

Marshall Memo 26

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 23, 2004

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8. Short items: (a) using graphic novels in secondary classrooms; (b) Fred Jones interview; (c) keeping teachers on board.

Quotes of the Week

"Practice selective abandonment each month by identifying activities that really aren't that important. Then stop doing them!

Suzette Lovely, *Principal Magazine* (see item #5)

"[L]eadership centered on your personal daily decision-making not only fails to utilize the intellectual capital of your staff, but creates a culture of helplessness and dependency."

Richard Coleman and Harvey Perkins, *Principal Magazine* (see item #4)

"You will only be able to reclaim your personal life if you share ownership for your professional life."

Richard Coleman and Harvey Perkins, *ibid.*

1. Giving Negative Feedback That's Heard

A principal from St. Louis offers these suggestions for giving teachers and others critical feedback in a way that changes behavior:

- *Pick the time and place carefully* – A good feedback session should not be spur-of-the-moment; it requires privacy and enough time to do justice to what's being said.

- *Be timely* – Don't wait a long time after you identify the problem. On the other hand, if you're still emotional yourself, wait until you're calm and collected.

- *Be specific* – Vague generalities will not help the teacher. Examples of specificity: "Why do you feel that the lesson was paced too slowly? What was it about the handling of a parent's complaint that disappointed you? How could you tell that the students were bored? Why do you think the lesson wasn't well-planned?" The more specific you are, the more push-back there may be [especially if you are off base!], but also the more chance there is for real learning and change on the teacher's part.

- *Watch your body language* – Non-verbal cues can communicate as much as words. "You need to be sure that your eyes, face, and body are giving the same message as your words." For a particularly difficult conversation, it may help to role-play with a trusted assistant.

- *Provide a rationale* – The teacher needs to understand why this incident is important to you – its implications and the context of your thinking. This may be obvious, or it may need careful explaining

- *Allow for a response* – No drive-by feedback! If you want to change behavior, you need a two-way conversation. The teacher must have time to absorb what you have said and respond to it, "making meaning" of your criticism. It sometimes helps to ask, "Does this make sense to you?" or "Can you see why I'm disappointed?" If the teacher is at a loss for words, you might say, "Why don't you sit on this for a day or so, and then let's talk."

- *Clarify what you said* – Rephrasing the message at the end can help: "Let me be sure that I was clear in what I said..." Alternatively, you might want to follow up with a memo outlining your key points so there will be no misunderstanding.

- *Praise more than you criticize* – A 5:1 ratio is ideal, frequently making "deposits" in the "interpersonal bank account", and making criticism easier to accept.

- *Don't e-mail criticism* – This is not an appropriate forum for difficult conversations, which require face-to-face contact and an opportunity for clarification and interaction.

- *Let the teacher know you've been there too* – It's disarming and helpful for you to acknowledge that you've made your share of mistakes and understand their feelings.

"Negative Feedback: Making Yourself Heard" by Thomas Hoerr, *Principal Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. 82, #4, p. 63-64). An e-link may be available soon at <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=288>

2. Research on Effective Teaching

Nancy Protheroe of Education Research Service (ERS) summarizes three studies that synthesize research on effective classroom teaching.

- These general practices were identified in a 2003 Walberg and Paik study (<http://www.ers.org/whatsnew.htm>) as having “powerful and consistent effects” on the achievement of diverse K-12 students:

- *Graded homework* – Students learn more when they complete homework and get feedback on it, including re-teaching of material not understood.
- *Aligned time on task* – This starts with the teacher knowing what needs to be learned [from state and district standards and assessments] and finding the most efficient way to present it.
- *Direct instruction* – This means systematic sequencing of lesson, guided student practice, teacher task orientation, flexibility, enthusiasm, and feedback [and not necessarily front-of-the-room lecture teaching].
- *Advance organizers* – Students need connections to previous lessons and prior knowledge when they begin learning something new, as well as help focusing on the most important parts of a lesson.
- *Learning strategies* – Students need to be explicitly taught learning strategies and take some control and responsibility for their learning goals.
- *Focused small-group instruction* – Teaching students individually or in small groups with the same learning needs is highly effective; so is well-organized peer tutoring.
- *Mastery learning* – This means setting clear goals, assessing students regularly, and not letting them move on until they have achieved mastery (80% or higher), while giving enrichment to students who have achieved mastery.
- *Cooperative learning* – Well-structured and academically-focused cooperative groups of 2-4 students can help students take responsibility for their own learning and do better.
- *Adaptive instruction* – This means tailoring instruction to individual and small-group needs. For it to be effective, teachers need to plan, allocate time, and delegate tasks to aides and students.

- A second study by Brophy (1999) synthesizes principles of effective teaching: (<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/international/publications/educationalpractices/EducationalPracticesSeriesPdf/prac01e.pdf>):

- *A supportive climate* – The classroom is cohesive and caring.

- *Curricular alignment* – Students’ learning experiences align with curriculum goals in a coherent fashion.
 - *Thoughtful discourse* – Students are engaged in sustained discourse on powerful ideas.
 - *Scaffolding* – Students get the help and support they need to be successful.
 - *Goal-oriented assessment* – Teachers use a variety of informal and formal assessments to monitor progress and give feedback.
 - *Achievement expectations* – Students know that the teacher has high, appropriate expectations of them.
- A third study by Marzano, Gaddy, and Dean (2000) identified nine instructional approaches that seem to improve student achievement across the board (<http://www.mcrel.org/topics/productDetail.asp?productID=110>):

1. *Identifying similarities and differences* – Students are presented with what’s the same and what’s different as they compare, classify, and create metaphors and analogies.
2. *Summarizing and note-taking* – Students “mentally sift through and synthesize information.”
3. *Reinforcing effort and providing recognition* – This targets students’ attitudes and beliefs.
4. *Homework and practice* – Done well, this helps students deepen proficiency and understanding.
5. *Non-linguistic representations* – Some students learn best from graphic organizers, pictures and pictographs, visualizing, concrete representations, and kinesthetic activities.
6. *Cooperative learning* – Experiencing positive interdependence can help, but it needs to be carefully structured and non overused.
7. *Goals and feedback* – Students need to have a sense of direction and purpose and get regular feedback on their progress.
8. *Generating and testing hypotheses* – Students understand and retain better when they are called upon to apply knowledge.
9. *Activating prior knowledge* – Students learn best when they retrieve what they already know and relate it to what they are learning.

“Effective Teaching” by Nancy Protheroe, *Principal Magazine*, March / April 2004 (Vol. 82, #4, p. 58-60). An e-link may be available soon at <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=288>

3. What Helps a Principal Thrive, Not Just Survive

“School consumes my life! I’m hardly ever at home, and when I am at home I’m thinking about school! I tell parents to be involved with their children, but I barely have time for my own, and the family dinner hour is a thing of the past.” Such is the lament of all too many principals. Two Virginia administrators offer some suggestions on finding a good balance between work and personal life, which is crucial to remaining productive over the years – and surviving!

- *Write a personal mission statement and re-visit it regularly* – It should answer the questions, What is really important in my life? What do I want to accomplish? Here’s the statement that one CEO reads to himself every Monday morning:

Wendi is the most important person in my life. My family comes before work and other activities. I live my religion. I provide the financial security for my family. Our home is a retreat from the challenges of the world. I have a positive attitude, looking for and developing the strength in others. I help people develop and grow, including, when appropriate, holding them accountable. The outdoors provides a needed sanctuary and retreat for me.

- *Teach your buffaloes to fly* – While you may enjoy being the “head buffalo” of your school (*Flight of the Buffalo*, Belasco and Stayer, 1993), you need to use the intellectual capital of your colleagues and not make people dependent on you (see quotes above).

- *Meet with successful students once a week* – As a principal, you don’t need to go looking for negative people and problems – they find you! (One principal described his job as being “a fire hydrant in a dog pound.”) A good antidote is to seek out positive people and experiences, and one way to do that is to schedule time to talk to students who are eager to learn and appreciate the opportunities the school is providing them.

- *Be a cheerleader* – Take on the role of master of ceremonies at a regular awards ceremony, showing your staff that you value their efforts to improve the school and raise student achievement and building positive feelings and a sense of common mission, accomplishment, and collegiality. This goes for your family too: have spontaneous nights out at a favorite restaurant and celebrate your family members’ accomplishments in visible ways.

- *Schedule and consistently use time for physical renewal* – A sense of physical well-being is crucial to performing at our best. Ways of accomplishing this vary from

person to person, but it must be regular (exercise should be at least 30 minutes three times a week), consistent, and devoid of shop-talk. Friendships outside of work are even more important. “If possible, you should cultivate friends through civic, community or religious organization, where you can assume a new role, explore different interests – and leave your work at work!”

- *Set goals for personal growth* – What gets measured gets done. Because so much progress in education is gradual and long-term, it’s important to set measurable, short-term goals in critical areas and track progress – and this goes for personal renewal as well. Do-able goals might include three-times-a-week exercise, sharing at least one professional article with staff each week, a “date” with your spouse at least twice a month, fun family rituals at least twice a month, capturing 5-10 minutes with each staff member each quarter or semester to talk about non-school-related subjects, and touching base with relatives or old friends at least once a month.

“Thriving – Not Merely Surviving – in the Principalship” by Richard Coleman and Harvey Perkins, *Principal Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. 82, #4, p. 32-36). An e-link may be available soon at <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=288>

4. Tips for Principals Interested in Keeping Their Sanity

In this article, a California school personnel administrator offers tips to first-year principals (and more experienced administrators) on what she has found to be the four biggest stress-points of the job.

- *Dealing with choppiness* – In the principalship, many transactions last for less than a minute, which may mean as many as 60 activities in a single hour. This puts a premium on being able to think on your feet, analyze and solve problems quickly, and deal with the fact that tasks often get done in bits and pieces throughout the day.

- *Juggling variety* – Principals have to be able to rapidly shift gears from wrestling with test data to consoling a distraught teacher who just found out that her son was in an accident. Principals have to be able to establish rapport with people of widely-ranging ages and backgrounds and modulate their messages and interactions appropriately. “Trying to anticipate and respond to the disparate needs of a broad constituency can make principals feel like hamsters on a wheel as they relentlessly labor to juggle the completion of tasks against the preservation of relationships.”

- *Handling fragmentation* – New projects, mandates, problems, and crises keep interrupting ongoing activities, and it’s easy for instructional goals to get buried by less important stuff that consumes the principal’s days. Principals need good time

management skills, keeping their eyes on the prize while still addressing important immediate needs.

• *Overcoming overload* – A constant stream of new stuff, fragmented days, and short, choppy interactions can easily create an oppressive feeling of overload, and the reaction among some new principals (and veterans as well) is to become insecure about making decisions, waiting for permission or answers from outside the school. This pattern breeds similar behavior among teachers and can paralyze a school. Some key advice:

- Work quickly, but know when a problem needs more time.
- Delegate, share decisions, analyze problems, forecast, and manage time.
- Practice selective abandonment; each month, identify activities that really aren't important and stop doing them.
- Continually ask, "How is what I'm doing helping to move our school toward its goals?"
- Don't feel sorry for yourself. Learn to enjoy the excitement and diversity of the job. Network with kindred spirits, tell stories, and build relationships.

A sidebar in this article identified the four stages of burnout: (a) physical and mental exhaustion; (b) shame and doubt of your abilities; (c) cynicism and callousness – cover your derrière; (d) failure, helplessness, and crisis (damned if I do, damned if I don't, health problems, perhaps clinical depression). The author offers some keys to recovering from incipient burnout:

- *Take stock* – Acknowledge the problem, grieve, tend to your wounds, reconnect with loved ones, and regain your sense of identity. A mentor or counselor may be needed to help you focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses.
- *Take a break* – Step out of the hurly-burly for 15-20 minutes each day.
- *Exercise* – A regular regimen (at least three times a week) can get disposition-enhancing endorphins pumping and lift your mood. Exercising with a buddy is even better.
- *Eat well* – Avoid fatty foods, caffeine, and between-meal snacks. Good diet and exercise increase mental agility and help you sleep better.
- *Laugh* – Hearty laughter releases endorphins and self-accepting laughter is a great antidote to shame.
- *Praise achievement* – Personal notes to students and staff build morale and make your job easier. Look for at least two things a day that deserve praise.
- *Accept reality* – Know what you can and cannot control.

- *Write* – Expressing and analyzing your emotions can be a stress-reliever and a source of self-discovery – and action.
- *Make a change?* – Reflection may lead to a life-saving decision to change your work environment, take a leave – or change your line of work.

In another sidebar, the author offers these tips for the first-year principal:

- Never leave rules to chance; have clear, precise rules for adults and students.
- Be consistent – don't play favorites
- Avoid the rumor mill – don't get sidetracked by workplace gossip.
- Don't be cynical – take the high road with your staff.
- Avoid being defensive – don't feel you have to justify every decision.
- Don't assume others will give you feedback – let staff know what you're working on and ask for their input and reactions.
- Plan and organize – poor organization undermines your effectiveness; stick to schedules, have agendas for meetings, and keep track of things.
- Don't try to do everything yourself – empower others, delegate.
- Avoid change for change's sake – change only those things that detract from the school's mission and goals.
- Leave your previous school culture behind – don't try to bring it into your new school; incorporate changes slowly.
- Don't get carried away with your power.

“Surviving the First Year – and Beyond” by Suzette Lovely, *Principal Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. 82, #4, p. 22-30). An e-link may be available soon at <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=288>

5. A Model for Mediating Student Conflicts

A veteran Pennsylvania principal believes that having a step-by-step protocol for mediating student conflicts (fights, verbal harassment, etc.) is extremely valuable. Although using this kind of procedure to talk through problems takes a lot of time, she thinks it pays off in the long run. Here's her system:

- *Step 1* – Separate the students and have them write down what happened. This helps defuse anger and gives you documentation of what happened. Read what they write and ask for clarification if necessary.
- *Step 2* – Bring the students together and tell them you're going to work together to find a solution that's agreeable to both of them (no winner or loser).
- *Step 3* – Explain and get agreement on the ground rules for mediation:

- Talk only to the principal.
- Take turns talking.
- Stay seated.
- Don't interrupt.
- Keep what is said confidential.

- *Step 4* – Ask who wants to go first and have that student explain the conflict, then give the other student the same opportunity. In this phase, they should look each other in the eye and talk honestly about how the conflict made them feel.

- *Step 5* – Brainstorm possible ways to ensure that the conflict will never happen again, including whacky and impossible ideas. The ultimate solution is usually somewhere on the list.

- *Step 6* – Help them choose and agree on the best solution, write up a contract that lists the terms of their agreement, have both students sign it, and make copies for everyone. Thank them for participating.

“Six Steps to Successful Conflict Mediation” by Audrey Quinlan in *Principal Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. 82, #4, p. 69). An e-link may be available soon at <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=288>

6. Advantages of Full-Service Schools

Taking care of students' basic needs can improve academic achievement, and the full-service model (comprehensive, “one-stop shopping” of medical, dental, mental health, adult education, job placement, etc. within a school) is one way to deliver needed services. Inspired by the work of Joy Dryfoos and others, there are now more than 1,000 full-service schools across the country, and the research is positive: there is a close link between higher academic achievement, better student attendance, parent involvement and better nutrition, more exercise, lower rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, better supervision of students after school, and a safe and caring school and neighborhood climate (a 2003 study by WestEd). Another intriguing correlate is “resilience factors”, which include caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful community activities (Hanson and Austin, 2002). The major selling points of the full-service model are:

- It can focus on early intervention versus crisis management.
- By reaching more parents, it can provide services early in a child's life – sometimes as early as infancy.

- It allows for flexible services that adapt to meet the changing needs of children and their families.
- Taking care of non-academic needs allows educators to focus on its core academic mission.
- It also helps students and their parents focus on schoolwork.
- It is cost-effective.
- It increases the likelihood that parents will use services and comply with suggestions, prescriptions, and other interventions.
- It contributes to the health and well-being of the entire community.

More than a decade of experience with the full-service model had produced valuable lessons. Thomas McMahon of Yale's Department of Psychiatry has identified some challenge areas: (a) deciding on an organizational model; (b) deciding how to plan – consultants, coordinators, etc.; (c) dealing successfully with the district bureaucracy, unions, city government, etc.; (d) raising money; (e) forming competent interagency teams to work with students and families; (f) working successfully with principals, teachers, parents, agency leaders, and staff; (g) clarifying mission and goals and who will have authority in service areas; (h) anticipating and addressing legal and fairness issues; (i) deciding how students and families will have access to services; and (j) setting clear expectations, measuring outcomes, and using data to improve services.

“All Together Now” by Susan Black, *American School Board Journal*, March 2004 (Vol. 191, #2, p. 40-42. The website is <http://www.asbj.com/> and the new issue should be on line within a few days. Joy Dryfoos's book is *Full-Service Community Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families* (Jossey-Bass, 1994)

7. Getting the Most Out of After-School Programs

After-school programs are “hot”, but now the heat is on to show that they are effective. In this back-page commentary piece in the current *Education Week*, two experts share their recommendations based on several recent evaluations:

- *High student attendance is important.* Sporadic attendance will not result in gains for students. In many programs, students only attended one or two days a week. “No program can make a difference if it does not change the daily experience of young people, and it cannot do that if attendance is poor.” To entice students to attend more regularly, programs must help kids “explore and deepen interests, make decisions, try out different roles, and get involved with people, ideas, and activities.”

In addition, it helps if after-school programs require five-days-a-week attendance and staff members track down non-attendees.

- *Programs may not be able to dramatically boost test scores.* “We need to be more realistic,” write the authors, “about what it takes to create discernible effects on achievement-test scores... While it is reasonable to expect that after-school activities *can* affect performance as measured by achievement tests, it is likely that such effects will be small. This is particularly true for reading scores, since they are traditionally less responsive than mathematics scores to instruction... We should balance a focus on test scores with an examination of intermediate effects – more parental involvement in school-related activities, more diligent homework completion, more school attendance, and better grades, for example – which may pay off in improved test performance over time.”

- *Programs should focus on vulnerable students who are on their own after school.* If after-school programs primarily serve students who have high-quality supervision available after hours, the programs may be missing their most important mission. It’s important to focus on students who can benefit the most from a structured, high-quality program after school.

- *Learn from successful programs.* Within the after-school program field, there is agreement on the key ingredients of a successful program: interesting activities, supportive relationships, and the capacity to deliver those. But getting these ingredients on the ground is the hard part, and there is less agreement on how to go about that.

“Improving the Quality of After-School Programs” by Robert Granger and Thomas Kane, *Education Week*, February 18, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, # 23, p. 76, 52)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=23granger.h23>

8. Short Items:

- *Using Graphic Novels in Secondary Classrooms* – A growing number of middle and high-school educators are discovering the power of a new generation of “graphic novels” – i.e., high-level comic books. Unlike the comics that use “simple drawings and fluffy stories about goofy teenagers or violent superheroes,” graphic novels are usually paperback books containing several comic stories. They have mature themes, real substance, engaging themes, and information that makes kids think, and because of all this, graphic novels can be highly successful at getting adolescents and young adults engaged in reading. Graphic novels are especially

helpful for English language learners because they put colloquial phrases into context, and introduce complex ideas in a format this is easy to understand.

Graphic novels made their way into the adolescent sections of many public libraries starting five years ago. The *Manga*, a Japanese series, is particularly popular, as is the *Maus* series by Art Spiegelman (which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992). Many teachers are hesitant at first, branding all comics as “junk food”, but once they pick them up, they are often converted. Graphic novels span different subject areas: *The Golem’s Mighty Swing* is about a Jewish baseball team in the 1920’s. *Clan Apis* describes the life cycle of bees, combining humor with science. *Word Squad* integrates comics and vocabulary lessons. *The Hobbit* has been turned into a graphic novel. So has *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but watch out for this one: it has a scene in a brothel. To avoid such pitfalls, Philip Crawford, a Vermont library director, has written a consumer guide: *Graphic Novels 101: Selecting and Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy: A Resource Guide for School Librarians and Educators*.

“Going ‘Graphic’: Educators Tiptoe Into Realm of Comics” by Michelle Galley, *Education Week*, February 18, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, # 23, p. 6)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=23Graphic.h23>

- *Fred Jones interview* – In this week’s *Education World* on-line magazine, discipline guru Fred Jones is interviewed on the role of curriculum in classroom management. Full text at http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr265.shtml

- *Keeping teachers on board* – There have been indications that a teacher’s decision to stay at a school depends most on the principal’s leadership. The Charlotte Advocates for Education, a local education fund, conducted a study to learn more about this dynamic, especially in high-need schools. The findings are at this link: <http://www.advocatesforded.org/principalstudy.htm>

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should be covered, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
Curriculum/Education Update (ASCD)
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Harpers
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
Middle School Journal
New York Times
New Yorker
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

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