

Marshall Memo 4

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 15, 2003

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Quote of the Week

“Well, you get to know kids, and you listen to them, and you do stuff together, and sometimes you like them, and then it makes it so you don’t want to beat them up on the playground.” (see #6)

1. The Word on Classroom Management

In the lead article in this month’s *Ed. Leadership*, Bob and Jana Marzano round up the research on classroom management (“a key to high student achievement”) and assert that “the quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management.” They believe that this has nothing to do with the teacher’s personality or even whether students view the teacher as a friend. Instead, it depends on how effectively teachers balance three agendas in their classrooms:

- *Appropriate dominance* – This means providing clear purpose and strong guidance for both academics and student behavior by (a) communicating clear expectations and consequences, (b) having clear learning goals at the beginning of each teaching unit (and giving feedback on progress, using rubrics where suitable), and (c) being assertive (including using effective body language and non-verbal signals).

- *Appropriate cooperation* – “Whereas dominance focuses on the teacher as the driving force in the classroom,” the Marzanos write, “cooperation focuses on the students and teacher functioning as a team.” The keys here are: (a) providing flexible learning goals that give different students different ways of reaching common goals; (b) taking a personal interest in students (including greeting them at the classroom door, having informal talks in the cafeteria and outside school, commenting on important events in their lives, and complimenting students in important achievements); and (c)

treating students fairly and equitably (including making eye contact with each student, moving around the room and standing close to all students at some point, giving students credit for their contributions, including all students in discussions and activities, and giving enough wait time for students to respond).

- *Awareness of high-need students* – In classrooms where up to 22% of students suffer from mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders and many are not getting mental health services, teachers need a repertoire of responses (including calling for help where it's needed). The Marzanos provide a one-page chart suggesting strategies for supporting five types of students: (a) passive students whose issues are fear of relationships and fear of failure; (b) aggressive students, who may be hostile, oppositional, or covert; (c) hyperactive or inattentive students; (d) perfectionists; and (e) socially inept students (unsuccessful in making friends, often teased for unusual behavior, appearance, or lack of social skills).

This article summarizes material from *Classroom Management That Works* by the Marzanos and Debra Pickering (available from www.ascd.org).

“The Key to Classroom Management” by Robert J. Marzano and Jana S. Marzano, *Educational Leadership*, Sept. 2003 (Vo. 61, #1, p. 6-13)

http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200309/marzano.html

2. Environment versus Genes

An article in the forthcoming issue of *Psychological Science* wades into the controversy over the relative importance of genes and environment in student achievement. University of Virginia psychologist Eric Turkheimer and his colleagues studied 319 pairs of seven-year-old twins (114 of them identical) and were able to isolate genetic and environmental influences. They found that early intervention in homes and classrooms can make a much bigger difference for children born to extreme poverty than they do for more advantaged children.

“Although there is much that remains to be understood,” said Turkheimer, “our study and the ones that have preceded it have begun to converge on the hypothesis that the developmental forces at work in poor environments are qualitatively different than those at work in adequate ones.” In other words, being given a decent environment can make an impoverished child’s intelligence blossom.

“IQ Study Weighs Genes, Environment” by Linda Jacobson, *Education Week*, Sept. 10, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #2, p. 1, 16, 17)

3. Attribution Theory in Israel

Learners can start viewing academic and social failures as events that they can change by applying effective strategies – by working smarter. That’s the main finding from a study by Ely and Lea Kozminsky in three elementary schools in Beer-Sheva, Israel. The Kozminskys sought to change the way students explained success and failure (causal attributions). In general, successful students tend to attribute their successes to effort and ability and their failures to bad luck (e.g., a difficult test question or a teacher’s grading error) – so they believe that working hard will produce better results. Less successful students tend to attribute their successes to luck and blame their failures on their lack of ability – so they believe that working harder will not make any difference.

Over a three-year period, the researchers tried to modify students’ beliefs about ability, luck and effort by focusing on classroom dialogue and teacher-student interactions. They used four strategies:

- *Modifying teachers’ beliefs* – Teachers attended a series of workshops designed to convince them that students’ use of efficient strategies could produce better academic results.
- *Guiding teachers’ feedback* – Teachers were given strategies for talking to students in ways that would change their causal attributions, including these:
 - Progress is personal and relative to your previous achievements.
 - Assume personal responsibility for success or failure.
 - Exerting effort makes a difference.
 - Effort requires time, attention, and persistence.
 - Giving positive reinforcement when students use of effective strategies.
 - Describing strategies for achieving success.
 - Asking guiding questions to help students examine their beliefs about the causes of success and failure and figure out how to improve learning.
- *Written dialogues* – Every three weeks, teachers and students had a written exchange in which each student shared a recent success or failure with the cause and the teacher responded,
- *Classroom discussions* – Each week, teachers conducted a 20-minute discussion about one of the vignettes and students talked about possible causes for success or failure and what actions should be taken.

The intervention changed the way teachers and students thought about success and failure. Teachers went from just urging students to work harder to introducing strategy-based attributions (“What do you do when you try harder?”) and helped students use these strategies (they adopted the slogan $\text{Effort} + \text{Strategy} = \text{Success}$). Gradually, students attributed fewer successes or failures to ability and more to effort, and learned how to focus effective effort – such as getting to class on time, being attentive in class, preparing for tests, or asking a friend for help.

“Improving Motivation Through Dialogue” by Ely Kozminsky and Lea Kozminsky, *Educational Leadership*, Sept. 2003 (Vo. 61, #1, p. 50-53)

4. Multiage Classes Fading?

A front-page article in the current *Education Week* reports that multiage grouping is falling out of favor in many schools in Kentucky (a state that had made multi-age grouping a major reform initiative). “Every chance we saw to return to a more traditional setting, we took it,” said Louisville principal Stephen Tyra. “A teacher can plan for a straight grade with much more depth.”

The driving force behind the shift back to traditional grouping seems to be the introduction of grade-by-grade state curriculum standards. But other concerns with multiage grouping are also involved, including the difficulty of challenging older students, the problem of “teaching to the middle”, and the stretch that multiage represents for new teachers.

Proponents of multiage regret losing some cherished advantages, including: having the same teacher for two or more years; students teaching each other; students taking more responsibility for their own learning; and students pushing themselves more.

Jim Grant, a consultant who has been a strong advocate for multiage grouping, was quoted as saying it was a mistake for Kentucky to require the reform on a statewide basis. It works best, he said, when it is adopted at the school level with plenty of teacher and parent input.

[Note: this article did not explore whether any schools were thinking of using “looping” (teachers keeping the same group of students for two years while moving up to the next grade) as an alternative to returning to traditional grade-level grouping. Looping would have some of the advantages of multi-age while still making it possible to concentrate on discrete grade-level curriculum.]

“Once-Popular ‘Multiage Grouping’ Loses Steam” by Linda Jacobson, *Education Week*, Sept. 10, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #2, p. 1, 15)

5. Computer Rights for Children

Newsweek columnist Steven Levy proposes a manifesto of five basics for the students living in the computer age:

- *Universal Internet access* – Every child must have access to a computer and the Internet. “It’s a no-brainer,” writes Levy. “Anyone without computer skills in this century is at a lights-out disadvantage. Anyone who can’t get on the Net is left out of the critical global conversation of our

time... While nothing can replace a flesh-and-blood teacher, computers are essential tools for learning..."

- *Teachers on e-mail* – Kids and parents should be able to ask teachers quick questions and keep in touch after school hours.

- *Freedom from multimedia* – Levy feels schools are succumbing to too many computer bells and whistles. "Exile the flashy software to the school's media lab, and ban PowerPoint from the classroom... The important things in school happen inside a student's head. They involve words and numbers and ideas, and are transmitted by reading and by the teacher's voice."

- *Freedom from predators* – Kids should be free from creeps – and "the less dangerous but much more prevalent forms of digital child-predation, including relentless marketing."

- *Filter the filters* – Levy calls for a happy medium that allows students to do research and explore (minus the porn).

"A Geek Bill of Rights" by Steven Levy, *Newsweek*, Sept. 8, 2003 p.E30

6. Morning Meetings

"The way that teachers begin each day sets the tone for learning and speaks volumes about what and whom they value, about their expectations for the way people will treat one another, and about the way they believe learning occurs," says Roxann Kriete, the Executive Director of the Northeast Foundation for Children. She suggests the key components of a successful daily class meeting:

- *Greeting* – Students greet each other and their teacher by name.

- *Sharing* – Each day, a few students share something important about themselves with the class.

- *Group activity* – The whole class does a short, fast-paced activity together (e.g., a song, chant, poem, math game).

- *News and announcements* – Students learn about what will happen that day.

Can a daily meeting make a difference? Kriete quotes Pete, a fourth grader who had a problem bullying other students: "Well, you get to know kids, and you listen to them, and you do stuff together, and sometimes you like them, and then it makes it so you don't want to beat them up on the playground."

"Start the Day with Community" by Roxann Kriete, *Educational Leadership*, Sept. 2003 (Vo. 61, #1, p. 68-70)

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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 educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, will act as your “designated reader”, looking through a wide range of publications as soon as they come out and sending a brief weekly e-mail summarizing a few select articles. Items will be chosen based on their relevance and usefulness to improving teaching and learning. Target topics include the following (those covered in this issue are underlined):

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; time management;
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate.
- *Effective teaching* – What produces high levels of student achievement; supervision and evaluation of teachers; 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 for teaching reading, writing, and math; parent involvement.
- *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.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

If one of the summaries is of particular interest, subscribers are encouraged to read the full article. E-links will be provided whenever possible.

Publications covered:

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Elementary School Journal
Harpers
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
Harvard School of Education Ed. Magazine
New York Times
New Yorker
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Review of Educational Research
Rethinking Schools
Teacher Magazine
Occasional books, lectures, and websites.

If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

Subscriptions:

The Marshall Memo is published weekly (with occasional breaks), usually on Monday. Major support from Research for Better Teaching and New Leaders for New Schools makes it possible to offer individual subscriptions at \$50 a year. To subscribe, please contact Kim Marshall at kim.marshall8@verizon.net or at 222 Clark Road, Brookline, MA 02445 (617-566-4353).