

Marshall Memo 445

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 16, 2012

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Quotes of the Week

"A healthy school is one in which harmony pervades relationships among students, teachers, and administrators as the organization directs its energies toward its mission."

Wayne Hoy and Anita Woolfolk (see item #2)

"Clearly, morale, job satisfaction, and the emotional support of co-workers are important to the psychological well-being of teachers, but apparently, these expressive qualities are not enough to give teachers the confidence that they can effectively teach their most difficult students."

Wayne Hoy and Anita Woolfolk (*ibid.*)

"While leaders need to be direct about what they expect, excellent leaders allow people plenty of latitude in choosing how they realize it."

Jon Saphier and Matthew King (see item #1)

"Differentiation is *making a difference by making it different.*"

Katherine Hilden and Jennifer Jones (see item #3)

"Here's a question for the KIPPs and YES Preps of the world: Would you be happy if, ten years from now, your middle schoolers were working as cops, firefighters, teachers, plumbers, electricians, and nurses?"

Michael Petrilli in "Can Schools Spur Social Mobility?" in *Education Gadfly*, July 12, 2012, <http://bit.ly/Q0Ci14>

"Children from wealthy families with lots of education can be taught by stupid teachers. We try to catch the weak students. It's deep in our thinking."

Finland principal Kari Louhivuori (see item #4)

1. Twelve Factors in a Strong School Culture (an Oldie but Goodie)

(Originally titled “Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures”)

School culture is the foundation of school improvement, say consultant/author Jon Saphier and superintendent Matthew King in this classic 1985 article in *Educational Leadership*. They believe twelve norms of school culture are essential. “Building these norms depends equally on teachers’ will and commitment since good leadership alone cannot make them strong,” they say. “But without such leadership, culture cannot begin to grow or be expected to endure.”

- *Collegiality* – People help each other out. They don’t close their classroom doors and work in isolation. They organize workshops for each other, even though that takes longer than bringing in an outside speaker. “In this school we resist the notion that teaching is our second most private activity,” a teacher said.

- *Experimentation* – Teachers and administrators aren’t afraid to try new ideas, but they drop an idea if it doesn’t produce results and try something else.

- *High expectations* – Teachers and administrators are accountable for high standards. “While we often feel under pressure to excel, we thrive on being part of a dynamic organization,” said a teacher.

- *Trust and confidence* – Teachers feel supported by administrators and parents to use their professional judgment to get results in their classrooms. Good schools have a loose-tight structure, say Saphier and King: “While leaders need to be direct about what they expect, excellent leaders allow people plenty of latitude in choosing how they realize it.”

- *Tangible support* – Teachers get the resources and materials to carry out their instructional plans – and time to meet with colleagues to collaborate.

- *Reaching out to the knowledge base* – In an “aggressively curious” manner, the school constantly researches and discusses the key success factors in pedagogy, curriculum content, and school organization. This includes reading the literature, visiting other schools, and getting past the notion that good teaching is an innate skill.

- *Appreciation and recognition* – Administrators are in classrooms and corridors all the time, notice effective practices, and give teachers specific private and public affirmation.

- *Caring, celebration, and humor* – Staff members gather for regular celebrations and get-togethers, and laughter is a regular feature.

- *Involvement in decision-making* – Teachers have a meaningful role in formulating school policies, but they aren’t pestered with every administrative detail.

- *Protection of what's important* – Classroom interruptions are kept to an absolute minimum, and faculty meetings are devoted to substance, not routine announcements (which are handled in memos or by word of mouth).

- *Traditions* – There's always something to look forward to in the calendar – grade-level projects, a science Olympiad, a special field trip, teacher recognition.

- *Honest, open communication* – “Around here,” a teacher might say, “people can disagree and discuss, confront and resolve matters in a constructive manner and still be supportive of each other. And I can listen to criticism as an opportunity for self-improvement without feeling threatened.”

“Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures” by Jon Saphier and Matthew King in *Educational Leadership*, March 1985,

http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198503_saphier.pdf

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2. How Does School Climate Affect Teacher Efficacy? (an Oldie But Goodie)

In this intriguing 1993 *Elementary School Journal* article, Wayne Hoy and Anita Woolfolk of Rutgers University report on how the organizational health of a school affects teachers' sense of efficacy. Research has linked teachers' belief in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning to their skill at classroom management, willingness to adopt innovations, administrators' ratings, and student achievement.

What is school climate? Hoy and Woolfolk say, “A healthy school is one in which harmony pervades relationships among students, teachers, and administrators as the organization directs its energies toward its mission. Healthy schools appear to be high-achieving schools.” And how did they measure teachers' sense of efficacy? By asking them to rate their agreement or disagreement with these two statements:

- *When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.* This measures general teaching efficacy – outcome expectations for schools and districts.
- *If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult of unmotivated students.* This measures personal teaching efficacy – expectations of the impact of one's own classroom work.

Interestingly, research has found that teachers' responses to these two statements are independent of each other. In other words, a teacher might be optimistic about the ability of schools to overcome home environment, but not feel that he or she could have much impact on difficult students because of a lack of skills or unfavorable conditions in a particular school. Conversely, a teacher could agree that home environment is very difficult to overcome but think he or she is the exception to the rule and will be able to turn around difficult students.

Hoy and Woolfolk say healthy schools work well at the technical, managerial, and institutional levels. Their study of 179 New Jersey elementary teachers was designed to find which of these six variables are most helpful to teacher efficacy:

- *Institutional integrity* – Teachers are protected from unreasonable community and parental demands and the school maintains its educational integrity.

- *Principal influence* – The school leader is able to persuade superiors, get additional consideration for the school, and operate with reasonable autonomy within the school.

- *Consideration* – The principal is friendly, supportive, open, and collegial, showing genuine concern for the welfare of teachers.

- *Resource support* – There are adequate classroom supplies and instructional materials and extra resources are provided when teachers request them.

- *Morale* – Hoy and Woolfolk define this as “a collective sense of friendliness, openness, enthusiasm, and trust among faculty members. Teachers like each other, like their jobs, and help each other; and they are proud of their school and feel a sense of accomplishment in their jobs.”

- *Academic emphasis* – The school is driven by a quest for academic excellence. “High but achievable academic goals are set for students,” say the authors; “the learning environment is orderly and serious; teachers believe in their students’ ability to achieve; and students work hard and respect those who do well academically.”

Here’s what Hoy and Woolfolk found: only two of these predicted personal teaching efficacy: principal influence and academic emphasis. “Schools promoted personal teaching efficacy when teachers perceived that their colleagues (a) set high but achievable goals, (b) create an orderly and serious environment, and (c) respect academic excellence,” say the authors. “Further, principals who were perceived as having influence with their superiors were also likely to effect a situation where teachers felt more personally efficacious.”

Hoy and Woolfolk were surprised to find that school morale was not a significant driver of personal teaching efficacy – feelings of trust, confidence, friendship, cohesiveness, and warmth. “Clearly, morale, job satisfaction, and the emotional support of co-workers are important to the psychological well-being of teachers,” they say, “but apparently, these expressive qualities are not enough to give teachers the confidence that they can effectively teach their most difficult students.”

Hoy and Woolfolk were also surprised that niceness on the part of the principal was also *not* related to personal teaching efficacy: “It may be that only task-oriented behaviors of principals are seen as producing an environment conducive to motivating ‘difficult’ students,” theorize the authors; “principals who ‘go to bat’ for their teachers with superiors are seen as more helpful than principals who are merely kind and supportive... Environments that are warm and supportive interpersonally may make teachers more satisfied with their jobs or less stressed, but they appear to have little effect on a teacher’s confidence about reaching difficult students.”

What about general teaching efficacy – that is, the belief that the school can overcome students’ home environment? It is driven by institutional integrity and morale, the study found. This is a matter of buffering teachers from negative parent and community influences and maximizing positive parent involvement – volunteers in the school, good turnout at parent meetings, and parents helping students with their homework.

The most intriguing finding of Hoy and Woolfolk's study was the independence of personal and general teaching efficacy. Moreover, they say, "factors that nurture personal efficacy seem likely to have limited effects on general teaching efficacy and vice versa." Why would this be? They suggest two possibilities:

- Schools with high parental involvement may lead teachers to focus their attention on supportive parents and "write off" difficult students whose parents are less involved.
- As teachers have more classroom experience, they increase their sense of personal efficacy, believing they have the skills to get through to difficult students, but develop a general sense of powerlessness in overcoming negative home-environment factors.

Hoy and Woolfolk conclude by suggesting that schools conduct regular organizational health inventories: "We recommend that school administrators use the health inventory as a continuing assessment of their own administrative practice and the influence of their practice on teacher efficacy." They suggest focusing especially on the factors that seem to make the biggest difference to personal and general teaching efficacy:

- Institutional integrity
- Principal influence
- Academic emphasis

"Teachers' Sense of Efficacy and the Organizational Health of Schools" by Wayne Hoy and Anita Woolfolk in *The Elementary School Journal*, March 1993 (Vol. 93, #4, p. 355-372), no e-link available

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3. From Traditional Spelling Instruction to Effective Word Study

In this *Reading Today* article, Radford University professors Katherine Hilden and Jennifer Jones criticize the traditional approach to spelling instruction – the weekly list presented on Monday, perhaps a few "bonus" words added during the week, homework practice writing each word three times, using each word in a sentence, writing the words in alphabetical order, and, of course, the Friday spelling test, grades recorded, and on to the next list the following Monday.

The biggest problem with this approach, say Hilden and Jones, is that students in every classroom are not all at the same developmental level of spelling proficiency: "With everyone using the same spelling list, students in stages outside of the traditional list miss out on instruction that will propel them forward through the stages." Here are the five stages of spelling development, through which children move:

- Sounds: emergent – Writes in letter-like forms, learning to recognize letters, begins to make representations of sounds in words;
- Sounds: letter names – Short vowels, consonant blends, consonant digraphs;
- Patterns: within-word patterns – R-controlled vowels, long vowel patterns, diphthongs (ambiguous vowels), complex consonants, homophones;
- Patterns and meaning: syllables and affixes – Inflection endings, syllabication, common prefixes and suffixes

- Meaning: derivational relations – Assimilated and absorbed prefixes, suffixes and parts of speech.

A single-list approach doesn't take all this into account, nor do pacing guides that push teachers to move through the basal at a predetermined rate without meeting students' individual spelling needs.

Hilden and Jones have another concern: "Are the kids doing well on the Friday tests *really* good spellers, or are they just the products of parents who have assisted with study and homework consistently throughout the week?" Have students truly learned and mastered the words? And what about students who aren't lucky enough to have effective home support?

What do Hilden and Jones suggest? "Differentiation is *making a difference by making it different*," they say. Here are the steps:

- Assess first. This looks like a traditional spelling test, but teachers analyze the results looking for the word features students know and the ones they need to learn.
- Use the data. Form groups for spelling instruction and give students spelling lists tailored to their needs.
- Manage differentiation. Students have to be trained and monitored so they can practice with each other and work independently as the teacher moves around helping and prodding.
- Teach. The teacher should engage students in the study of words by sound, pattern, and meaning.
- Monitor progress. Groups should be tested weekly on their assigned words, and the results should determine whether new word features can be introduced the next week or whether more work is needed on the previous feature. "Groups should remain fluid and flexible," say Hilden and Jones, "with weekly data and students' writing samples serving as guiding factors in students' placement within groups."

"Traditional Spelling Lists: Old Habits Are Hard to Break" by Katherine Hilden and Jennifer Jones in *Reading Today*, June/July 2012 (Vol. 29, #6, p. 19-21), <http://www.reading.org>; the authors can be reached at klouse@radford.edu and jjones292@radford.edu.

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4. Why Are Finland's Students Doing So Well?

In this article in *Smithsonian Magazine*, LynNell Hancock analyzes the reasons for Finland's "staggering educational success" over the last decade. A major factor seems to be thoughtful, skilled, tenacious help delivered to struggling students at every stage of their school careers. "Whatever it takes," is the mantra. "If one method fails, teachers consult with colleagues to try something else," says Hancock. "They seem to relish the challenge." Almost 30 percent of students receive some kind of special help during the K-8 years.

Contrary to the common stereotype of Finland being a homogeneous Caucasian nation, it has immigrants from Somalia, Iraq, Russia, Bangladesh, Estonia, Ethiopia, and other countries. Educators tilt toward students with economic and learning challenges. "Children

from wealthy families with lots of education can be taught by stupid teachers,” said principal Kari Louhivuori. “We try to catch the weak students. It’s deep in our thinking.”

“Why Are Finland’s Schools Successful? The Country’s Achievements in Education Have Other Nations Doing Their Homework” by LynNell Hancock in *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2011,

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/Why-Are-Finlands-Schools-Successful.html>

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5. Does “Just Right” Reading Help Students Grow?

In this short *Education Gadfly* review of a new book from the International Reading Association, *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* (by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp), Kathleen Porter-Magee praises the authors’ recommendation that students be given challenging rather than “just right” texts. This is in line with the Common Core emphasis on students reading “grade-appropriate” material (with scaffolding and support when needed) to build vocabulary and comprehension.

Porter-Magee says the book gives three reasons why assigning “just right” texts undermines student learning:

- It makes reading too easy for students; they won’t improve unless they are challenged by more difficult texts.
- It marginalizes the teacher, since students can read the material on their own.
- The “just right” strategy focuses on skills, which, in isolation, are “pointless,” says

Porter-Magee. Skills are best developed as students wrestle with challenging texts.

[It appears that the kind of “just right” texts these authors have in mind are at children’s *independent* level. When students read material at their *instructional* level, there’s some challenge with vocabulary and comprehension and the role of the teacher scaffolding and supporting becomes crucial to acceleration.]

“Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading” by Kathleen Porter-Magee in *Education Gadfly*, July 12, 2012, <http://bit.ly/LkeNM7>

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6. Skype Talks with Children’s Book Authors

In this *Reading Today* article, author John Micklos, Jr. recommends Skyping with authors, which he says is almost as good as a live author visit. A number of well-known children’s book authors are willing to do Skype talks – see <http://skypeanauthor.wetpaint.com>, <http://www.skypeauthors.com>, and <http://www.katemessner.com/authors-who-skype-with-classes-book-clubs-for-free>.

To make the most of a 20-minute Skype session with an author, Micklos recommends the following steps:

- Make sure students have read the book in advance.
- Visit the author’s website so students know about him or her.

- Brainstorm ideas about what to talk to the author about.
- Have students write their questions on index cards to they don't forget them in the excitement of the moment.
- Decide on a sequence of questions so students don't step on each others' lines.
- Practice using Skype so everyone is comfortable with the process.

“Authors Who Skype: A New Way to Stimulate Student Reading” by John Micklos, Jr. in *Reading Today*, June/July 2012 (Vol. 29, #6, p. 22-23), <http://www.reading.org>

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7. Recommended Children's Books

In this regular *Reading Today* feature, former teacher David Richardson recommends these children's books:

- *Penny and Her Song* by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 2012), ages 4 and up – Penny the mouse creates a new song and wants to sing it for everyone, but everyone is busy.

- *Step Gently Out* by Helen Frost, photographs by Rick Lieder (Candlewick Press, 2012), 3 and up – A simple but elegant picture and poetry book.

- *Gem* by Holly Hobbie (Little Brown, 2012), 3 and up – A toad's journey through several perilous adventures to find its way to the garden.

- *Oh No, George!* by Chris Haughton (Candlewick Press, 2012), 4 and up – George is a typical dog, and when his owner leaves him alone, what will tempt him?

- *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio (Knopf, 2012), 10 and up – Auggie Pullman was born with facial deformities and has been home-schooled, but now he's going to a private middle school.

- *The Obsidian Blade* by Peter Hautman (Candlewick Press, 2012), 11 and up – A complicated time-travel adventure in which Tucker Feye goes in search of his missing parents and a strange girl with a gray cat, leading to different worlds – and danger.

- *The Raft* by S.A. Bodeen (Feiwel & Friends, 2012) – A fast-paced adventure: a cargo plane crashes into the Pacific Ocean and Robie is trapped in a lifeboat with a seriously injured co-pilot, a bag of candy, no water, and sharks circling.

In addition, Richardson recommends the International Reading Association Children's Choices: http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Awards/ChildrensChoices2012_web.pdf, and Young Adult: http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Awards/YoungAdultsChoices2012_web.pdf

“Cool Reads for a Hot Summer” by David Richardson in *Reading Today*, June/July 2012 (Vol. 29, #6, p. 40-41), <http://www.reading.org>

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8. Do-Now Ideas for English Classes

Here's an idea for Do-Nows (short, substantive, independently-done tasks for students for the first 3-4 minutes of class) for middle- and high-school English: selecting material from Richard Lederer's humorous books *Anguished English* (Dell, 1987), *More Anguished English* (Dell, 1993), and *Fractured English* (Pocket Books, 1996). The idea would be for students to

find the mistake, explain why it's a mistake, and write the sentence correctly. Here are a few samples:

- A triangle which has an angle of 135 degrees is called an obscene triangle.
- His death leaves a void in the community which will be hard to replace.
- He sees things from an unusual vintage point.
- In the early Sixties, we were strong and virulent.
- (In a Paris elevator) Please leave your values at the front desk.
- A rainstorm reduced attendance at the parade and acted as a detergent to the crowds.
- We saw many bears driving through Yellowstone Park.
- Emily Dickinson was a wreck loose in society.
- The Oregon Republican admits he harassed women but vows not to quit.
- We sell children's clothes and babies too.
- Children on school buses less than 10,000 pounds must be restrained.

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9. Short Items:

a. Common Core sample questions – The New York State Education Department has a helpful website that recently added sample Common Core questions in ELA and Math created by David Coleman: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/apda/common-core-sample-questions/>

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b. Five historical misconceptions – This short, animated video takes on Viking warriors' horned helmets, Lady Godiva's naked ride, Napoleon's short stature, the Roman vomitorium, and Columbus's round-earth theory.

“Five Common Historical Misconceptions Explained” in *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2011,

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/video/Five-Common-Historical-Misconceptions-Explained.html>

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.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 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).

Subscriptions:

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- How to change access e-mail or log-in

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Better Evidence-Based Education
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
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
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
The School Administrator
Theory Into Practice