Marshall Memo 266

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 29, 2008

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"As counterintuitive as it might seem… the best way to lead people into the future is to connect with them deeply in the present. The only visions that take hold are shared visions – and you will create them only when you listen very, very closely to others, appreciate their hopes, and attend to their needs."

James Kouzes and Barry Posner (see item #3)

"Employees are more likely to implement a strategy when they not only believe in it, but also feel they truly belong in the organization."

Bryan Goodwin (see item #4)

"It's tempting to accept research at face value, especially if it's labeled as *scientific* and involves quantitative methods. However, as consumers of research, teachers must approach all studies with careful scrutiny rather than unquestioning acceptance."

Elaine Garan and Glenn DeVoogd (see item #7)

"If we don't allow students to read in school at the same time that we tout the wonders of reading, what message are we sending to students about our values?"

Elaine Garan and Glenn DeVoogd (*ibid.*)

"The best science has the power to change the thinking of those who previously disagreed with it but are fair-minded enough to admit they were wrong once the case has been made."

James Cunningham (quoted in *ibid.*)

1. Newly Appointed Leaders Want Quick Wins, but Beware of the Traps!

The importance of scoring a quick win is a perennial piece of management advice for newly appointed leaders. But in this *Harvard Business Review* article, management consultants Mark Van Buren and Todd Safferstone warn that "the quest for rapid results is inherently dangerous." They describe five traps they see many new leaders falling into and suggest a wiser approach:

• *Trap #1: Focusing too heavily on details* – Getting bogged down in minutiae is the most common mistake made by those new to leadership roles. Looking for a quick win, the leader tries to master one area and doesn't pay enough attention to broader responsibilities.

• *Trap #2: Reacting negatively to criticism* – New leaders tend to believe they have a mandate for change, zero in on one area that needs improvement, and view any criticism as an act of aggression by naysayers. This prevents them from looking at the facts on the ground and learning.

• *Trap #3: Intimidating others* – New leaders are sometimes "convinced of their brilliance and the inevitability of their rise in the organization," say Van Buren and Safferstone, and this can cow their subordinates into being less than candid with the boss and not providing needed feedback on unwise actions.

• *Trap #4: Jumping to conclusions* – "Some leaders hoping to score a quick win jump into its implementation too quickly," say the authors. "To the people around them, it feels as if these leaders have arrived with the solution already formulated instead of engaging others in its design."

• *Trap #5: Micromanaging* – "Leaders new to their jobs often make the mistake of meddling in work they should trust others to do," say Van Buren and Safferstone. "Unwilling to take the time to get direct reports on board with an overall vision or goal – but afraid their decisions and actions won't align with it – they second-guess and micromanage."

The way to avoid these traps, say the authors, is to engineer *collective quick wins*. They can do this by working with respected members of the organization to brainstorm things that need fixing and can be implemented quickly. Here is the authors' checklist for a collective quick win:

- Value – Is it linked to an urgent, meaningful outcome for the organization?
- Feasibility – Can we achieve this win without distracting from day-to-day responsibilities?

- Ownership – Will all key members of the team be able to see their "fingerprints" on this win and cite their contributions with pride?
- Opportunity to learn – Will this activity give me a chance to learn the strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and aspirations of members of the team?
- Opportunity to engage – Will this effort require me to seek input, guidance, and coaching from colleagues?

For newly appointed managers, say the authors, "quick wins should not be about your personal scoreboard or pet projects but about your management of a group of individuals. A focus on collective quick wins ensures that your work as a leader is a success." Here are the authors' pointers for getting genuine ownership:

• *Make people believers, not bystanders*. Enlist the team in your success. "Rather than watching from the periphery (hoping quietly for success or failure), your direct reports need to become fully engaged and have skin in the game," say Van Buren and Safferstone.

• *Understand your subordinates' nervousness*. The arrival of a new leader creates anxiety and uncertainty among employees. "Early emphasis on a collective achievement pushes their uncertainty to the background," say the authors, "sending a clear signal that you define success as a team effort."

• *Show humility*. "Too many leaders approach transitions as if they have nothing to learn," say Van Buren and Safferstone. "An emphasis on collective quick wins forces you to seek your team's guidance as they work with you to define and pursue an early achievement. This small but difficult act of humility builds credibility. In seeking advice, you demonstrate respect for the team's capabilities and your willingness to learn."

• *Learn about your team*. Leading your team in action is the best way to get to know their strengths and weaknesses.

"The Quick Wins Paradox" by Mark Van Buren and Todd Safferstone in the *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009 (Vol. 87, #1, p. 54-61), no e-link; the authors can be reached at vanburem@executiveboard.com and safferst@executiveboard.com.

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2. Fine-Tuning Leadership for Five Types of Entry Challenge

In this *Harvard Business Review* article with direct relevance to principals entering new jobs, management consultant Michael Watkins suggests STARS as a helpful acronym for the five possible leadership challenges:

- Start-up – Building an organization from scratch;
- Turnaround – Saving an organization that's in serious trouble;
- Accelerated growth – Managing an organization that's growing rapidly;
- Realignment – Re-energizing a previously-successful organization facing problems;
- Sustaining success – Following a highly-regarded leader whose record was stellar.

"The right strategies for creating organizational change flow directly from the STARS situation you've inherited," says Watkins. Here are the challenges and opportunities for each:

• *Start-up* – Challenges: building the strategy, structures, and systems without a framework or boundaries; recruiting and building a high-performing team; making do with limited resources. Opportunities: Being able to get it right from the beginning; working with people who are energized by the possibilities; not being limited by fixed preconceptions.

• *Turnaround* – Challenges: Re-energizing demoralized employees; making good decisions under time pressure; making painful cuts and difficult personnel choices. Opportunities: Everyone knows that change is necessary; people are hungry for hope, vision, and direction; people are prepared to follow a strong leader; affected constituencies offer significant external support; a little success goes a long way.

• *Accelerated growth* – Challenges: Putting structures and systems in place to permit going to scale; integrating many new employees. Opportunities: The potential for growth helps motivate people; employees are willing to stretch themselves and their subordinates.

• *Realignment* – Challenges: Convincing employees that change is necessary; restructuring the leadership team and refocusing the organization; developing a "stewardship" leadership style that is diplomatic and patient. Opportunities: There are significant pockets of strength; people want to continue to see themselves as successful.

• *Sustaining success* – Challenges: Living in the shadow of the former leader and managing that person's team; playing good defense before embarking on too many new initiatives; finding ways to take the organization to the next level. Opportunities: A strong team and a solid foundation may already be in place; people want to continue their history of success.

Watkins says that leaders need to be self-aware about their leadership style. If their personal bent is toward "heroic" leadership, they are best suited to a turnaround situation. If they are more attuned to "stewardship," they may be a better fit in other types of organization. Leaders in transition need to exercise personal discipline, says Watkins. They should ask themselves, "What am I good at – or what do I like doing – that I need to do less of?" and "What am I mediocre at – or what do I dislike doing – that I need to do more of?" and work to make those things happen every day. Even the best leader can't do it all, so it's also essential to build a team that complements his or her strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, Watkins describes six essential "moves" that new leaders need to take, contrasting the approach they might take entering a turnaround and a realignment situation:

• *Organize to learn*: Figure out what you need to learn, from whom, and how best to learn it.
- Turnaround – Focus on technical learning (strategy, technologies) and prepare to act quickly.
- Realignment – Focus on culture and political learning; prepare to act deliberately.

• *Define strategic intent*: Develop and communicate a compelling vision for what the organization can become; outline a clear strategy for achieving the vision.
- Turnaround – Prune non-essential positions and programs.
- Realignment – Hone and take advantage of existing capabilities; stimulate innovation.

• *Establish top priorities*: Identify a few vital goals and pursue them relentlessly; think about what you need to have accomplished by the end of the first year.

- Turnaround – Make faster, bolder moves; focus on strategy and structure.
- Realignment – Make slower, more deliberate moves; focus on systems, skills, and culture.

• *Build the leadership team*: Evaluate the team you inherited; move deftly to make the necessary changes; find the optimal balance between bringing in outside talent and elevating high-potential insiders.

- Turnaround – Clean house at the top; recruit external talent.
- Realignment – Make a few important changes; promote high potential people from within.

• *Secure early wins*: Think through how you plan to "arrive" in the new organization; find ways to build personal credibility and energize the troops.

- Turnaround – Shift the organizational mindset from despair to hope.
- Realignment – Shift the organizational mindset from denial to self-awareness.

• *Create supporting alliances*: Identify how the organization really works and who has influence; create key coalitions to support your initiatives.

- Turnaround – Gain support from bosses and other stakeholders to invest the required resources.
- Realignment – Build alliances sideways and down to ensure better execution.

"Picking the Right Transition Strategy" by Michael Watkins in the *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009 (Vol. 87, #1, p. 46-53), no e-link; the author can be reached at mwatkins@genesisadvisers.com.

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3. Getting "The Vision Thing" Right

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Santa Clara University business professors James Kouzes and Barry Posner report on their study of what people look for in leaders. They asked thousands of working people around the world:

- What do you look for and admire in a leader (defined as someone whose direction you would willingly follow)?
- What do you look for and admire in a colleague (defined as someone you'd like to have on your team)?

Number one on both lists was honesty, but there were sharp differences on the issue of vision. 72 percent wanted their leader to be forward-looking, versus 27 percent wishing for that in a colleague. No other quality showed such a big difference between leaders and co-workers.

This is the challenge for someone rising from the ranks to a leadership position, say Kouzes and Posner: "The trait that most separates the leaders from individual contributors is something that they haven't had to demonstrate in prior, non-leadership roles. Perhaps that's why so few leaders seem to have made a habit of looking ahead."

So how do newly-appointed leaders learn how to look beyond immediate projects? The authors have two pieces of advice:

• They must carve out time from operational duties to look at the big picture.

• They shouldn't have too much faith in their own prescience. Too many leaders think that *they* must be visionaries. "Bad idea!" say Kouzes and Posner. "Yes, leaders must ask, 'What's new? What's next? What's better?' – but they can't present answers that are only theirs. Constituents want visions of the future that reflect their own aspirations. They want to hear how their dreams will come true and their hopes will be fulfilled." The authors analyzed close to a million responses to their Leadership Practices Inventory and learned an important lesson: "The data tell us that what leaders struggle with most is communicating an image of the future that draws others in – that speaks to what others see and feel."

One manager in the business world got some blunt advice along these lines from one of his subordinates: "You would benefit by helping us, as a team, to understand how you got to your vision. We want to walk with you while you create the goals and vision so we all get to the end vision together."

"As counterintuitive as it might seem," conclude Kouzes and Posner, "the best way to lead people into the future is to connect with them deeply in the present. The only visions that take hold are shared visions – and you will create them only when you listen very, very closely to others, appreciate their hopes, and attend to their needs. The best leaders are able to bring their people into the future because they engage in the oldest form of research: They observe the human condition."

"To Lead, Create a Shared Vision" by James Kouzes and Barry Posner in the *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009 (Vol. 87, #1, p. 20-21), no e-link; the authors can be reached at jim@kouzes.com and bposner@scu.edu.

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4. How to Implement a Strategic Plan So It Works

In this article in *Changing Schools*, McREL official Bryan Goodwin argues that the content of a strategic plan is less important than how a school implements it. Citing highly effective schools and the experience of Toyota, Southwest Airlines, and Wells Fargo Bank, he suggests these guidelines:

• *Keep it simple* – Can everyone in your school articulate the goals for student performance and the plan to raise achievement? In most schools, the answer is no, because comprehensive school plans are "excessively complicated," says Goodwin. Leaders need to distill the ideas to their essence, says Goodwin – a few very simple, clear ideas that everyone in the organization knows and remembers.

• *Build a culture of success* – Many leaders default to the "three Fs" to manage their subordinates: facts, fear, and force. But research shows that these are ineffective motivators. "Employees are more likely to implement a strategy when they not only believe in it, but also feel they truly belong in the organization," says Goodwin. Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf once said in a newspaper interview, "I could leave our strategy on an airplane seat and have a competitor read it and it wouldn't make any difference. It's about culture." The same is true of effective schools, where teachers collaborate with school leaders to create a school-wide vision and high expectations for behavior and work that are known by all students.

• *Empower everyday innovation* – Goodwin tells the story of how Toyota turned around a General Motors factory in Fremont, California that had been stymied by labor-management tensions and was producing poor-quality vehicles. With the same unionized workers, the factory's productivity soared and defects decreased to almost zero. The secret was encouraging bottom-up innovation and getting workers to feel they were part of a larger effort and getting them to think independently and make decisions. Worldwide, Toyota workers submit up to a million new ideas a year, many of which are put into action.

"Superior Execution" by Bryan Goodwin in *Changing Schools*, Fall 2008 (Vol. 59, p. 1-3), no e-link available; the author can be reached at bgoodwin@mcrel.org.

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5. What Fosters Creativity in a Leadership Team?

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, senior editor Steven Prokesch reports on General Electric's assessment of how successful its leadership team was at creating a climate that supported creativity. Here were the characteristics they measured:

- Challenge/involvement – Team members feel connected and stretched by their work and take pride in it.
- Freedom – Team members feel empowered to try new approaches to their work.
- Trust/openness – Team members feel safe sharing ideas and working with one another.
- Idea time – Team members have time to think about and develop new ideas.
- Playfulness/humor – Team members see their workplace as easygoing, fun, and relaxed.
- Idea support – Team members encourage one another's ideas.
- Debate – Team members constructively discuss and challenge each another's ideas and approaches.
- Risk-taking – Team members can make decisions and take action in the face of uncertainty.
- Conflict – Team members experience relatively little personal tension and interpersonal warfare at work.

"How GE Teaches Teams to Lead Change" By Steven Prokesch in the *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009 (Vol. 87, #1, p. 98-106), no e-link; the author can be reached at sprokesch@harvardbusiness.org.

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6. Response to Intervention: Timely Services for Struggling Students

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, professors Eric Mesmer and Heidi Anne Mesmer clarify the helpful role Response to Intervention can play. RTI's importance, they say, is that it allows teachers to intervene more quickly with students who are having difficulty, as compared to the traditional approach of holding off on determining a child's need for special-education services (or even additional non-special-education help) until the emergence of "a

severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability" (U.S. Department of Education, 1977). "RTI is an initial attempt to provide an alternative to the dominant and damaging discrepancy model in which so much time is spent admiring the student's reading problem," write Mesmer and Mesmer. "… As a result of the intervention-focused nature of RTI, eligibility services shift toward a supportive rather than sorting function."

The authors illustrate the way RTI works by telling the story of Mark, a second grader who was struggling in reading:

• Step 1: In September, Mark took the Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening (PALS) and scored well below grade level. He took part in classroom guided reading (small-group daily reading instruction in on-level materials), and was given individual attention on comprehension and decoding. As the weeks passed, Marks' second-grade teacher was concerned that he was not making enough progress.

• Step 2: The RTI team (consisting of Mark's teacher, a reading specialist, a special education teacher, and the school psychologist) discussed Mark's situation and decided he needed to improve word recognition so he could accurately and fluently read connected text. The team planned a six-week intervention: the reading teacher conducted 20-minute lessons three times a week with Mark and three other students in the classroom, focusing on modeling of fluent reading, repeated readings, error correction, comprehension questions, and self-monitoring. Mark's regular teacher also continued to give him additional practice and monitor his progress.

• Step 3: As the intervention proceeded, the school psychologist used a PDA device once a week to track Mark's accuracy and fluency compared to grade-level norms. Mark made some gains, but he was not progressing at a rate that would meet second-grade goals. The PALS assessment was administered again mid-year and Mark had made virtually no progress since September.

• Step 4: The team decided to use the Woodcock Word Attack Test. This revealed that Mark was having trouble decoding words with more than one syllable and words with difficult vowel patterns, which resulted in reduced accuracy and fluency. The team launched a new six-week intervention in which the reading teacher saw Mark ten minutes a day and had him work with problem words; Mark practiced incorrectly read words, was taught how to analyze word parts and apply this to similar words, and practiced sorting words. After each word sort, Mark read each word within a sentence. The psychologist continued to monitor Mark's accuracy and fluency once a week and found that he responded quickly to the word-attack intervention, in dramatic contrast to his lack of progress with the earlier intervention. By the sixth week, Mark could accurately read 100% of a list of words (he'd only been able to read 55-60% of them before), and his fluency improved markedly. At the end of May, Mark took the PALS assessment again and met the end-of-second-grade goals.

• Step 5: The team reviewed Mark's progress and decided that special-education services were not necessary. However, they decided to assess him in the fall in case there was slippage over the summer.

"Response to Intervention (RTI): What Teachers of Reading Need to Know" by Eric Mesmer and Heidi Anne Mesmer in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2008/January 2009 (Vol. 62, #4, p. 280-290), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at emesmer@radford.edu and hamesmer@vt.edu.

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7. Sustained Silent Reading – the Research Evidence and Common Sense

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, California State University/Fresno professors Elaine Garan and Glenn DeVoogd report that the National Reading Panel (NRP) report of 2000 continues to cast a shadow on the use of sustained silent reading in schools and had led some principals to discourage teachers from using it. "It's tempting to accept research at face value, especially if it's labeled as *scientific* and involves quantitative methods," say the authors. "However, as consumers of research, teachers must approach all studies with careful scrutiny rather than unquestioning acceptance." Classrooms are not laboratories, they write, and the NRP's findings about sustained silent reading are an example of how even the most scientific research can miss the mark. How did that happen?

First, say Garan and DeVoogd, the NRP did not find that sustained silent reading is ineffective. "Nowhere did the report state that having children read in school is a bad idea," they say. Instead, the NRP said that there were not enough studies meeting its methodological requirements to draw any conclusions.

Second, the authors fault the NRP for using a component-skills approach to reading, which assumes that reading skills can be taught in isolation, one at a time, and that students move along a linear progression. This approach led NRP researchers to miss the delayed benefits of sustained silent reading.

Third, the NRP imposed an experimental/control-group research model on classrooms. Virtually no "scientific" studies of sustained silent reading exist because of what researchers would have to ask of the control group. "What administrator or parent would allow children to participate in a study that prohibits, discourages, or drastically controls the amount of reading children can do over a long period of time?" ask the authors.

Fourth, Garan and DeVoogd say the NRP misplaced sustained silent reading in its research, putting it under fluency rather than comprehension. This led them to miss important research on the power of independent reading to improve comprehension.

Fifth, the NRP reasoned that correlation is not causation, which led it to ignore hundreds of studies that show a strong link between the amount of time children read and their vocabulary, knowledge, and reading proficiency.

And finally, there wasn't even unanimity among NRP panel members on the issue. One member said that sustained silent reading was probably a bad idea while others said it was probably helpful for children.

Garan and DeVoogd go on to report that there have been a number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies showing clear benefits of sustained silent reading in schools – especially for disadvantaged students. The authors optimistically quote Cunningham (2001):

"The best science has the power to change the thinking of those who previously disagreed with it but are fair-minded enough to admit they were wrong once the case has been made."

The authors then try a different tack. "In life," they argue, "common sense routinely prevails over research… For example, if we accept the lack of experimental research as a reason to eliminate sustained silent reading from schools, then we should also call a halt to practicing sports, or musical instruments, or phonics worksheets, or math homework, or preparing students to take standardized tests for that matter. Either we believe practice helps or we don't… Sometimes common sense just makes sense."

And then there's the message we send to students. "If we don't allow students to read in school at the same time that we tout the wonders of reading," they say, "what message are we sending to students about our values? Furthermore, if we really believe that reading is probably not a good idea in schools, then why assign it for homework or encourage it at all for that matter?"

Garan and DeVoogd conclude by acknowledging that some educators and parents believe sustained silent reading is too loose and unstructured. *Should students be allowed such freedom? Are they really reading during sustained silent reading, or are they "fake reading"? Are they reading the right books? Are they thinking critically about what they are reading?* The authors describe ways that some teachers have tweaked sustained silent reading – ways that they believe enhance its power to improves children's reading proficiency:

- Teachers conducting mini-lessons before and after sustained silent reading;
- Teachers conferencing with students about their reading;
- Teachers modeling the questions good readers ask themselves as they read;
- Teachers giving students these R^5 guidelines: Read, relax, reflect, respond, rap;
- Having students keep book logs on their reading;
- Having students take part in book clubs or discussions on their reading;
- Scaffolded Silent Reading, in which students are accountable for reading widely across selected literacy genres, setting personal goals for completing books, conferring with their teacher, and completing response projects to share their books with others;
- Allowing young children to take turns with a buddy so both can verbalize as they read and each can play the part of the teacher, helping his or her partner read well.

"The Benefits of Sustained Silent Reading: Scientific Research and Common Sense Converge" by Elaine Garan and Glenn DeVoogd in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2008/January 2009 (Vol. 62, #4, p. 336-344), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at elainegaran@gmail.com and gdevoogd@csufresno.edu.

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8. Using "Sound Boxes" to Help Readers with Phonemic Awareness

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Towson University (MD) professor Patricia McCarthy describes the use of "sound boxes" (also known as Elkonin boxes) to help beginning readers detect and manipulate phonemes within spoken words, building an essential bridge to successful reading and spelling. Most children develop phonemic awareness at home or in

kindergarten, but for some, hearing and differentiating the sounds in words, especially phonemes, is confusing. Sound boxes add a kinesthetic element that scaffolds their learning.

Here's how sound boxes could be used for the word *feet*. The teacher glues a picture of two feet to the top of an 11 x 8½ sheet of cardboard and draws three 2" x 2" boxes in a row in the middle, one for each sound in the word (not for each letter). Tokens are placed under each box, and as the word is stretched out and verbally segmented into its three sounds, the tokens are pushed up one by one into the box for each sound. The picture is there to help the student remember the word being stretched and help them independently correct themselves if they are putting in extra sounds. McCarthy recommends printing the word on the back of each card and creating a large supply of sound box cards, sorted by color according to their difficulty level. "Since the goal is to teach the process of hearing sounds in words," she says, "exposure to a variety of words is more effective than repeated practice with the same words."

McCarthy has the following suggestions on the choice of words for sound boxes and for three levels of difficulty:

- Use only one-syllable words;
- Choose words that are conceptually familiar to young children;
- Choose words that are phonemically regular so that all stretched sounds can be distinctly heard. This means avoiding *r*-controlled vowels like *car*.
- Words with silent letters can be used as long as the boxes are drawn to match the number of sounds, not letters.
- Level 1 words have three phonemes and a continuous initial consonant sound like /s/, /f/, or /m/, where the flow of breath is not constricted and the sound does not cease as you hold it (for example, fan, fish, feed, feet, file, five, jog, lamb, leaf, lid, lock, map, meat, mess, mice, moon, mop, nail, net, nose, nut, rat, rain, rake read, ride, road, rock, rope, rug, sack, seal, seat, sheep, ship, sick, soap, sun, write).
- Level 2 words are more difficult to stretch and have three phonemes with an initial stop consonant like /d/, /k/, or /t/ (for example, bake, bag, bat, bed, bike, book, bug, bus, sap, cake, cage, can, cave, chick, coat, comb, cot, cup, cut, dog, deer, duck, game, gate, goat, gum, ham, hat, hit, hose, hot, jack, jam, jeep, jet, juice, kick, kite, pig, pan, path, peak, pot, top, team, tape, tire, tub, tube, wash, wave, web, wig, wipe).
- Level 3 words are the most difficult to segment, beginning or ending with blends such as /bl/ or /mp/ (for example, three-phoneme words like blow, cry, fly, glue, ski, stew, tree, and four-phoneme words like black, block, bride, broom, brush, brick, crack, drop, dress, drive, flag, frog, float, flute, fruit, glass, grass, grill, groom, hand, plug, plum, press, plane, prize, skate, skip, sleeve, slice, sled, slip, smile, snip, spill, spoon, spot, stop, steam, sweep, swim, train, truck).

McCarthy suggests gradually releasing responsibility by teaching the process of detecting and segmenting phonemes in four stages:

• First, model how to stretch the word out into its phonemes and have the student repeat. If he or she is having difficulty, use a mirror to show how your mouth looks and how the student's mouth looks making the sounds.

• Second, demonstrate how to push the tokens up into each box as you make the sound.

• Third, teach students how to use the sound boxes to detect and segment phonemes. Start by taking turns, then reverse the tasks, with you pushing the tokens as the student stretches out the word. Keep practicing until the student becomes proficient.

• Fourth, when students can successfully stretch and push, have them put the actions together and do it independently. As students become more proficient, the four steps can be collapsed into two (the first and last).

• As students master Level 1 cards, you can move up to Level 2 and then Level 3 words.

McCarthy says that three cards per five-minute session give students enough practice without taking up too much time or overwhelming them. When they have mastered sound boxes, it's time to move on to letter boxes, where the number of boxes matches the number of letters in the word and students have to do an extra stretch and think through not only sounds but letters. "As students internalize their understanding of the alphabetic principle and become more sure of sound-letter matches and high-frequency rimes," concludes McCarthy, "their need for the support of the boxes will diminish and eventually extinguish."

"Using Sound Boxes Systematically to Develop Phonemic Awareness" by Patricia McCarthy in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2008/January 2009 (Vol. 62, #4, p. 346-349), no e-link available; the author can be reached at pmccarthy@towson.edu.

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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 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 37 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 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
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Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
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Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
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Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
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