Marshall Memo 544

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 7, 2014

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"As an English teacher, nothing I do is as important as teaching writing, and nothing is harder than getting a bunch of high-school students to produce anything worth reading… Student essays are by and large dreadful concoctions of misremembered facts, misinterpreted passages, and misunderstood ideas, all spewed out in mangled grammar and creative spelling, cobbled together with a formulaic structure. No wonder I carry my stacks of papers home with a heavy heart."

Andy Waddell (see item #2)

"Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That's the only way it happens – and when it happens, it lasts."

John Wooden (see item #1)

"Give a coach the opportunity to take fifteen minutes to say what he should in fifteen seconds – *he will*!"

Basketball coach John Bunn (quoted in item #1)

"Research findings in neuroscience have shown how the developing teen brain is ill equipped to override emotional reactions with cooler assessments. Now these fragile and self-destructive minds have a tool to indulge their worst tendencies."

Jack Dickey in "The Antisocial Network: Inside the Dangerous Online World Kids Can't Quit" in *Time Magazine*, July 7-14, 2014 (p. 40-45), http://ti.me/1rICHtZ

"For parents, this requires facing a new reality: if your child uses an anonymous social-networking site, when her phone buzzes at the dinner table, she's not just ignoring you; she's joining a world that hums with cruelty and insecurity, two enduring features of adolescence newly turbocharged by changing technology."

Jack Dickey (*ibid.*)

1. Lessons from Watching Coach John Wooden in Action

In this 2004 article in *The Sports Psychologist*, Ronald Gallimore (University of California/Los Angeles) and Roland Tharp (University of California/Santa Cruz) revisit a study they did 25 years earlier of one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time, John Wooden. Gallimore and Tharp got permission to observe Wooden's afternoon practice sessions with his team during the 1974-75 season – which turned out to be his last. They sat at mid-court in Pauley Pavilion and took notes, quietly discussed their observations, created categories, and gathered data. They later followed up with interviews with the coach and some of his players.

"Wooden's teaching fell naturally into a frequency-count system," say Gallimore and Tharp. "His teaching utterances or comments were short, punctuated, and numerous. There were *no* lectures, *no* extended harangues. Although frequent and often in rapid-fire order, his utterances were so distinct we could code each one as a separate event." Here are the main categories and each one's percent of the total:

- *Instructions*: What to do and how to do it ("Do some dribbling between shots." "Hard driving, quick steps.") – 50.3%
- *Hustles*: Activating or intensifying previous instructions, while maintaining accuracy (When a rookie 7' 2" player snagged a rebound and, not for the first time, hesitated and dribbled when he was supposed to pass to a guard and start a controlled downcourt rush, Wooden shouted, "Pass to someone short!") – 12.7%
- *Modeling-positive*: Demonstration of how to perform, sometimes by stopping the action with a short whistle blast and giving a mini-lecture to all the players ("You're reaching in! You're *still* reaching in! Gracious, I'd hate to see us play a good guard. You can't take the ball away from a good guard! You *can* get position. *Cut him off!* Some of you think you're better on defense than you are and you aren't. Now, no more reaching! *Cut 'em off!* Now go!") – 2.8%
- *Modeling-negative*: Demonstration of how not to perform – 1.6%
- *Praises*: Spoken compliments to players – 6.9%
- *Reproofs*: Expressions of displeasure ("Goodness gracious me!" was the closest Wooden came to cursing) – 6.6%
- *Nonverbal reward:* Smiles, pats, etc. – 1.2%
- *Nonverbal punishment*: Scowls, despairing gestures, temporary removal of a player from the scrimmage – Trace
- *A "Wooden":* The distinctive combination of a scold, modeling-positive, followed by modeling-negative ("How many times do I have to tell you to get your hands up for a

rebound?"), ending with a second modeling-positive ("Pass from the chest!") – 8.0%

- *Other*: Anything not in the list above – 2.4%
- *Couldn't be coded*: Not seen or heard – 6.6%

What struck Gallimore and Tharp was that 75 percent of Wooden's coaching was *information*, much of it repetitive – instructions, hustles, modeling, "Woodens" – and very little of it was praise and criticism.

Yet Wooden saw his teaching as positive, and players perceived it that way, even when they were being corrected. One player said, years later, "[C]orrections in the form of information did not address or attack me as a person. New information was aimed at the act, rather than the actor… Had the majority of Coach Wooden's corrective strategies been positive ('Good job') or negative ('No, that's not the way'), I would have been left with an evaluation, not a solution."

In the practices, everything was short. Wooden quoted another coach, John Bunn, saying, "Give a coach the opportunity to take fifteen minutes to say what he should in fifteen seconds – *he will*!" Wooden said, "I learned to be concise and quick and didn't string things out… I never had a lot of meetings and things of that sort. I wanted short things during the practice sessions."

The researchers noticed several other features of Wooden's sessions: Practices began and ended precisely on time (3:29 – 5:29 p.m.); everything was tightly organized; there was constant, intense activity; and Wooden (who had been an English teacher in Indiana) came prepared with meticulous 3x5 note cards scripting what would happen. "He made decisions 'on the fly' at a pace equal to his players, in response to the details of his players' actions," say Gallimore and Tharp. "Yet his teaching was in no sense ad hoc. Down to the specific words he used, his planning included specific goals both for the team and individuals. Thus, he could pack into a practice a rich basketball curriculum and deliver information at precisely the moments it would help his students learn the most. It was, he always said, the teaching in practices that he valued, more than the games and the winning, and it was practice that he was so reluctant to leave behind when he retired."

Years later, one of Wooden's most illustrious players, Bill Walton, said: "Practices at UCLA were nonstop, electric, supercharged, intense, demanding… with Coach pacing the sidelines like a caged tiger, barking instructions, positive reinforcement, and maxims: 'Be quick, but don't hurry.' He constantly changed drills and scrimmages, exhorting us to 'move quickly, hurry up.' Games seemed like they happened in a slower gear. I'd think in games, 'why is this taking so long because everything we did in games happened faster in practice.'"

Behind it all was a strategic purpose – building automaticity and mastery of fundamentals that would serve his players in competitive situations and open up opportunities for creativity and initiative. Wooden espoused the "whole-part" method – giving players the big picture and then spending a lot of time on the details. "The four laws are explanation, demonstration, imitation, and repetition," said Wooden. "The goal is to create a correct habit that can be produced instinctively under great pressure. To make sure this goal was achieved, I

created eight laws of learning, namely, explanation, demonstration, imitation, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition, and repetition."

All this was coupled with patience. "When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur," said Wooden. "Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That's the only way it happens – and when it happens, it lasts."

"What a Coach Can Teach a Teacher, 1975-2004: Reflections and Reanalysis of John Wooden's Teaching Practices" by Ronald Gallimore and Roland Tharp in *The Sports Psychologist*, 2004 (Vol. 18, p. 119-137), http://bit.ly/1zkKD74

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2. A California Teacher Fights the Good Fight on Student Writing

"As an English teacher, nothing I do is as important as teaching writing, and nothing is harder than getting a bunch of high-school students to produce anything worth reading," says Andy Waddell in this article in *American Educator*. "Student essays are by and large dreadful concoctions of misremembered facts, misinterpreted passages, and misunderstood ideas, all spewed out in mangled grammar and creative spelling, cobbled together with a formulaic structure. No wonder I carry my stacks of papers home with a heavy heart. Nightly, they perch at the edge of my table like Poe's raven, mocking me while I find something – anything – I absolutely must do first before I begin grading."

When Waddell finally gets down to work, he gets out his red pen and corrects spelling and punctuation errors, run-on sentences, fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, incorrect antecedents, and awkward and unclear writing. By the time he gets around to rubric-scoring, each paper "looks like a crime scene," he says. "I try to add in a positive comment regarding the content of the essay, and I'm on to the next paper." The most discouraging part is when students look at their grades, glance at the comments, and throw their papers in the trash barrel. Only a few students take him up on his offer to talk individually about their papers.

Waddell describes spending most of a recent winter break grading 120 lengthy research papers that are a requirement in his junior English classes. He seethes with resentment that the school's history, science, and math teachers seldom assign writing like this. He hopes the Common Core State Standards' call for cross-disciplinary writing will prod content teachers to assign more writing, but fears the burden will continue to fall disproportionately on English teachers. He consoles himself by looking in his students' writing folders and seeing improvement from "God-awful, horrible" writing a few months and years earlier.

Waddell agrees with David Brooks's statement that when students sit down to write an essay, they should be 80 percent done. "That's because 'writing' is mostly gathering and structuring ideas," says Brooks – and indeed, his approach to writing his *New York Times* column is jotting ideas, spreading numerous pieces of paper on a rug in his living room, and slowly figuring out what he wants to say and how to say it. This prewriting process is the key, says Waddell – clustering, outlining, brainstorming, or pair-share discussions with classmates: "For a history paper, this means research; for a science paper, experimentation; for a literature

essay, it means a close reading of the text. Only then, after gathering enough knowledge to have an opinion, after marshaling the requisite proof, is the student really ready to write."

Drafting comes next – getting it down on paper without worrying about spelling and grammar (*we can fix that later*). Perfectionism at this stage is "the voice of the oppressor" says author Anne Lamott. And then comes revision – "looking hard at one's writing to see if the objective has been met," says Waddell. "Has the question been answered? Has the thesis been proven? Is there sufficient proof? Is the organization logical? In other words, is the paper clear?"

Waddell has heard the oft-repeated criticism of the five-paragraph essay – that it's dull and formulaic and squelches creativity. He knows that college professors set out to undo what they believe is bad teaching in high schools. But he believes the five-paragraph essay is necessary to channel and improve the weak writing skills with which most students enter ninth grade. "I teach the five-paragraph essay," he says, "…and I have seen firsthand its power to create confident writers. It is true that it imposes an artificial structure, but it is a first step, and only a first step."

Waddell's school administers timed writing assessments twice a year that are graded by two teachers, with the scores going into students' records. He appreciates the emphasis that these assessments put on writing (as opposed to multiple-choice tests), but he's ambivalent. "Because I know that my students' papers are going to be read by other teachers, and because that reflects on me, I feel pressure to bring my students in line with district expectations," he says. "For the most part, this is an excellent practice that has no doubt raised the overall writing level of our students." But preparing for these assessments takes time away from other types of writing, and the rubric scoring is unforgiving – if a student doesn't follow the five-paragraph formula or buries the thesis, the student could fail. "We run the risk of overvaluing anything that can be simply checked off and undervaluing everything that cannot," he says.

Waddell describes how he prepares his ninth graders for the first of these assessment prompts. The class reads a passage from *Black Boy* by Richard Wright in which six-year-old Richard is sent for groceries by his mother, is robbed by older boys, is sent again by his unsympathetic mother, this time with a stick, and successfully drives away the bullies. Together, the class comes up with words to describe Richard at the beginning and end of the passage and drafts a thesis statement: "In *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, a naïve, scared mama's boy transforms into a fearless, violent gangster when his mother makes him stand up for himself." Waddell types this into his computer and projects the page on the screen and the class collaboratively writes the rest of the essay, alternating between brainstorming, working in small groups to decide on the best words and quotes, and then creating each paragraph together. In the end, they read over their quite competent essay and are proud.

"The next day, the training wheels are off," says Waddell; "they're reading something brand new to them and writing about it. Facts are being misremembered, passages misinterpreted, and ideas misunderstood. Their grammar is as mangled as ever, their spelling just as creative. Some are struggling to recall the simple structure taught the day before. One or two are simply blinking at the terrible white sheet… Class is quiet now, only the scritch-

scratch of pen on paper. Their brows are furrowed. I can see they're struggling. Of course they are; they're writing."

"Writing About Writing: The Challenge of Helping Students 'Get It Down on Paper'" by Andy Waddell in *American Educator*, Summer 2014 (Vol. 38, #2, p. 33-37), http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2014/Waddell.pdf

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3. Ways to Get Whole-Class Engagement

In this *Education Week Teacher* article, Larry Ferlazzo lists several teaching techniques that come close to involving every student in a classroom:

- Each student writing answers on individual whiteboards and holding them up;
- Giving students partner-sharing time after posing a thought-provoking question;
- Calling on students randomly (rather than having them raise their hands);
- Having students respond to reflective questions on exit slips at the end of a class.

Ferlazzo then hands the baton to Jim Peterson, a veteran California vice principal, who believes that the way a teacher frames an assignment or activity makes all the difference to the level of student engagement. Consider the instructions given by two teachers:

• Teacher A: "You're going to read the next three pages. When you finish, you are going to answer the five questions that follow the reading."

• Teacher B: "When I tell you to begin, you will have one minute 45 seconds. You are going to read the next paragraph looking for the main point. As you read, you are going to highlight any words or phrases that support what you believe is the main point. When you are finished, be prepared to share with a partner or with the entire class. You may begin."

Peterson believes Teacher B is much more effective at getting students to *tap in* to the lesson, following the TAPN acronym:

- *Time* – Setting a precise and deliberate time limit gets students' attention and gives them a sense of urgency.
- *Amount* – Students get a manageable task. Giving students too little work decreases motivation, and giving them too much overwhelms them.
- *Public* – Knowing that all students will be asked to share their work increases motivation to bring their A game.
- *Novelty* – The first time students are asked to turn and talk with a partner will increase participation and energy, but if the same routine is used again and again, it will lose its impact. Peterson recommends constantly varying response methods – one time students turn and talk, another time they write first, then share, another time they use dry-erase boards and hold them up, and so on.

Finally, Ferlazzo has William and Pérsida Himmele of Millersville University share their ideas on whole-class engagement. "One of the things to remember is that not all participation is qualitatively equal," they say. "We don't simply want behavioral compliance. As much as we can, we want all students participating using cognitively intense prompts that cause them to grow each other's learning." They suggest three techniques:

• *The chalkboard splash* – Students think about a teacher prompt, jot their answer in 15 words or less, and then get up and write their answers in an open space on the chalkboard or whiteboard. The whole class then does a gallery walk reading all the responses.

• *Pause, star, and rank* – At the conclusion of a lesson or unit, students are asked to review their notes, star the concepts they believe are most important, and then rank-order the top three concepts and be ready to defend their rationale in a turn-and-talk. They might also do a chalkboard splash.

• *The A-Z summary* – At the end of a lesson, students get a magnet or die-cut with a letter on it from A to Z and are asked to wrap up what they've learned in one sentence using the letter they've been given as the first letter of their sentence. The teacher then calls out the letters in alphabetical order and students share their sentences.

"Ways to Cultivate 'Whole-Class Engagement'" by Larry Ferlazzo, Jim Peterson, and William and Pérsida Himmele in *Education Week Teacher*, April 4, 2014, http://bit.ly/1iE0uU0

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4. Suggestions for District Foreign-Language Programs

In this article in *Foreign Language Annals*, Kristin Davin and Tania Rempert (University of Chicago) and Amy Hammerand (a Spanish teacher at Chicago's Murray Language Academy) report on their study of a large urban district's foreign language program. The authors found that there were major inconsistencies in instructional time, classroom materials, instructional sequence, and assessments in the city's foreign-language courses; that fewer than half of elementary students moved from their K-8 schools to a high school that offered the same language they had studied; and students' proficiency levels in reading, writing, and speaking were disappointing, with few students reaching the district's goal of the Intermediate Low level in Spanish, Chinese, or French – even after four years of instruction.

From these findings, the authors have four recommendations for districts implementing foreign-language programs:

• Standardize curriculum materials, assessments, and time allocations across schools, and "ensure that a team is in place to oversee the collection, organization, and analyses of the data," say Davin, Rempert, and Hammerand.

• Map out a common sequence of study in each language and devise feeder patterns so students can move from elementary to high schools offering the same language.

• Place students in foreign-language courses based on diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, and speaking, not on age or years of study.

"Converting Data to Knowledge: One District's Experience Using Large-Scale Proficiency Assessment" by Kristin Davin, Tania Rempert, and Amy Hammerand in *Foreign Language Annals*, Summer 2014 (Vol. 47, #2, p. 241-260), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/flan.12081/abstract

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5. Helping Native English Speakers Pronounce Spanish Diphthongs

In this article in *Foreign Language Annals*, Cynthia Kilpatrick and Lori McLain Pierce (University of Texas/Arlington) say phonological bias is common when learning a new language: people tend to transfer sounds – and their perceptions of sounds – to the way they pronounce words in the language they are learning. When errors interfere with understanding, teachers and native speakers usually correct them right away. But when errors don't lead to misunderstanding, they are often not corrected and become "fossilized" – embedded in the learner's obviously foreign-accented way of speaking.

For example, when native English speakers learn Spanish, they tend to assume that two adjacent vowels are pronounced as two syllables, the way they are in English – words like radio, fiesta, and diablo. But in Spanish, adjacent vowels are often a diphthong pronounced as one syllable – for example, *labiado* (the *ia* sequence is pronounced as a single-syllable diphthong [ja]), and similarly with the *ie* in *ardiente*, the *io* in *accion*, and the *iu* in *ciudad*.

Kilpatrick and McLain found that most textbooks and teachers don't address this issue adequately, and plenty of native English speakers learning Spanish – including some at the advanced level – continue to mispronounce Spanish diphthongs as two syllables. The authors conducted an experiment with a more-explicit approach:

- Students were shown PowerPoint slides with three orthographically identical words in English and Spanish – *radio, Fiona,* and *piano* – and told that the words had three syllables in English and two syllables (and different pronunciation) in Spanish.
- Students said each word with the correct Spanish pronunciation while clapping their hands with each syllable.
- Students were then presented with three new Spanish words containing diphthongs – *diablo*, *siempre*, and *ciudad* – in written and spoken form and asked to tell the number of syllables, then say the words, clapping each syllable.
- Students were then asked to say the number of syllables in 12 Spanish words, including *radio* and the three just used and eight more with diphthongs.
- When students attained at least 80% correct responses, they proceeded to a post-test.

What were the results? This simple sequence brought about marked improvements in pronunciation among native English-speaking Spanish learners at all levels of proficiency – with only about 30 minutes of instruction. Kilpatrick and Pierce attribute the results to explicit instruction, a multi-sensory approach, and the use of negative examples, all of which helped learners notice the differences in pronunciation of vowel sequences in the two languages and correct their pronunciation to sound more like native Spanish speakers.

"Focused Instruction in Spanish Syllabification" by Cynthia Kilpatrick and Lori McLain Pierce in *Foreign Language Annals*, Summer 2014 (Vol. 47, #2, p. 286-299), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/flan.12080/abstract

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6. The Impact of New York City Tightening Its Teacher-Tenure Process

In this working paper from CALDER (the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research), Susanna Loeb, Luke Miller, and James Wyckoff report what happened when New York City asked principals to provide detailed evidence for granting tenure to teachers. In the two years before this policy was introduced in 2009, 94 percent of teachers were given tenure after their three probationary years. Evidence could include value-added data, student and teacher work products, classroom-observation data, and feedback from colleagues. Principals had the option of extending a teacher's probationary status if they believed the teacher had not yet met the standard.

What were the results? In the three years after the new policy was introduced, only 56 percent of probationary teachers who were up for tenure received it. Most teachers who were denied tenure had their probationary status extended for a year. There was a slight increase in the number who were denied tenure – from 2 to 3 percent. Among teachers receiving an extension, there was a marked increase in transfers from one New York City school to another and departures from the district. These teachers were generally less effective than the teachers who were likely to replace them.

Finally, the study found that schools with heavily African-American student populations were more likely to extend teachers rather than granting tenure. Given that this increased the likelihood of those teachers moving on and being replaced by more-effective teachers, students likely benefited.

"Performance Screens for School Improvement: The Case of Teacher Tenure Reform in New York City" by Susanna Loeb, Luke Miller, and James Wyckoff, Working Paper 115 from CALDER (The National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research), June 2014, available at http://www.caldercenter.org/publications/upload/WP-115.pdf, spotted in Amber Northern's review in *The Education Gadfly*, July 2, 2014 (Vol. 14, #27)

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7. Short Item:

Information charts – This Vox feature has a set of graphic displays showing U.S. trends, including age, race, marriage, children, politics, income, educational attainment, religion, women in the workplace, productivity, health, unemployment, eating habits, driving, and safety. You can check it out at http://www.vox.com/a/how-the-us-is-changing.

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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.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 43 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 Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Middle School Journal
NASSP Journal
NJEA Review
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 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