to the topic.

Discussions are most successful when teachers pose authentic, open questions that require reasoning because there is no simple, straightforward answer. Students and teacher are positioned as “co-inquirers” and there is a respectful, collaborative environment that enables engagement with rigorous content.

Why is there so little high-quality discussion in our schools? Lawrence, Crosson, Paré-Blagoev, and Snow believe it’s because:

- Teachers worry about losing control of the classroom;
- They worry about students who talk too much and those who talk too little;
- Teachers worry about taking too much time and not covering the curriculum;
- Some teachers haven’t acquired the skills to facilitate productive discussions;
- Many students lack the norms and skills to participate productively.

In short, teachers need considerable support to launch and manage good discussions. The good news from this study is that with relatively little professional development, teachers were able to use the Word Generation materials to bring about dramatic improvements in their classroom discussions. The authors also believe that the students’ vocabulary knowledge improved more than indicated by the multiple-choice test they used.

“Word Generation Randomized Trial: Discussion Mediates the Impact of Program Treatment on Academic Word Learning” by Joshua Lawrence, Amy Crosson, Juliana Paré-Blagoev, and Catherine Snow in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2015 (Vol. 52, #4, p. 750-786), available for purchase at <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/52/4/750.full.pdf+html>; Lawrence can be reached at [jflawren@uci.edu](mailto:jflawren@uci.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

### 3. How Teachers Can Get the Year Off to a Good Start

In this article, classroom management guru Fred Jones suggests some key moves that teachers can make to begin the school year in the strongest possible way:

- *Introduce yourself.* “On the first day of school,” says Jones, “the first question in the students’ minds is, ‘Who are you?’” They also want to know, “Why are you here?” and “Do you care?” It makes a big difference when teachers, without being corny, share their passion for the work, the pleasure they get from watching students learn, and their determination to make the year productive and fun.

- *Introduce students to each others.* “If you think that the students all know each other, think again,” says Jones. “Students do better in class both academically and socially when they are comfortable, relaxed, and ‘at home.’ They do not do so well in an impersonal environment.” When secondary-school teachers are asked to fill out a seating chart in mid-November with the first and last names of everyone in the class, the number of correct answers rarely exceeds 25 percent. It takes a concerted effort at the beginning of the year to change this dynamic. Jones suggests spending at least a half hour on the first day of school on an appropriate icebreaking exercise. Some ideas:

- Scavenger hunt – Students all get a piece of paper with ten questions (the last movie seen, favorite sport, favorite ice cream flavor, how you get to school, etc.). Everyone (including the teacher) fills in the answers for themselves and then roams around the room trying to get signatures in the three spaces by each question of others who have the same answer.
- Name game – Students sit in a circle with their first names printed in large letters on a card. The first person says his or her first name plus a rhyme, a descriptive adjective, or a nickname. The second person follows suit and then repeats what the first student said, and so on around the room, with the teacher going last.
- Partner introductions – Students pair up, get acquainted (family, pets, hobbies, special interests), and then introduce their partners to the class.
- Group sharing – Students share the best thing they did over the summer, their biggest fear, their hopes for the new school year, etc.
- Design a T-shirt – Students sketch out a shirt design that describes themselves and then present it to the class.
- Photos – Students take selfies, write five descriptions of themselves on the bottom half of a sheet of paper, and then mount their photos on the top half and post them. This can be supplemented by having students bring in baby photos of themselves and challenging the class to match baby images with current pictures.
- Guess who – Students answer ten questions about personal characteristics and hand in the sheets. The teacher reads the first item on a student’s list and the class has to guess who it is, often needing additional items read. Other students’ questions are read in turn.
- Place in the family – Students form groups according to whether they are oldest, middle, youngest, only, etc. Each group lists the things they have in common and the

advantages and disadvantages of their place in the family and then shares its list with the class.

“The students can always tell what is important just by watching you,” concludes Jones.

“Things that are important are worth your time and effort. The students need to know that they are important.”

“Starting the New School Year: Getting Off on the Right Foot” by Fred Jones, July 28, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1IjGd1>

*[Back to page one](#)*

#### **4. Are Young People on Their Devices Too Much for Their Own Good?**

In this *New York Times* article, Bruce Feiler remembers his father telling him how to shake hands: “Firm grip, squeeze, look me in the eye.” Are today’s young people so absorbed in their digital devices that they’re losing the ability to give good eye contact and read the facial and body-language cues in others? “Reading nonverbal communication is an underappreciated skill,” says Feiler. “For most of our history, humans had no choice but to communicate face to face. With so much experience, we honed the ability to detect sometimes-lifesaving information from facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, and posture. Though these cues may vary in different cultures, reading them involves decoding what people think less by their words and more by their raised eyebrows, downcast gazes, or rolled eyes.”

Children used to learn these skills early, but are today’s youth losing this facet of communication? They’re on screens up to 7.5 hours a day, according to one study. Stanford researchers found that girls 8-12 who spent less time online and more on face-to-face interactions felt more normal, slept better, were more successful socially, and had fewer friends whom their parents worried were a bad influence; girls with more screen time slept less and had lower self-esteem. Another study found that after spending five days at an overnight camp without TV, computers, or phones, preteens were significantly better than a control group at reading nonverbal emotional cues. But this might not be true of children who start playing with iPads at the age of two or three and never acquire good nonverbal literacy.

“We should not leap to facile conclusions,” says Judith Hall of Northeastern University. “It may not be all doom and gloom.” Only a few super-obsessed young people who are playing video games all the time are harmed, she says, and there are social benefits and social-intelligence demands with e-mail, texting, reading Facebook posts, watching television, and playing video games. Psychologist Niobe Way of New York University believes boys and girls are sensitive and articulate about the feelings of those around them – “But by late adolescence, when they’re spending more time online, they’re basically told to keep those feelings to themselves.” For boys, buried in sports, gaming, and pornography, the message is, “Feelings don’t matter.” For girls, whose online interactions often revolve around looks, clothes, and makeup, the message is *Pretty. Perfect. Gorgeous. Sexy*. She believes that when young people don’t practice empathy and positive face-to-face techniques as teens, those skills atrophy.

“We can’t become fully human until we learn to look into other people’s eyes,” concludes Feiler. “A good handshake may not be the only answer, but for me, at least, it’s a

good place to start.” He counsels parents to find ways to limit children’s screen time and seize moments every day (like bedtime) “for interactions that value vulnerability and feelings.”

“The Eye-to-Eye Challenge” by Bruce Feiler in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1Ujon76>

*[Back to page one](#)*

## **5. Another Study of Single-Sex Schooling**

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Nicole Else-Quest (University of Maryland/Baltimore County) and Oana Peterca (Villanova University) report on their study comparing socioeconomically comparable 11<sup>th</sup> graders in single-gender and mixed-gender schools in non-selective high schools within the same urban district. The results:

- Girls in single-sex schools did slightly better in standardized tests of English, math and science than girls in mixed-gender schools.
- Boys in single-sex schools did significantly worse on state tests than boys in mixed-gender schools.
- In terms of their attitudes toward schoolwork, the findings were mixed: students in the single-sex schools had slightly more negative attitudes toward reading and slightly more positive attitudes toward science and math, with no significant differences between boys and girls. Students in single-sex schools scored about one-half a standard deviation lower in their self-concept and expectations of success in English/reading than students in mixed-gender schools.

Else-Quest and Peterca conclude that “boys and girls in our study achieved the best academic outcomes when they had female classmates.” In other words, single-sex schools are far from being a magic bullet, especially for boys. The authors cite a number of studies questioning the wisdom of gender segregation and calling into question the two most-common rationales: (a) that there are differences in brain structure and learning styles between males and females; and (b) that single-gender education reduces gender stereotyping and liberates boys and girls to excel in non-traditional subjects. “In single-sex high schools,” they say, “students’ use of heterosexism and homophobia to reinforce traditional gender roles is pervasive, which suggests that SSS [single-sex schooling] is likely to exacerbate – not reduce – sexism and gender stereotyping.”

“Academic Attitudes and Achievement in Students of Urban Public Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex High Schools” by Nicole Else-Quest and Oana Peterca in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2015 (Vol. 52, #4, p. 693-718), available for purchase at <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/52/4/693.abstract>; Else-Quest can be reached at [nmeq@umbc.edu](mailto:nmeq@umbc.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## 6. Mastery Goals That Help and Mastery Goals That Don't

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Benoît Dompnier, Emanuele Meier, Catherine Brandner, and Fabrizio Butera (University of Lausanne), Céline Darnon (University Clermont Auvergne and University Institut of France), and Annique Smeding (Université de Savoie) report on two studies they conducted with Swiss university students. The researchers' focus was the impact of mastery goals (a desire to acquire new knowledge and skills) versus performance goals (doing better than others). Here's how they proceeded:

- Students read a 1,600-word textbook passage and took a multiple-choice test on its content.
- Students were divided into four groups, each reading one of four different versions of a "scientific" article on mastery orientation. The message of the articles ranged from a strong endorsement of mastery goals' positive impact on academic success to a strong endorsement of teachers' appreciation of students with mastery goals.
- After performing two other brief tasks, students were asked to read a second textbook passage and answer ten multiple-choice questions on its content.

The researchers found that test performance was best among students who read the passage endorsing mastery goals for their social and academic benefits and worst among students who read the passage on mastery goals fostering teachers' appreciation. This was especially true for students who had been low achievers on the initial test.

"In sum," say the authors, "these results indicate that mastery goals do predict academic performance only if they are endorsed for 'right' reasons, namely, because one believes in the social utility of these goals for learning, and not because one wants to appear as a nice student in his or her teachers' eyes."

"Improving Low Achievers' Academic Performance at University by Changing the Social Value of Mastery Goals" by Benoît Dompnier, Céline Darnon, Emanuele Meier, Catherine Brandner, Annique Smeding, and Fabrizio Butera *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2015 (Vol. 52, #4, p. 720-749), available <http://bit.ly/1SCwcr3>; Dompnier can be reached at [benoit.dompnier@unil.ch](mailto:benoit.dompnier@unil.ch).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## 7. Short Item:

*Accents of the British Isles* – In this YouTube video, Siobhan Thompson does spot-on imitations of accents from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Great fun!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyyT2jmVPak>

*[Back to page one](#)*

© Copyright 2015 Marshall Memo LLC

*If you have feedback or suggestions,  
please e-mail [kim.marshall48@gmail.com](mailto:kim.marshall48@gmail.com)*

# About the Marshall Memo

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

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 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 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

## ***Website:***

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions (with results of an annual survey)
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

## ***Core list of publications covered***

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal  
American Educator  
American Journal of Education  
American School Board Journal  
AMLE Magazine  
ASCA School Counselor  
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast  
Better: Evidence-Based Education  
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter  
District Administration  
Ed. Magazine  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Week  
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Educational Horizons  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
Essential Teacher  
Go Teach  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Educational Review  
Independent School  
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)  
Journal of Staff Development  
Kappa Delta Pi Record  
Knowledge Quest  
Literacy Today  
Middle School Journal  
Peabody Journal of Education  
Perspectives  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Responsive Classroom Newsletter  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
School Administrator  
School Library Journal  
Teacher  
Teachers College Record  
Teaching Children Mathematics  
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children  
The Atlantic  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The District Management Journal  
The Journal of the Learning Sciences  
The Language Educator  
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools  
The New York Times  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
Theory Into Practice  
Time Magazine  
Wharton Leadership Digest