Marshall Memo 398

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 22, 2011

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"On the whole, American policymakers do not understand that the knowledge… required for successful teaching, especially for children of poverty, is as large and complex as that for high-level practice in law, architecture or engineering."
Jon Saphier (see item #5)

"As a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher, I find that every year almost half my students still have difficulty subtracting with regrouping."
Luann Voza (see item #2)

"[O]nce an ineffective strategy is internalized, students with disabilities rarely abandon it."
Teresa Gardner in "Disabilities in Written Expression" in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, August 2011 (Vol. 18, #1, p. 46-54); Gardner is at tgardner@jsu.edu.

"If schools accede to and support the notion that 'good learning is always fun,' what are they teaching students about work?"
Martin Haberman (see item #1)

"[H]ow much can students learn if they believe that they are not supposed to make mistakes in front of peers? How much can students learn if they pretend (or really believe) that they are supposed to know things without effort or study?"
Martin Haberman (*ibid.*)

"The difference between coal and diamonds is that diamonds stayed on the job longer."
Thomas Edison (quoted by Haberman, *ibid.*)

1. Martin Haberman on Urban Schools (an oldie but goodie article)

In this provocative article published in *Kappan* in 1997, University of Wisconsin/ Milwaukee professor Martin Haberman contends that many urban schools are "extremely effective at teaching skills that predispose young people to fail in the world of work." These schools' hidden curriculum, he says, "fosters a set of beliefs that enables youngsters to slip and slide through middle school and high school but that also becomes the source of their subsequent failure. It is an ideology that is easily learned, readily implemented, rewarded by teachers and principals, and supported by school policies. Schools promulgate the ideology because it is easier to accede to students' street values than it is to try to change them." As you read Haberman's list, ask yourself to what degree it still applies today.

• *Nowness* – Learning is presented in "discrete jolts" that are unconnected to the work that comes before or after it. Haberman believes there are several reasons for this. Textbooks can't be sent home and many students don't do homework, so everything has to be compressed into isolated, stand-alone classroom lessons. Student turnover is high and the number of new students appearing in classrooms throughout the year necessitates constant review, as does absenteeism, frequent pullouts for special education and other classes and activities, and students' tendency to forget what was taught before.

For example, an eighth-grade teacher embarking on a lesson on election results might discover that many students are unclear about the distinction between the city, county, state, and federal levels of government and has to decide whether to go back and teach that concept or plow ahead, leaving many students confused. Haberman likens such classrooms to the TV show *Jeopardy*: "Anyone can show up at any time and play the game… There are always new answers, so viewers need not remember those presented in a previous show. And best of all, the rules are quickly covered anew each day."

In a school steeped in nowness, "A successful period or activity is one in which students are expected neither to prepare anything nor to follow up in any way," says Haberman. "But it is impossible for students to learn ideas of any consequence or to develop skills to any degree of proficiency when 'nowness' controls the conditions of learning. Education is a process of building connections, and this process is hard work for students. It is even harder work for teachers. By 'going with the flow,' teachers support students' misconception that the unit of time in which anything can be taught and learned is something less than one hour."

• *Showing up* – Haberman echoes Ted Sizer's description (in *Horace's Compromise*) of an implicit bargain between students and teachers: "A student does not disrupt the class, and, in return, the teacher ignores the fact that the student is doing nothing. Simple attendance is transformed into a virtue… By rewarding inaction, uninvolvement, and detachment, urban schools promulgate the dangerous myth that the minimum standard for 'doing' satisfactory work is merely showing up."

• *Make me* – Urban schools put a premium on control and safety, which is understandable, but this leads them to be authoritarian, says Haberman. And it extends to the curriculum and learning environment, resulting in strict rules, a prescribed curriculum, and the "pedagogy of poverty" [see Marshall Memo 321 for a summary of Haberman's article describing this phenomenon]. This supports the conclusion by students that it's "the teacher's responsibility to see to it that they learn." In a top-down environment, students aren't led to feel accountable for learning.

• *Excuses* – "Students believe that they can be late or absent as often as they wish," says Haberman, "provided they have a good excuse, someone's permission, or a written note." Students don't accept responsibility for making up missed schoolwork, or even finding out what they missed; that's the teacher's responsibility. In one study, middle-school students were asked what policies they might expect on tardiness or absenteeism in a real-world job. Over half said they could be late or absent any time they had a good excuse.

• *Noncooperation* – Urban schools tend to react to violent incidents by separating students, says Haberman. Very few schools teach students how to communicate with their rivals or enemies and solve problems nonviolently, which reinforces the idea "that one should never have to work with anyone he or she doesn't like or with whom he or she cannot get along."

• *Respect* – Haberman contends that urban schools do a poor job counteracting street values about responding to disrespect with violence. In fact, he says, schools mirror the idea that might is right by using power to control students – until it doesn't work anymore. Ineffective teachers communicate the message, "This is my class. If you can't shape up, I'll suspend you." The alternative? "The only option for schools," says Haberman, "from the earliest grades on, is neither to accept nor to use power to control students."

• *Authority* – "Urban schools begin teaching students a dysfunctional way of relating to authority in kindergarten," he says. "Young children are readily controlled by authoritarian, directive teaching and simplistic, extrinsic rewards. As children mature, however, they come to realize that school authorities lack the power to inflict any real hurt. Relating to school authorities then becomes a game – and, since students neither identify with the school nor feel ownership of the rules and regulations, the goal of the game is to make school authorities look bad or stupid. The students win the daily contest, but in the long term they lose."

• *Peers* – All too many urban adolescents, says Haberman, succumb to the peer-group message, "Don't carry books, don't do homework, don't take responsibility, don't prepare for classes, don't remember things… just show up and see what they try to get us to do today."

• *Messing up* – Another part of the hidden curriculum, he says, is that "no matter how often one does things wrong or neglects to perform an expected behavior, he or she *deserves* another chance." Assignments can be done again, homework made up, tests re-taken, and outrageous behavior forgotten. *In extremis*, troublesome students can be transferred to another school or warehoused in special schools, but many of them become "ghosts" who aren't really attending school at all.

• *Explaining success* – Haberman echoes the research of Carol Dweck and Jeffrey Howard when he says that many students explain success in terms of ability, luck, or connections, not effort. "[I]t is not cool to put a lot of effort into school activities," he says. "If one tries hard and fails, it shows that one is stupid. If one tries hard and succeeds, it shows that one is not as intelligent as the individual who expends no effort and still manages to succeed… Students' resistance is especially strong when teachers offer help in front of peers. But how much can students learn if they believe that they are not supposed to make mistakes in front of peers? How much can students learn if they pretend (or really believe) that they are supposed to know things without effort or study?" If schools don't actively teach the value of effort, they leave students to the tender mercies of prevailing attitudes. Haberman quotes Thomas Edison, who is reputed to have said, "The difference between coal and diamonds is that diamonds stayed on the job longer."

• *Relevance* – Haberman salutes attempts to make learning relevant to students' lives, but says that can become a limitation that shortchanges them. "The very purpose of education is to push students beyond their present understanding," he says, "to open their minds and imaginations to the universe of ideas, past and present. To do anything less is to lower expectations and standards… Genuine relevance must be viewed in terms of the potential for helping students live in neighborhoods and communities yet to be developed."

• *Purpose* – "The learning of skills to an advanced and useful degree is frequently not fun," says Haberman. "Learning concepts can likewise be hard work." But many urban teachers fall into the trap of believing that learning must always be fun, and their students reinforce that by acting up when classroom activities aren't entertaining. "If schools accede to and support the notion that 'good learning is always fun,' what are they teaching students about work? Should good feelings be dependent on 'fun' or on accomplishment?"

• *Staying on task* – Researchers have documented an extraordinary level of classroom interruptions in urban classrooms – an average of 125 per week. "It is not unusual for students to stay on task only 10 minutes or so per hour."

• *Ignorance of rules* – "Lists of rules are sent home," says Haberman. "Parents are asked to sign a statement that they have read them. Students who don't 'learn' a rule the first time are taught it again. This makes classroom and school rules exactly like other school content – 'something the teacher is responsible for making me learn.'"

These 13 elements interact in ways that teach students that they have no stake in the school, says Haberman: "As early as third grade, many urban students come to believe that schooling is irrelevant to them and their future lives." So what does all this portend for students when they enter the real world and try to be successful in the workplace? Students who have

learned the hidden curriculum that Haberman describes will be successful only in jobs that don't have a screening process, have no requirements for previous training, with a boss who will watch them constantly, with freedom to come and go and make excuses for tardiness and absences, with pay based on time at work versus work accomplished, and with no real responsibility – in other words, menial, low-wage jobs, if that.

"What is currently taking place in urban schools is not teaching and learning, but a socialization battle," concludes Haberman. "Will urban educators socialize their students for the world of work, or will students continue to socialize their educators into the ideology? Currently, there is no contest."

"Unemployment Training: The Ideology of Nonwork Learned in Urban Schools" by Martin Haberman, *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1997 (Vol. 78, #7, p. 499-503); for Haberman's description of what highly effective urban teachers do to beat this ideology, see Marshall Memo 14.

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2. Improving Students' Performance in Subtraction

"As a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher, I find that every year almost half my students still have difficulty subtracting with regrouping," says New Jersey teacher Luann Voza in this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*. In the primary grades, children quickly master addition and carrying, but subtraction throws many for a loop. Among other things, there's the common problem of subtracting a smaller number from a larger one when the smaller number is on top. Voza's niece, a third grader, said, "I like adding better than subtracting. Adding is more easier."

Voza likens basic addition and subtraction to decoding in reading: "Both are necessary for comprehension and high-order thinking." She has the following suggestions for boosting subtraction success:

• Students need to understand the big idea about subtraction: while addition combines parts to find a total amount, subtraction starts with the total amount and takes part of it away. This sounds obvious, but research shows that students who don't grasp this fundamental difference (as early as kindergarten) have math troubles down the line.

• Teachers should avoid making absolute statements like "You can never subtract a larger number from a smaller number" – this causes confusion with negative numbers later in the curriculum.

• Start with concrete examples – manipulatives that can be counted and used for modeling operations – and move to abstract. Modeling is particularly important for subtraction because it makes vivid and understandable the idea of taking away from a total. Number lines are also helpful.

• Use fact families that link addition and subtraction, for example, 6 + 8 = 14 and 14 – 8 = 6. The 14 ends the addition problem and begins the subtraction problem, reinforcing the link and improving retrieval skills and fluency.

• Assign missing addend problems that get students using subtraction to solve addition problems, for example, 7 + x = 16. It's also helpful to vary the unknown's placement.

• Reinforce place value concepts, which are at the heart of most regrouping difficulties. Confused students see regrouping as changing the value of the top number; they need to understand that the top number remains the same while parts of it are renamed. In the problem 63 – 35, the value of the top number starts as 6 tens and 3 units and is changed to 5 tens and 13 units; representations of tens and ones are interchangeable.

• Use money problems that start with a certain amount and spending some of it, or make change, regrouping dollars to dimes and dimes to pennies.

• Get students to use their bodies to act out a problem like

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Have them line up in two rows, holding up their number, and ask which numbers need "help." The student who is holding the number 3 should be the one who answers.

• Get students to create their own addition and subtraction problems. This is one of the best ways to teach and check for conceptual understanding. Voza believes that too many teachers drill students in fact mastery and don't pay enough attention to conceptual understanding. If students can't create good problems, she says, it's too early to drill facts.

• Take a critical look at math textbooks. Voza says that a number of texts concentrate on algorithm mastery without first establishing conceptual understanding. Instructional materials should also be fun, which might mean veering away from textbooks and using fun applications on SMART or Promethean boards and other media.

• Identify common errors and attack them with appropriate instruction, not drill and kill. The two most common errors in subtraction are taking smaller numbers from larger numbers despite their placement and regrouping from a zero digit.

"Winning the 'Hundred Years' War'" by Luann Voza in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, August 2011 (Vol. 18, #1, p. 32-37), http://www.nctm.org. Voza can be reached at lvoz@aol.com.

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3. Key Considerations with Teacher Evaluation

"While linking pay to performance seems obvious to many advocates, the devil is in the details," says author/consultant Douglas Reeves in this *American School Board Journal* article. He recommends fine-tuning in several areas:

• *The purpose of evaluation* – It's about giving feedback that improves professional practice, not just documenting the poor performance of a small number of teachers. Reeves favors rubrics that give clear and specific descriptions of professional performance and challenge teachers to continuously improve.

• *Timeliness* – "Awarding letter grades or labels to schools, teachers, and principals after the year ends is comparable to giving a student a failing grade and never providing the feedback necessary to improve academic performance," says Reeves. He believes teachers

should get candid and constructive feedback *throughout* the year, with the final evaluation reflecting how much they learned and improved.

• *What's good for the goose* – Reeves says that administrators should be evaluated in the same way as teachers – frequently, using criteria that target the practices that strengthen teaching and learning, and with a premium on improvement.

• *Using test scores* – Reeves says there can be unintended consequences in districts that use achievement data to evaluate teachers. This can include experienced staff moving away from high-need schools and principals pulling effective teachers away from non-tested grades.

• *Transitioning* – Reeves recommends phasing in new evaluation policies by giving everyone a "no fault" year to absorb criticism (if it's warranted) without penalty. This might lead a teacher to learn from a critical evaluation rather than filing a grievance.

"Pay-for-Performance Landmines" by Douglas Reeves in *American School Board Journal*, September 2011 (Vol. 198, #9, p. 46-47), http://www.asbj.com

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4. Seven Essentials for Professional Learning in Schools

This *Journal of Staff Development* article introduces the third edition of the Learning Forward (formerly National Staff Development Council) Standards for Professional Learning, which are available online at www.learningforward.org/standards. The seven key areas are:

• *Learning communities* – The best professional development occurs within communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and worthy goals.

• *Leadership* – Effective professional learning depends on skillful leaders who develop capacity, serve as advocates, and create support systems.

• *Resources* – Professional learning won't happen without prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources.

• *Data* – To get results, professional learning needs student, educator, and system data for planning, implementation, and assessment.

• *Learning designs* – Optimal professional learning requires the integration of theories, research, and models of human learning.

• *Implementation* – Professional learning will have an impact on student learning when leaders apply research on change and sustain support over time.

• *Outcomes* – Professional learning needs to align student curriculum standards, educator performance, and student learning.

"Standards of Professional Learning Quick Reference Guide" in *Journal of Staff Development*, August 2011 (Vol. 32, #4, p. 41-45), http://www.learningforward.org

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5. Putting the Knowledge Base on Good Teaching to Work

"On the whole," says author/consultant Jon Saphier in this *Journal of Staff Development* article, "American policymakers do not understand that the knowledge and skills required for successful teaching, especially for children of poverty, is as large and complex as that for high-level practice in law, architecture or engineering." Too many Americans believe that good teachers are "naturals" – born, not made.

Saphier zeroes in on two aspects of instruction that are among those likely to bring about major gains in classroom learning:

• *Making students' thinking visible* – This maximizes high-level student-to-teacher and student-to-student talk about the content, gives the teacher a sense of who understands and who doesn't, makes students better listeners, and improves classroom climate. For examples, see http://www.learningforward.org/news/jsd.

• *Feedback* – At its best, feedback is preceded by clear learning objectives and is frequent, value-neutral, and helpful to students.

Saphier believes these are just two of a well-documented list of powerful practices that should be the curriculum for district and regional teaching and learning academies and the day-to-day work of classroom-based instructional coaches. He also advocates using the knowledge base on high-leverage strategies to inform teacher education, licensure, hiring, and induction of new teachers, in addition to the work of teacher teams within schools.

"Outcomes" by Jon Saphier in *Journal of Staff Development*, August 2011 (Vol. 32, #4, p. 58-62), http://www.learningforward.org; Saphier can be reached at JonSaphier@comcast.net.

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6. Short Item:

Teaching videos – The Teaching Channel http://www.teachingchannel.org has videotapes of teachers in action in a wide variety of subjects and grades. The site invites commentary and suggestions.

"Essentials" in *Journal of Staff Development*, August 2011 (Vol. 32, #4, p. 6-7), http://www.learningforward.org

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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 41 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
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
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
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
The School Administrator
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools