Marshall Memo 172

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 12, 2007

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"By the time children are in upper primary school, parental and teacher influence on their children's peer-related behavior is practically nonexistent."

Ken Rigby and Bruce Johnson (see item #1)

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Edmund Burke, quoted in item #1

"All learners need to know why they are learning something. It is not always easy to explain, but articulating it will get you thinking about exactly what you are asking them to do and where it is leading."

Sara Bubb (see item #7)

"Now that I'm in my work, I see math everywhere. Why didn't I get this in school?"

A vocational school graduate (see item #6)

"If kids were only smarter about choosing their parents, all would be well."

Phillip Schlechty's tongue-in-cheek "pre-conception IQ solution to education reform" quoted in a letter to *Education Week* by Michael Holzman (Feb. 7, 2007, p. 28)

"Our work as teachers is filled with dilemmas, with units we want to make better and lessons that work great for first period and bomb with period four… We want to understand how to help the silent voices in the back of the room… These are the areas where we want to learn and grow. Who better to collaborate with us in managing and dealing with these issues than colleagues who share our context, our concerns, and our students?"

Linda Emm, Miami-based consultant (see item #3)

"No one can argue against something that produces calculable student success and improved learning."

Corrina Knight, North Carolina teacher (see item #3)

1. What Schools Can Do To Influence Students Who Witness Bullying

In this thoughtful article in *Greater Good Magazine*, Australian education professors Ken Rigby and Bruce Johnson discuss the role of bystanders when bullying is taking place. The authors start by reporting that anti-bullying programs have generally been ineffective. This is because:

• Programs urge teachers and other school personnel to be vigilant and take strong measures when they see bullying – but bullying almost always takes place when adults are not present, and students rarely tell.

• Anti-bullying programs are not successful in getting students to intervene. "We can no longer conceive of bullying at school as a covert activity, engaged in guiltily when there is no one around," write Rigby and Johnson. "On the contrary, research has found that school bullies glory in the presence of an audience. It provides theater. To a remarkable extent, the watchers either enjoy the spectacle or watch in a curious but largely disengaged manner. The few who may object are in a small minority."

Here's the kicker: when bystanders *do* speak up, the bullying often stops. Several studies have found that objections from the "audience" effectively discourage bullies 50% or more of the time. These findings led Rigby and Johnson to conclude that anti-bullying programs should focus more on getting bystanders to speak up.

But this is easier said than done. Some students actually enjoy seeing bullies in action. "I love to watch fights," said one. "The person insulting the other person is cool and ROCKS," said another. "Some people deserve to get their heads kicked in because they are [losers]," said a third.

Fortunately these students are in a minority, but there's a larger group that watches bullying and takes no action. Why? To find out, the authors showed videos of bullying to students in England, South Africa, Italy, Israel, and Bangladesh and asked children what they would do if they were bystanders. Those who said they would not intervene gave four reasons:

• They felt it was none of their business.

• They feared consequences, including embarrassment, being branded as a "sissy," and the bully turning on them.

• They felt the victims should take care of the situation and stand up for themselves. As students move into the teenage years, they tend to become less sympathetic toward victims of bullying.

• They felt helpless to stop the bullying – or feared that their intervention might make things worse.

A number of students said they *would* intervene if they witnessed bullying, especially if the victim was a friend. Here were their reasons:

• Bullying is wrong and stopping it is the right thing to do.

• I am the kind of person who helps others.

• I feel pity for the victim.

• I identify with the victim; I've been bullied myself.

• The victim might help me in a similar situation or might become my friend.

• I'll be a hero!

All well and good. But studies have found that in real-life situations, few students act on their beliefs and most continue to passively observe the bullying. This is especially true of teenagers. Rigby and Johnson report that students feel conflicted, and are highly susceptible to the influence of their peers. When asked what their peers expected them to do, students gave a wide variety of answers: some thought their friends would expect them to do nothing; some thought their friends would want them to join in the bullying; and some thought their friends would approve of helping the victim. Correlating these responses to what students said they would do, Rigby and Johnson found that students who said they would intervene also believed their friends would approve of intervention.

The authors then asked students what they thought adults wanted them to do. Most children said that authority figures expected them to help a bullying victim. But when Rigby and Johnson compared these findings with students' statements about what they would actually do, they found no correlation. "Apparently," they write, "neither mothers nor fathers nor teachers were having any significant impact on their children's bystander behavior. This supports what many social psychologists and some developmental psychologists have told us. By the time children are in upper primary school, parental and teacher influence on their children's peer-related behavior is practically nonexistent."

This is discouraging news for parents and teachers. We'd certainly like to feel we have more influence on young people! But Rigby and Johnson drive the point home: just *telling* children how we expect them to behave in bullying situations is not enough. A more careful instructional strategy is required, and this is what the authors have been working on.

Their strategy builds on the finding that peer influence is a powerful factor. "We reason that once children know how many of their peers feel about bullying and why they think it should be stopped," write Rigby and Johnson, "there is a good chance that some of them – especially those 'on the fence' – will be influenced by what they have learned." Teachers must use an indirect strategy, they argue. "It must also seek to leverage the widespread good intentions that we have documented, so that children can be encouraged to object to bullying when the teacher is not around."

Rigby and Johnson's suggested intervention has eleven steps:

• Show children pictures or videos of bystanders witnessing bullying.

• Ask them what they, as bystanders, would do about it (orally or in writing)

- Ask them to give their reasons.
- Make sure that the whole class hears from students who say they would intervene.
- Acknowledge that sometimes the safest thing to do is go get an adult.
- Suggest that verbal intervention can be as effective as physical intervention.
- Suggest that encouraging bystanders to express disapproval can be powerful.
- Have students rehearse what they might say.
- Have students role-play how they might act.
- Don't make this a one-shot lesson; repeat the message and role-playing over time.
- Ask students to report back on their experiences, good and bad.

"In this way," say Rigby and Johnson, "the teacher, as well as the children, learn about what can be done to translate good intentions into effective action."

Rigby and Johnson close with this powerful paragraph: "Promoting bystander intervention is not risk free. The impetuous will make mistakes. Enemies may be made as well as friends. Being a hero can be close to feeling a fool. By being thoughtful and learning from experience, one can minimize the risk, but never eliminate it. Yet what is the alternative? Edmund Burke identified it: 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'"

"Playground Heroes" by Ken Rigby and Bruce Johnson in *Greater Good Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2006-07, spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Feb. 9, 2007; available at http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/greatergood/current_issue/rigbyjohnson.html

2. How Are Interim Reading Assessments Like Apgar Scores?

Obstetrics has one of the best records in all fields of medicine for extending life – yet obstetricians make the *least* use of elaborate, randomized experimental studies. How is this possible, asks Timothy Shanahan, president of the International Reading Association, in the current *Reading Today*.

Shanahan says it's because obstetricians and nurses give a quick 5-4-3-2-1 Apgar score to each newborn within minutes of birth. Apgar data allow them to quickly and objectively evaluate each child's condition – and get immediate feedback on the impact of their procedures. "That simple assessment has led obstetricians to try things out – not waiting for research – to see if they can improve their scores," says Shanahan. "Because they always know the baby's score, the doctors can easily see the relationship between their actions and the outcomes." In other words this quick, albeit imperfect, assessment is responsible for the steep learning curve of obstetricians, producing a better track record than other fields of medicine that depend on more complicated, cumbersome, long-range studies.

What's the relevance of this to education? There's been a big emphasis in recent years on "scientifically-based" research to identify effective practices. Shanahan suggests that quick, informal interim reading assessments may be better for improving practice; teachers can see what's working and what's not working with their own students in real time and make immediate changes in their classroom approaches – and monitor results to see what's working.

Shanahan suggests that intelligent use of interim assessments may have the same effect on reading achievement that Apgar scores have had on the health of babies.

"More Ideas Not Everyone Will Like" by Timothy Shanahan in *Reading Today*, February/ March 2007 (Vol. 24, #4, p. 18), no e-link available

3. The Case for Teacher-Led Professional Development

In this *Education Week*-sponsored online chat, three professional development experts respond to questions from the field. Excerpts:

• *Isn't teacher-led professional development little more than "sharing ignorance*"? Linda Emm, a Miami-based consultant, responds that this view reflects the low esteem in which teachers are held – and the conventional paradigm that professional development is something *done to* teachers. "Our work as teachers is filled with dilemmas," she says, "with units we want to make better and lessons that work great for first period and bomb with period four. We want our assessments to tell us if our students have mastered the content. We want to understand how to help the silent voices in the back of the room. We have data, data, data, and we want to know how to use it in a meaningful way to drive the decisions we make in our planning and implementation of lessons that engage each student. These are the areas where we want to learn and grow. Who better to collaborate with us in managing and dealing with these issues than colleagues who share our context, our concerns, and our students?... [T]he learning most likely to have an impact on our own practice is learning in which we are actively engaged with our peers, focused on the students we serve."

Emm bemoans the fact that many teachers say they don't have time to think about improving their practice because they need to get ready for the test. "In what universe is this a sane response?" she asks.

• *How can teachers persuade administrators to provide time for teacher-driven professional development?* Corrina Knight, a North Carolina sixth-grade teacher, understands the pressure principals are under and can relate to their reluctance to give up control over professional development. The answer, she says, is for teachers to shape a professional development plan with broad input, make it available to everyone for comment, and then hold themselves accountable for student learning results. "No one can argue against something that produces calculable student success and improved learning," she says. "If teachers can prove how the work they're doing will produce favorable results for the school, administrators will more than likely create the time and give them the flexibility they need for the work to continue."

• *Are there conceptual models for designing effective professional development?* Yes, says Carolann Wade, a North Carolina educator who works with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This organization believes that effective professional development (a) occurs over time, spanning months or years; (b) is job-embedded, requiring teachers to implement theories and methods in their own classrooms; (c) causes teachers to

examine their own practices and look at student results to see what is effective and what needs improvement; and (d) gets teachers working with teammates.

• *Isn't teacher-led professional development old hat?* Linda Emm acknowledges that learning teams have been around for a long time, but says that the old paradigm has been sharpened. "What defines this work," she explains, "is that the people in the group (grade-level team, academy, critical-friends group, or whatever) work together over time, with the express purpose of improving their practice. They do this by examining their own and their students' work and becoming experts about their students' strengths and weaknesses. They design instruction that is engaging and assessments that are authentic."

• *There's never enough time for professional development!* Corinna Knight says that good professional development takes time and agrees that finding enough is a constant challenge. She has two recommendations. First, focus on one or two major goals for the year; it's impossible to do a good job on more than a small number of major challenges, she says. Second, accept that professional development is a long-term learning process, not a series of one-shot workshops. "[Y]ou have to implement your knowledge," she says, "find out what works and doesn't, and determine what gives you the results you are seeking. One thing that can help generate the time needed for true professional development is innovative thinking – by teachers, administrators, everyone. When you're thrown a 'no' because of time, find a way to make it a 'yes.'"

"Chat Wrap-Up: Teacher-Directed Professional Development" with Corrina Knight, Linda Emm, and Carolann Wade in *Education Week*, Feb. 7, 2007 (Vol. 26, #22, p. 30); the full transcript is available (after free registration) at http://www.edweek.org/go/chat/development

4. School Phobia: What Should Be Done

In this article in the London *Times Educational Supplement Magazine,* reporter Adi Bloom says that in a school of 1,000 students, about 10 suffer from school phobia. These children's fear of going to school may produce palpitations, hot flushes, nausea, stomach pains, vomiting, and diarrhea. "Essentially," says Nicky Lidbetter of the National Phobics Society, "they are having mini panic attacks."

Telling a school phobic to "snap out of it" is the worst thing to do, says Lidbetter. "Shouting will just make them more scared. You need to listen to what's frightening them. Facing up to the thing you're frightened of is difficult and needs to be done in a supportive environment." This includes counseling and helping them overcome fears by easing into school in gradual stages.

"A child suffering from school phobia is not attention-seeking or spoilt," says Marianna Csoti, a former physics teacher whose daughter developed school phobia and who now advises schools on the issue. "School phobia is severe emotional stress. An adult having problems like that would have time off work. I see teachers in schools damaging kids by forcing them."

How should schools handle school phobia? Bloom suggests these Do's and Don'ts:

<u>Schools should</u>:

- Acknowledge the effort it takes for a school-phobic child to come to school.

- Inform all teachers about the problem and give appropriate advice.
- Explain the problem to the class in a basic and matter-of-fact way so they become understanding and tolerant.
- Think carefully about what is said to school phobics; they will be hypersensitive to criticism, real or perceived.
- It may be a good idea to excuse school phobics from physical education or class assemblies.
- Intervene immediately if there is any bullying.
- Try to anticipate the child's needs and smooth over any fears.
- Try to include the child in group activities; social isolation will compound any problems.
- Let school phobics visit the bathroom as often as they want.

Schools should not:

- Send school phobics home for illness without verifying their symptoms.
- Punish them for not conforming to expected behavior.
- Make a joke at the expense of the child, or say negative things about their behavior.
- Blame the child or their parents or caregivers.
- Ignore the child's hand if it is raised for the first time.
- Allow students to choose teams for games; if school phobics are unpopular, this could make them feel even worse about themselves.
- Force school phobics to take part in sports day or school trips, or make them feel bad for not taking part.

"Listen to What's Making Them Frightened" by Adi Bloom in the (London) *TES Magazine*, January 19, 2007 (p. 18-19), no e-link available

5. Making Math Relevant in Vocational Classes

In this *Education Week* article, reporter Sean Cavanagh describes the difficulty many vocational teachers have getting their students to see the relevance of mathematics. Once they're in the real world, they get it, but not when they're in school. One educator describes a common reaction from graduates: "Now that I'm in my work, I see math everywhere. Why didn't I get this in school?"

A new program out of the University of Minnesota's National Research Center for Career and Technical Education is tackling this problem. Researchers worked with 131 teachers and 3,000 students to find ways to integrate math and make it more understandable and less abstract. "We're not telling teachers to teach anything different," said James Stone, the project's lead researcher, "only to emphasize math when appropriate. It's about getting teachers and students to see math as a tool to solve a workplace problem. The effect is that kids no longer fear math."

Teachers who went through the program were asked to diagnose students' math knowledge up front; use "bridging" language" to move students from "shop talk" to "math

talk"; and gradually shift to more math-specific language. Some examples of ways of easing into math:

- In an auto-tech class, developing a formula for the cycle of a piston in an automobile engine, and using that to understand the formula for finding the volume of a cylinder;
- In a construction class, using the 3:4:5 ratio in measuring angles, and using it to bridge to the Pythagorean theorem.
- In business and marketing classes, developing the concepts of maximizing profits and break-even points.

Initial results from the program are encouraging, including higher test scores and positive student reactions.

"Teachers Helped to Mine Vocational Classes for Math" by Sean Cavanagh in *Education Week*, Feb. 7, 2007 (Vol. 26, #22, p. 12), no free e-link available

6. Knowing What You're Learning – and Why

In this column in the London *Times Educational Supplement Magazine*, Sara Bubb has a suggestion on how to motivate reluctant students: Make sure students know exactly what they are learning – and why. Not "mindless copying of objectives from the board," she writes. "That merely wastes time. All learners need to know why they are learning something. It is not always easy to explain, but articulating it will get you thinking about exactly what you are asking them to do and where it is leading."

"Motivate the Masses" by Sara Bubb in the (London) *TES Magazine*, January 19, 2007 (p. 29), no e-link available

7. Chester Finn Takes on the Fatalists

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Chester Finn bats down three arguments made by what he calls educational determinists:

• *Schools don't have enough money, time, and experienced teachers.* Finn insists that money is not the most important barrier to high achievement, as demonstrated by effective district, charter, and private schools that "beat the odds." There aren't enough of these schools, he admits, but the fact that they exist and get such good results with similar populations proves that it can be done.

• *Students face so many problems outside school that schools can't do much with them.* Finn cites increasing evidence of the key factors in schools that are successful in helping students overcome disadvantages – strong leadership, good teaching, a clear sense of mission, team spirit, a coherent curriculum, values that push students toward success – and a longer school day and year.

• *Many students don't have the innate ability to achieve proficiency.* Intelligence is far more elastic than the determinists believe, says Finn, and effective schools find ways to get much better performance from all students.

"Even if 100 percent proficiency by 2014 is dreamy," he concludes, "what a different country this would be – how much better, stronger, and prosperous in so many ways – if we moved from today's 30 percent proficiency (using NAEP standards) to, say, 70 or 80 percent."

"Fie On Fatalism" by Chester Finn, Jr. in *Education Gadfly*, Feb. 8, 2007 (Vol. 7, #6, p. 2-3) http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/index.cfm

8. Short Items:

a. Which elementary math programs work best? This *Education Gadfly* article reports that the What Works Clearinghouse recently released its evaluation of four elementary math programs. Everyday Math was the only one that has "potentially positive effects" on student achievement. Saxon Math, said the report, had "no discernible effects." The *Gadfly* article notes that these findings were based on a very limited number of studies.

"The Sum of the Evidence" by Martin Davis, Jr. in *Education Gadfly*, Feb. 8, 2007 (Vol. 7, #6, p. 3-4) http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/index.cfm

b. Elementary art enrichment online – *Phi Delta Kappan* has helpfully compiled websites that feature engaging art activities that could be used in a number of ways in the classroom, including providing enrichment for students who finish art projects early. Some of these sites may require plug-ins.

• http://kids.albrightknox.org - For students age 4-12 in English and Spanish, this site was created by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York and allows students to explore art history and the content of specific paintings, and also create their own works of art.

• http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/art_action_zone/noisy/interactive_structure/interactive.asp This site from the National Gallery in London allows students create a soundtrack for paintings by adding appropriate noises. A Macromedia Flashplayer is required, but it can be downloaded for free on the website.

• http://www.moma.org/destination - This site from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City has students listen to sounds that correspond to works of modern art, examine details, and gather ideas for projects.

• http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/smartkids/index.html - Created by the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, this site draws students into the world of artists, curators, docents, and art historians through journals, demonstrations, and readings.

• http://www.tate.org.uk/learning/kids/mementomori - This site from the Tate Modern in London is designed for older students and has them explore common symbols and their meanings in paintings by solving riddles.

• http://www.protozone.net/AJinteractives.html - This site from ProtoZone allows students to create art using paint tools, pattern makers, virtual 3-D construction, and animation.

• http://www.kidspsych.org/index1.html - This site uses puzzles and games to develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

• http://www.artsconnected.org/toolkit - This site from the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Art helps students learn the elements of art and the principles of design by watching animated sequences, identifying examples of artists' tools (line, color, and balance), and then creating art that uses these tools. There are also links to videos of artists at work.

• http://www.nga.gov/kids/kids.htm - The NGA Kids site from the National Gallery of Art engages students as independent workers or in a group discussion, and has computer art activities, art inquiry, museum guides, and search engines for the museum's collection.

• http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt_room/treasure_hunt.html - This site has students hunt through the collections of museum sites to find the answers to a virtual treasure hunt on art history.

• http://www.inventionatplay.org/playhouse_main.html - Created by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the National Museum of American History, this site has students invent Rube Goldberg-type objects, testing their creativity and problem-solving skills.

"Web Watch: Enrichment Activities for Elementary Art" by Veronica Zaenglein and Erin Biddle in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2007 (Vol. 88, #6, p. 481)

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 36 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 (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs
Atlantic Monthly
Catalyst Chicago
CommonWealth Magazine
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
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
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
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
TESOL Quarterly
Theory Into Practice
Times Educational Supplement, Magazine