Marshall Memo 575

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 23, 2015

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, get better, confront reality, clarify expectations, practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust."

> Stephen Covey's trust behaviors, quoted in "The Character of a Coach" by Kay Psencik in in *Journal of Staff Development*, Feb. 2015 (Vol. 36, #1, p. 52-55) www.learningforward.org

"It is for developing the muscle of thoughtfulness, the use of which will be the greatest pleasure in life and will also show what it means to be fully human."

> Anne Hall, a university professor of English, on the purpose of post-secondary education, quoted in "College, Poetry, and Purpose" by Frank Bruni in *The New York Times*, February 18, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1B4Mz5I

"Teachers frequently have an imprecise understanding of what their teaching looks like until they see a video recording of their class."

> Jim Knight, Marti Elford, Michael Hock, Devona Dunekack, Barbara Bradley, Donald Deshler, and David Knight in "3 Steps to Great Coaching" in *Journal of Staff Development*, February 2015 (Vol. 36, #1, p. 10-18), www.learningforward.org

"[T]oo often, professional learning community time turns into 'social hour,' coaching is viewed as administrative monitoring, and lesson observation is superficial."

> Stephen Sawchuk (see item #1)

"When your work is intertwined with notions of your value as a person, you're pretty much screwed."

> Rachel Toor in "Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Writers" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 20, 2015, http://bit.ly/17pXfQi

1. How PD Activities Are Seen by Teachers and Higher-Ups

In this *Education Week* article, Stephen Sawchuk reports on a recent Boston Consulting Group study that reveals stark differences in how job-embedded professional development is seen by teachers on the one hand and principals and district PD leaders on the other. (About $18 billion is spent on professional development in K-12 schools each year.) "It's not that training options like coaching, lesson observation, and professional learning communities, in which groups of teachers plan together, aren't good ideas," says Sawchuk. "The problem appears to lie in the execution of such activities – too often, professional learning community time turns into 'social hour,' coaching is viewed as administrative monitoring, and lesson observation is superficial."

Researchers surveyed 1,300 teachers, principals, PD directors, and providers and reported these findings:

• Teachers' net satisfaction with various PD activities:

- Courses +22
- Conferences +5
- Lesson observation 0
- Coaching -6
- Intensive summer training -9
- Self-guided professional development -10
- Workshops -26
- Professional learning communities -45

• Principals and district PD leaders' views on which should have more or less investment:

- Courses +25
- Conferences +18
- Lesson observation +84
- Coaching +82
- Intensive summer training +57
- Self-guided professional development +45
- Workshops +22
- Professional learning communities +74

"Study Finds Poor Execution of 'Job-Embedded' PD" by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, February 18, 2015 (Vol. 34, #21, p. 6), www.edweek.org

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2. Criteria for Effective Instructional Coaching

In this introductory page to an issue of *Journal of Staff Development* devoted to coaching, the editors provide a teacher's-eye view of the best attributes of a coaching relationship:

- My coach knows what it's like to be in my shoes.
- My coach is an expert in my subject area.
- Coaching sessions give me specific actions I can try in my classroom immediately.
- My coach is well-trained at giving feedback.
- My coach is not the same person who does my evaluation.

"Teachers' Coaching Preferences" in *Journal of Staff Development*, February 2015 (Vol. 36, #1, p. 8), www.learningforward.org

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3. Collegiality 101

"The level of collaboration demanded by modern teaching is unprecedented," says Kentucky high-school teacher Paul Barnwell in this *Education Week* article. "[I]f we don't deliberately forge personal connections and strengthen relationships within our school buildings, then we are handicapping our efforts to reach, mentor, and educate all our students." Here are his suggestions for overcoming the tendency to hunker down:

• *Give without strings attached*. For example, one of Barnwell's colleagues was fighting a nasty cold and asked him to cover her fifth-period class a couple of times, and he did so without expecting a quid pro quo. "In our personal and professional lives, dealing with people who always expect something in return isn't a way to build sustainable or authentic relationships," he says.

• *Talk, don't e-mail*. "The more time you spend in front of a screen, the less time you have to say hello, ask questions, and build relationships," says Barnwell. "The more e-mail you send, the more messages you must check and reply to." He makes a point of walking down the hall and making personal contact, or at least picking up the phone.

• *Follow your colleagues on social media*. This can spark personal and professional conversations, says Barnwell. He's set up a Twitter list in his school that allows people to take the pulse of opinions and ideas throughout the building.

• *Make interdisciplinary connections*. Barnwell recently reached out to the functional mental disabilities teachers in his school to get their students involved in his digital media elective. "My interactions with the FMD teachers and students have been some of my favorite, most meaningful interactions at my school," he says.

• *Laugh*. "Yes, our work is important and incredibly difficult," sighs Barnwell. "I know the feeing of having a furrowed brow and tension building up in my neck and shoulders after a particularly trying day." Smiling, cracking a joke, sharing joy are vital to making the job sustainable.

• *Be humble*. "I'm in the midst of my 11th year teaching," says Barnwell, "and one of my current classes is the most difficult I've ever had in terms of student engagement,

promoting positive behavior, and attendance issues." It makes all the difference if he can reach out to colleagues who don't have an aura of knowing it all.

• *Expand your circles*. Barnwell confesses that it's easy for him to limit his professional conversations to his English III colleagues. He pushes himself to reach out to counselors, librarians, classroom aides, and others.

"Keep an Open Door, and Other Ways to Build In-School Relationships" by Paul Barnwell, *Education Week*, February 18, 2015 (Vol. 34, #21, p. 8-9), www.edweek.org; the author can be reached at paul.barnwell@jefferson.kyschools.us.

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4. A School Focuses on Classroom Math Questions

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, Boston Public Schools educators Sara Zrike and Christine Connolly describe making a series of 20-minute visits to math classrooms in a K-8 school and noticing that teachers' questions were often not engaging students in higher-level thinking. They also noticed that teachers were talking more than students, questions and answers happened in ping-pong fashion between teachers and students, there were few moments when students commented on each others' thinking, and misconceptions were not used as learning opportunities. All this was a problem because the school was trying to bring math instruction up to Common Core levels.

Zrike and Connolly created a transcript of classroom math questions from their visits, asked teachers to read an article on question types, and devoted several grade-level meetings to this topic. At first, teachers were reluctant to look at the transcripts, fearing they would reveal ineffective instructional practices. But teachers' names weren't attached to the questions and the exercise of sorting them into two categories proved to be non-threatening and eye-opening. The two types mentioned in the article were "funneling" questions (leading to one right answer) and "focusing" questions (more open-ended and thought-provoking). Here are some examples of each:

Funneling:

- What's a decade?
- If 490 were males, how many would be females?
- Are these pieces bigger or smaller?
- Would 8/7 be more than a whole?
- How many multiples of 24 are there?
- Do you agree or disagree?
- Did anyone else make it simpler?
- Is that a fraction?
- What are you going to put right there?
- Count by 5s; what comes after 15?
- So which one is your answer? You have 2 numbers circled.
- Is it getting bigger or smaller?

Focusing:

- How do you know this answer doesn't make sense?
- Tell me which answer is ridiculous and why.
- Why is this more complicated?
- Can you explain it again?
- Do you want to explain what she said?
- How did you know that?
- Why was I confused?

"Teachers said they had no idea that they were asking so many funneling questions," says Zrike, "and felt that it would be easy to make some of the same questions more focusing." For example, the question, "Would 8/7 be more than a whole?" was rewritten as, "What does the fraction 8/7 tell us about the whole? How do you know?" Teachers went to work on crafting higher-level questions with a new consciousness of questioning rigor.

Classroom observations a few months later showed a marked improvement: "A majority of the questions asked by teachers probed students to explain how they solved a problem, why they solved it that way, and how do they know they problem-solved correctly," says Connelly. "Often, teachers exhibited longer wait times, which is necessary when asking cognitively demanding questions requiring significant language in the answers." In that spring's state MCAS testing, the school showed a significant uptick in math and literacy scores.

"Problem Solvers: Teacher Leader Teams with Content Specialist to Strengthen Math Instruction" by Sara Zrike and Christine Connolly in *Journal of Staff Development*, February 2015 (Vol. 36, #1, p. 20-22, 29), www.learningforward.org; Zrike can be reached at szrike3@bostonpublicschools.org, Connelly at cconnolly@bostonpublicschools.org.

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5. Two Ways to Improve the Quality of Academic Discourse

(Originally titled "Calling Mulligan! Two Rules for Dynamic Discourse")

In this article in *Education Update*, Lisa Arter (Southern Utah University) suggests two approaches to enhancing classroom or faculty discussions:

• *Calling a mulligan* – In sports, a mulligan is letting a mistake pass unnoticed or without consequences. In classrooms, mulligans are helpful for students who may be unwilling to risk making a contribution for fear that they'll be criticized or feel stupid: a person can stop in mid-sentence, say "mulligan," take a deep breath, and start over (or opt out of making a statement). "Speakers are more willing to engage in controversial discussions because they are allowed to take an immediate second shot at their statement," says Arter. "Audience members listen more carefully to the entire statement because they realize a mulligan might be used at any moment." Students may also see how mulligans can apply to their writing – they might get in the habit of looking at it again versus running a spell-check.

• *The five Rs: respond, repeat, restate, rebut, and reinforce* – When a student finishes responding to a question, the teacher tosses a Koosh ball to another student and says, "Repeat"

and the student tries to reiterate what the first student said. The Koosh ball then returns to the first student, who is asked to "Restate" if the previous student didn't capture his or her meaning. The Koosh ball then comes back to the teacher, who tosses it to another student and says, "Rebut" and that student has to either disagree or agree with the original response and give a reason. The Koosh ball then goes to another randomly selected student to "Reinforce" – this student has the option to support either the original response or the rebuttal with additional supporting evidence.

"When combined, these two methods have been extremely successful at increasing respectful student debate and limiting my involvement to the simple R commands," says Arter. "Students listen more actively, speak more freely, and – as a bonus – apply the state-and-support scaffold to their academic writing."

"Calling Mulligan! Two Rules for Dynamic Discourse" by Lisa Arter in *Education Update*, February 2015 (Vol. 57, #2, p. 8),

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6. Ongoing, Continual Assessment of Teaching and Learning

In this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Francis (Skip) Fennell and Barbara Ann Swartz (McDaniel College), Beth McCord Kobett (Stevenson University), and Jonathan Wray (Howard County Schools, MD) say there's a disconnect between teaching and learning in many classrooms. The key is *eliciting* and *using* evidence of student thinking to improve teaching and learning in real time. The authors believe that judicious use of a "palette" of on-the-spot checks for understanding can make all the difference:

- Observations
- Interviews
- Show-me activities
- Hinge questions
- Exit tasks or lesson closers

The first three can inform instruction during the lesson and the last two are helpful planning for the next day. Here's more detail on two:

• *Show-me activities* – Asking students to demonstrate what they are learning provides teachers with a glimpse of students' grasp of particular concepts and skills – for example,

- "Use base-ten blocks to represent 57 in three different ways" (1.NBT.A.1)
- "Using your pattern blocks, show me two different ways to represent 1/3" (3.NF.A.3b)
- "Use a drawing to show me 32 ÷ 4" (3.OA.B.6)

• *Hinge questions* – These "deal-breaker" questions, planned in advance, are designed to strategically check for understanding at a natural break or hinge-point in the lesson, telling the teacher what students understand so far and what needs more work, usually the next day – for example, Primary (1.G.A.2): "What are ways in which squares and rectangles are similar and different?" (2.NBT.B.9) "Is 45 + 59 > or < 100? How do you know?" Intermediate (4.NF.A.2): "What is the order of 4/5, 4/6, and 4/8 from least to greatest?" (5.MD.A.1) "500

mL of water was needed for the recipe. If that amount were tripled, how many liters (L) would be needed? How do you know?"

• *Lesson closers* – In a companion article, Robyn Silbey suggests carefully planned closure questions to see if students have reached the lesson's learning goal – for example, after a lesson on whole-number quotients (4.NF.6), here are some possible questions for partner talks or group talk, a demonstration, or whiteboard responses:

- How are division and place value connected?
- What are some ways you can check to see if you divided correctly? Why do your checking methods make sense?
- You divide 402 by 3 and by 6. Without actually dividing, predict which quotient will be greatest. Explain your thinking.
- What pictures would you draw to show 121 ÷ 5?

"The value of lesson closers is the immediate feedback provided to students and teachers alike," says Silbey. "Summarizing knowledge by articulating it verbally reinforces pride in learning as it celebrates accomplishment."

"Classroom-Based Formative Assessments – Guiding Teaching and Learning" by Francis (Skip) Fennell, Barbara Ann Swartz, Beth McCord Kobett, and Jonathan Wray, and "Did Students 'Get' It? Teachers Can Find Out Now!" by Robyn Silbey in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, February 2015 (Vol. 21, #6, p. 325-327), www.nctm.org; Swartz can be reached at bswartz@mcdaniel.edu, Silbey at robyn@robynsilbey.com.

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7. A Math Problem That Will Get Third Graders Thinking

In this *Teaching Children Mathematics* article, Ed Enns (Waterloo Region School District, Canada) suggests the following problem-solving challenge and invites teachers to try it with third or fourth graders and e-mail him with solutions, student work, and feedback.

Students work in pairs or triads supplied with a large piece of paper to record solutions, pens or markers, and (optionally) calculators. Here's the problem (given to students after some introductory discussion of allowances):

• *You are going to receive an allowance for the next twelve weeks. You must choose how you would like to be paid. These are your choices:*

- *You get $2 for the first week, but you get $0.25 more every week after that.*
- *You get $0.01 for the first week, but the amount doubles every week after that.*

How much would you get paid if you picked the first approach?
How much would you get paid if you picked the second?
Which choice would give you more money?

After reviewing the problem with the class, Enns suggests having students make a prediction of which choice bring in more money and take a straw poll to see what students think. As groups work on the problem, the teacher circulates to observe problem-solving strategies and perhaps take digital photos of their work. "Try not to tell students how to do the math," he says, "but use questions to provoke their thinking," such as:

- What is the rule for how much money you will receive?
- How much money do you get the first week?
- How could you keep track of how much money you receive each week?
- Is that amount in cents or dollars?
- How much money would you have altogether after 12 weeks?
- Students who finish early might be challenged to try a third payment option: *Flip a coin each week to determine the amount of allowance – if the coin lands on heads, you get $6, if it lands on tails, you get no allowance. Could this end up being more lucrative than the other two approaches?*

When students have finished, have groups present their solutions and strategies and compare and contrast them in terms of accuracy and efficiency.

"Which Is the Better Deal?" edited by Ed Enns in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, February 2015 (Vol. 21, #6, p. 328-330), www.nctm.org; Enns can be reached at ed_enns@wrdsb.on.ca.

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8. Another Clever Math Problem

In this *Teaching Children Mathematics* article, Tracey Muir (University of Tasmania, Australia) suggests this approach to building students' skills in reasoning, argumentation, and justifying answers:

- Prepare a number of statements based on common misconceptions or beliefs that are likely to promote discussion and disagreement. Here's a fifth-grade example:
- Multiples of 5 are also multiples of 10.
- Multiplying numbers makes them bigger.
- Adding any three consecutive numbers is the same as multiplying the middle one by 3.

Ask students whether each statement is always true, sometimes true, or never true and the reasons.

"Always, Sometimes, Never True" by Tracey Muir in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, February 2015 (Vol. 21, #6, p. 384), www.nctm.org; Muir can be reached at Tracey.Muir@utas.edu.au.

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9. Best Practices for Preventing and Responding to Bullying

In this *Educational Researcher* article, Nadia Ansary (Rider University), Maurice Elias (Rutgers University), Michael Greene (Greene Consulting), and Stuart Green (New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention) synthesize research on bullying prevention and intervention and suggest ways that schools can decide on an effective program. Their report is organized in two broad categories: preventing bullying, and addressing it once it has occurred. The authors cite four anti-bullying programs as models of the key characteristics that research indicates are effective:

- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Norway)

- SAVE – The Seville Anti-Bullying in School Project (Spain)
- The DFE Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project (United Kingdom)
- The KiVa Antibullying Program (Finland).

None of these programs is perfect – they've brought about only moderate reductions in bullying in schools implementing them. "The evident imperfections in policy and our scholarly understanding of bullying prevention and intervention," say Ansary and her colleagues, "should in no way be viewed as permission for schools to shirk their fundamental responsibility to safeguard students. Schools must be accountable *now* for presenting bullying in comprehensive, sustained, and schoolwide ways to ensure the safety and dignity of our children." That's why the authors tried to tease out the core tenets of effective programs and advise schools on how to match programs to their unique circumstances:

Preventing bullying:

• *A guiding theoretical approach* – Effective programs (a) address the different contexts in which students move each day – home, school, community; (b) adopt a whole-school approach with antibullying messages presented in the curriculum, policies, etc.; and (c) "foster a positive school climate in which the values, norms, and practices of the school reflect an ethos of caring and respect for one another and the school community."

• *Program content* – Keys to effectiveness include: (a) attending to students' social-emotional and character development; (b) promoting "upstander" behavior through curriculum and norms; and (c) covering all grades in developmentally appropriate ways.

• *Leadership and team management* – "Effective antibullying programs require school leadership to communicate and actively support modeling the expected behaviors," say Ansary, Elias, Greene, and Green, "as well as to maintain a nurturing school climate where safety is paramount and all members are engaged in the school community." This leadership has to reach all staff members through effective training and oversight.

• *Program evaluation* – It's essential that leaders keep tabs on how the program is working and make adjustments as needed, as well as coordinating antibullying efforts and making sure they last over time.

Addressing bullying once it has occurred:

"When prevention efforts fail," say Ansary et al., "schools must have transparent, firm, and consistent policies in place to effectively investigate reported incidents of bullying, begin to rebuild the target's confidence that school is a safe place, ensure that bullying is not seen as normative, and communicate to the rest of the school that bullying is not tolerated or 'stood by.'" Some specifics:

• *Teacher and staff training to address bullying incidents* – Since training on how to respond to bullying is included in few college-level teacher training programs, schools must shoulder the responsibility of bringing staff up to speed on the specific responses that are expected when bullying occurs.

• *School policies* – Clear expectations on how staff should respond to all types of bullying "are a direct expression of the school's climate, culture, and values," say Ansary et al. There need to be well-known steps for reporting and investigating incidents, disciplinary

procedures and consequences, and when the police should be called. Shaming, punitive, zero-tolerance approaches have not been shown to be effective with perpetrators, say the authors.

• *An ongoing leadership team* – This team, which should include administrators, counselors, teachers, and child study staff, is responsible for (a) coordinating resources and services to address needs, (b) ensuring that incident reports comply with external policies, (c) tracking types of bullying; (d) discussing different types of bullying and the underlying reasons; and (e) reflecting on professional development and how effective it is in bending the curve toward civility.

"Guidance for Schools Selecting Anti-bullying Approaches: Translating Evidence-Based Strategies to Contemporary Implementation Realities" by Nadia Ansary, Maurice Elias, Michael Greene, and Stuart Green in *Educational Researcher*, January/February 2015 (Vol. 44, #1, p. 27-36), http://edr.sagepub.com/content/44/1/27.abstract; Ansary can be reached at nansary@rider.edu.

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***If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail* 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).

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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
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Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Middle School Journal
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
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
Wharton Leadership Digest