# Marshall Memo 621

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 25, 2016

## In This Issue:



## Quotes of the Week

"We nurture our students and help them grow intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally."

> A school mission statement, quoted in "Beyond Tomboys, Sissies, and 'That's So Gay': New Ways to Think About Gender and Sexuality in PreK-12 Education" by Jennifer Bryan and Team Finch, September 2015, http://bit.ly/1VjfObQ; Bryan can be reached at jbryan@jenniferbryanphd.com

"If there's a threat of being wrong every time I raise my hand, and being wrong is a bad thing, then very quickly I decide math isn't for me, I don't like this, I'm not a smart person."

> Noah Heller (see item #4)

"If you want the people on your team to step up and do more, you have to be willing to do less: less talking, less responding, less convincing, and less rescuing of others who need to struggle and learn for themselves."

> Liz Wiseman (see item #5)

"College admissions is a tremendous opportunity for parents to understand their children more deeply, to uncover with them what makes them thrive, and to support them in writing about their interests and inspirations authentically."

> Richard Weissbourd (see item #2)

"Assumptions are the root cause of poor instruction."

> Christopher Reddy (see item #3)

"The bugle blast of evaluation can drown out the quieter melodies of coaching and appreciation."

> Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen (see item #1)

## 1. Effective Use of Appreciation, Coaching, and Evaluation

In this chapter of *Thanks for the Feedback*, Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen say there are three kinds of feedback in the workplace:

• *Appreciation* – When a boss tells you how grateful he or she is to have you on the team, that's appreciation. It's about acceptance and a human connection – the boss is saying, *I see you. I know how hard you've been working. You matter to me and the organization.* We never outgrow the need to hear someone say, "Wow, look at you! You matter," say Stone and Heen. "Appreciation motivates us – it gives us a bounce in our step and the energy to redouble our efforts. When people complain that they don't get enough feedback at work, they often mean that they wonder whether anyone notices or cares how hard they're working. They don't want advice. They want appreciation."

• *Coaching* – This is feedback to help us learn, grow, or change in a specific way – to sharpen a skill, master a new idea, expand knowledge, or improve a particular capability. Coaching could come from a tennis instructor, the woman at the Apple Genius Bar, or a friend giving advice on a relationship.

• *Evaluation* – This lets us know where we stand – a "meets expectations" performance evaluation, a middle-school report card, your time in a 5K race, the blue ribbon that your cherry pie was awarded, the acceptance of a proposal of marriage. "Evaluations are always in some respect comparisons, implicitly or explicitly, against others or against a particular set of standards," say Stone and Heen. "Evaluations align expectations, clarify consequences, and inform decision-making."

Each of the three forms of feedback satisfies a different set of needs, they continue: "We need evaluation to know where we stand, to set expectations, to feel reassured or secure. We need coaching to accelerate learning, to focus our time and energy where it really matters, and to keep our relationships healthy and functioning. And we need appreciation if all the sweat and tears we put into our jobs and our relationships are going to feel worthwhile." Research has shown a high correlation between effective evaluation, coaching, and appreciation and employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. In the area of appreciation, one study found that "Yes" answers to these questions were particularly significant:

- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

When employees answer "No" to these questions, it doesn't necessarily mean bosses don't care or aren't saying "Thanks." But they may not be doing so in a way that's heard. Appreciation needs to have three elements to have an impact:

- It has to be specific. "Good work" is not enough. Some boss-employee relationships can degenerate into MADD – Mutual Appreciation Deficit Disorder.
- Appreciation has to come in a form that the receiver values and hears. This is tricky, because for some people, all the "attaboy" they need is their monthly paycheck, while for others public recognition is important, while others crave a title or promotion, and others want to know they're a trusted advisor or indispensable player.
- Appreciation has to be authentic. "Appreciation inflation" can set in – *Thanks for coming to work today* – and the currency loses all value.

When appreciation is specific, fine-tuned, and authentic, it's an essential workplace element.

Coaching also requires skill and finesse – and there's always an element of evaluation in advice-giving. "The coaching message 'here's how to improve' also implicitly conveys the evaluative message that 'so far you aren't doing it as well as you might,'" say Stone and Heen. "All too often, feedback that is offered as coaching is heard as evaluation. ('You're telling me how to improve, but really, you're saying you're not sure I'm cut out for this.') And efforts to elicit coaching from mentors yield feedback that is laced with evaluation, producing defensiveness and frustration rather than learning." When coaching is handled badly, it's stressful, confusing, and ineffective, wastes time, and leads to conflict and poor morale. "Coaching shortfalls mean that learning, productivity, morale, and relationships all suffer," say Stone and Heen. "And that's particularly tragic when people on both sides of the relationship are well-meaning and trying hard."

The key is giving the right kind of feedback to the right person at the right time. Here's how Donald, the lead partner in a law firm, went 0 for 3 giving feedback to three subordinates:

• April meets with Donald hoping for some appreciation for working tirelessly for eight years and effectively anticipating her boss's needs. Instead, Donald gives her a number of concrete suggestions on how she could manage her time better, straighten up her workspace, and be more assertive about saying no. April leaves the meeting feeling devastated and considers quitting.

• Cody submitted a research memo to Donald a few days earlier and is hoping for some specific suggestions on how to approach such assignments more efficiently in the future. Instead, Donald gives him a general evaluative comment about being on a successful track for a first-year lawyer. Like April, Cody leaves the meeting deeply frustrated: "How is that going to help me figure out what I'm doing?" he wonders.

• Evelyn goes into her meeting with Donald really wanting to know where she stands in terms of making partner in the firm. Donald says, "Evelyn, I know I'm not good with a compliment, but I can tell you that it means a lot to me when I see you staying late and here on weekends. I notice that. I'm sorry if I haven't always said so over the years." Evelyn is frustrated not to get the specific evaluative information she sought, and now she's more anxious than ever – were Donald's comments code for "Thank you and goodbye"?

"In this farcical round-robin," say Stone and Sheen, "April wants appreciation but gets coaching, Cody wants coaching but gets evaluation, and Evelyn wants evaluation but gets appreciation. All the while Donald is so pleased with his newfound feedback-giving abilities that he wonders whether he might be just the guy to lead an in-house training for other partners on how to give feedback well."

Stone and Sheen close with two pieces of advice on effectively handling appreciation, coaching, and evaluation:

• *Be explicit about the purpose of the conversation*. There needs to be an upfront discussion of the goal, addressing questions like these:

- What's my purpose in giving/receiving this feedback?
- Is it the right purpose from my point of view?
- Is it the right purpose from the other person's point of view?

"Are you trying to improve, to assess, or to say thanks and be supportive?" ask Stone and Heen. "You won't always be able to fit the messiness of real life into these clean categories, but it's worth trying." It's also important to check in several times during the conversation. It's possible that the person receiving feedback may take the bull by the horns: "You're offering coaching, but it would help to get a quick evaluation: Am I doing all right overall? If so, then I can relax and am eager for your coaching."

• *Separate evaluation from coaching and appreciation*. "The bugle blast of evaluation can drown out the quieter melodies of coaching and appreciation," say Stone and Heen. "Even if I walk into my performance review determined to learn how to improve, evaluation can get in the way… We can't focus on how to improve until we know where we stand." Being upset with a less-than-stellar rating can prevent people from hearing the feedback that will get them to a higher rating next time. That's why it's wise to separate the formal evaluation process from coaching and appreciation, and make sure that coaching and appreciation take place *throughout the year*.

*Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen (Penguin, 2015)

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## 2. A Healthier Set of Values for College Admission

In this *Education Week* article, Richard Weissbourd (Harvard Graduate School of Education) reports on the Making Caring Common project, one goal of which is to make the college-admission process less of a rat-race. The project's report, "Turning the Tide," contains a set of recommendations for de-escalating the intense "arms race" that is making adolescence a miserable experience for too many students. The report has been endorsed by over 75 key stakeholders, including the admissions deans of all the Ivy League colleges and the deans and administrators from a wide array of other colleges.

One of the core recommendations concerns what students submit in their college applications as evidence of service learning. What's important, says Weissbourd, "is not whether it occurs locally or in some distant country, or whether a student shows leadership.

What's important is whether students immerse themselves in an experience that is meaningful to them over a sustained period of time, and whether they learn about themselves and the perspectives of others, especially those who are different in background and character, and their responsibilities toward their communities." One key question is whether the service project was done *with* rather than *for* a community group.

High schools need to give students a wide range of choices for community-engagement and service opportunities based on their individual interests and passions, and follow up with opportunities for students to reflect on those experiences. Faculty guidance is key: "Without thoughtful facilitation," says Weissbourd, "diverse groups too often simply reinforce divisions and biases."

Another recommendation of the Making Caring Common project, says Weissbourd, is for the college admission process to send a clear message to students and families that "significant and demanding family responsibilities are highly valued, and provide clear opportunities for applicants to discuss these responsibilities. Many students, particularly those in low- and modest-income families, often contribute vitally to others in ways that are not measured by traditional forms of community service… caring for a sick relative, supervising a younger sibling, helping to run a household, or working after school to support their family… These contributions often build ethical character and demonstrate the perseverance that is key to college success." These experiences belong in the college application.

A final recommendation is to reduce the pressure for students to focus on generating long lists of extracurricular activities and Advanced Placement courses. Quality matters more than quantity, says Weissbourd, and more and more colleges are buying into the idea of looking at two or three activities that are truly meaningful to a student. Parents need some counseling in this department, especially those who are over-coaching their children through the admissions process and putting too much emphasis on getting into highly selective colleges. "College admissions is a tremendous opportunity for parents to understand their children more deeply," says Weissbourd, "to uncover with them what makes them thrive and to support them in writing about their interests and inspirations authentically."

"College Admission 2.0: Service Over Self" by Richard Weissbourd in *Education Week*, January 20, 2016 (Vol. 35, #18, p. 32, 27), www.edweek.org; Weissbourd can be reached at richard_weissbourd@gse.harvard.edu.

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## 3. The Curse of Knowledge – A Failure of Empathy in the Classroom

In this *Edutopia* article, Christopher Reddy explores the "curse" of a teacher knowing content really well and forgetting how difficult it was to learn it in the first place. This creates an empathy gap with students who are having difficulty learning – the teacher can't get into students' state of mind, making it much more difficult to teach effectively. A teacher suffering from the curse of knowledge may assume that the lesson's content is "easy, clear, and straightforward," says Reddy. "We assume that connections are apparent and will be made

effortlessly. Assumptions are the root cause of poor instruction. And acknowledgement is the first step to recovery." Reddy suggests these steps to counteract the curse of knowledge:

• *Fill in background knowledge*. It's very difficult for students to understand new content without a foundation of facts and concepts, says Reddy: "Conceptual knowledge in the form of facts is the scaffolding for the synthesis of new ideas." Teachers should not assume that students have all the prerequisite puzzle pieces to understand what's being taught.

• *Tell stories*. Vivid narratives are one of the most powerful ways for students to make a personal connection to curriculum content, says Reddy: "Everyone loves a great story because our ancestral past was full of them. Stories were the dominant medium to transmit information. They rely on our innate narcissistic self to be effective learning tools – we enjoy stories because we immediately inject ourselves into the story, considering our own actions and behavior when placed in the situation being described."

• *Inject emotion*. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson has found that playing a short, humorous film clip or making a quick joke can change the emotional valence of a classroom, creating emotional links between teacher and students.

• *Use more than one learning modality*. Students are attuned by a variety of learning styles and intelligences, and presenting visually, kinesthetically, orally, musically, etc. connects with more students.

• *Use analogies and examples*. An effective analogy highlights a connection, and getting students to form connections is at the core of learning. Similarly, giving lots of examples helps students scan their knowledge inventory for possible connections.

• *Use novelty*. "New challenges ignite the risk-reward dopamine system in our brains," says Reddy. "Something that is novel is interesting, and something interesting is learned more easily because it is attended to." Teachers should look for ways of presenting content with a different spin.

• *Have students retrieve what's been learned*. Effective teachers check for understanding at regular intervals, strategically spacing the mini-tests to maximize long-term retention and provide feedback to teacher and students on what's being learned and what continues to be a struggle.

"The Teacher Curse No One Wants to Talk About" by Christopher Reddy in *Edutopia*, December 18, 2015, http://www.edutopia.org/blog/the-curse-of-knowledge-chris-reddy

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## 4. "I'm Just Not a Math Person"

In this *Usable Knowledge* article from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Leah Shafer explores the all-too-common dynamic of a student struggling with a math problem, giving up, and saying: "I just can't get this. I'm not a math person." Of course the idea that there are "math people" and "not math people" is a social construct, says Shafer: "It stems from the belief that math intelligence is a fixed trait, rather than something that grows and develops with hard work and opportunities to learn." Students who believe they are not "math

people" feel outside mathematics – that math doesn't belong to them, that it's not useful to interpreting and navigating the world; it's just something they have to memorize for tests.

The good news is that it's possible to change a student's negative attitudes toward math. Some key steps:

• *Shift from a fixed to a growth mindset*. Students can be taught to make this shift – that through determination and hard work they can be good at math.

• *Create opportunities for cooperative learning*. "When students learn from each other by discussing problem-solving strategies," says Shafer, "they discover new techniques for approaching problems and new attitudes that help them persevere."

• *Give students the chance to productively struggle*. Rather than simple right/wrong computational problems, teachers should assign meaty problems that invite students to find their own solutions. Teachers should give students enough time to wrestle with problems and try a new approach if they reach a dead end.

• *Encourage participation, even if the student doesn't have the right answer yet*. "If there's a threat of being wrong every time I raise my hand, and being wrong is a bad thing, then very quickly I decide math isn't for me, I don't like this, I'm not a smart person," says Noah Heller of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Teachers need to frame wrong answers as opportunities for learning and get students sharing tentative answers without fear of failure.

• *Re-envision math as a language*. Math students should feel they can claim ownership over the language of math in the same way that English language learners claim ownership over English. Math students need to feel they are insiders, able to construct knowledge, and can gain access to skills and tools that will be truly useful in their lives.

"Becoming a Math Person: Why Students Develop an Aversion to Mathematics – and How Teachers Can Help Change Their Minds" by Leah Shafer in *Usable Knowledge*, January 16, 2016, http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/01/becoming-math-person

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## 5. Humility Pays Off for Rookie Managers

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Liz Wiseman says there are two reasons most new managers tend to be ineffective – sometimes disastrously so – in their first six months after being promoted. First, they keep doing the stuff that got them promoted – "They haven't realized that their new role is to enable others to do the work, not to do it themselves," says Wiseman. Second, they tend to try too hard at being leaders: "Feeling pressure to justify their newfound authority, they make decisions too quickly and too emphatically and look to play the hero. They play too big, causing their teams to play small."

Some rookie managers take a very different approach that gets much better results: they embrace their rookie status, advertise their areas of ignorance, and open themselves as learners. Some specifics:

• *List the things you don't know*. As a new CEO, Shane Atchison periodically jots down the *7 Things I Don't Know*. "This is easily the most important part of my toolkit," he says,

"because it forces me to get out of my own bubble and take a critical look at what's going on around me." It helps him shift from the assumption of knowing to an attitude of inquiry.

• *Confess your limitations*. Cliff Bean, when he was promoted to a new position in the U.S. Navy, started his first meeting by saying, "Hi. My name is Cliff, and I don't know what I'm doing." There was an audible sigh of relief in the room, and his proactive confession prompted other officers to admit that they felt like they had been faking expertise they didn't actually possess.

• *Ask questions*. "While your value used to come from having all the answers," says Wiseman, "your new value will come from asking the right questions and letting your team find the answers… As a rookie manager, avoid asking stupid questions that lack intelligence and common sense. But do ask the naïve questions that cut to the core, reveal problems, and prompt your team to think differently and find fresh solutions."

• *Do less; challenge more*. "If you want the people on your team to step up and do more," says Wiseman, "you have to be willing to do less: less talking, less responding, less convincing, and less rescuing of others who need to struggle and learn for themselves. Instead of contributing big ideas, offer big challenges that require your team to develop big ideas."

"New Managers: Embrace Your Rookie Status" by Liz Wiseman in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2, 2015, https://hbr.org/2015/10/new-managers-embrace-your-rookie-status

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## 6. Maximizing Wonder and Creativity

(Originally titled "The Wonder Years")

In this *Education Update* article, Kathy Checkley suggests ways to spark students' curiosity and creativity in the classroom:

• Have students maintain a Wonder Journal. Students jot down a question a day about things that intrigue them, and then select one to investigate further, writing a short essay or poem and sharing it with classmates.

• Set up a Wonder Counter in the classroom. Have students bring in objects that pique their curiosity, and then follow up with a Wonder Form – students bounce ideas about what an object suggests to them.

• Help students develop good questioning techniques. For example, with a visiting police officer, asking "thick" questions that elicit a detailed and thoughtful response – "What did you have to learn to become a police officer?"

• Tap students to become experts on a topic of their choice. Have students choose a particular area of the curriculum that intrigues them, study about it in depth, and make a presentation to the class.

• Allow students to be curious together. Curiosity is contagious, so it's a good idea to pair shy students with those who are more vocal with their curiosity.

"The Wonder Years" by Kathy Checkley in *Education Update*, January 2016 (Vol. 58, #1, p. 1, 4-5), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1lIK2ca

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## 7. Short Items:

***a. Hans Rosling film on ending extreme poverty in 15 years*** – In this one-hour film, Swedish data guru Hans Rosling uses a variety of graphic displays to show the decrease in absolute poverty worldwide since 1800, plays film clips of what poverty looks like in several developing countries, and ends with a hopeful message about meeting the new United Nations goal – to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030:
http://www.gapminder.org/videos/dont-panic-end-poverty/

"Don't Panic – End Poverty" by Hans Rosling, October 7, 2015

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***b. Radio stories*** – The Listen Current site has a wide variety of radio stories in science, social studies, ELA, and current events: https://listencurrent.com

"Listen Current," January 2016

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***c. A collection of notable letters*** – This compilation has correspondence from a wide range of famous people – George Orwell, Paul Revere, Mats Gustafsson, and others:
http://www.lettersofnote.com

"Letters of Note" edited by Shaun Usher, January 2016

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***d. A speech bank*** – The American Rhetoric website has a trove of notable speeches, texts, and recordings: http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speechbank.htm

"American Rhetoric," January 2016

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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).

### *Subscriptions:*

Individual subscriptions are $50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

### *Website:*

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

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- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

### *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
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
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 Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest