Marshall Memo 246

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 11, 2008

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"It's hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable, chaotic environment. If we're going to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple… What we mean by 'simple' is *finding the core of the idea*."

Chip Heath and Dan Heath (see item #1)

"No lesson plan survives contact with teenagers."

(*Ibid*.)

"Concrete language helps people, especially novices, understand new concepts. Abstraction is the luxury of the expert."

(*Ibid*.)

"Trying to teach an abstract principle without concrete foundations is like trying to start a house by building a roof in the air."

(*Ibid*.)

"People fail [Algebra I] because they are unable to learn at the pace that is arbitrarily set. They have a chapter for every week of the school year. And since math is cumulative, if you fall behind, you're dead in the water."

Lee Shulman (see item #3)

"At what point did God speak to Moses and say a college education is four years? Go to Europe and it's three years. Did God speak to them on a different day?"

Lee Shulman (*ibid*.)

1. How Teachers and Leaders Can Make Their Ideas *Stick*

In their brilliant and accessible book, *Made to Stick*, brothers Chip Heath, a Stanford Business School professor, and Dan Heath, an Aspen Institute consultant and researcher, analyze why people remember some ideas and not others. Why do improbable urban legends stick in people's minds (the Kentucky Fried rat; razor blades in Halloween apples; we only use 10 percent of our brains, etc.) while much more sensible and important information goes in one ear and out the other?

Here's an example of a presentation that met all the Heaths' criteria for "stickiness": people paid attention, they understood and remembered, they believed and agreed, they cared, and they acted on it In 1992, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) wanted to convince the public that movie-theater popcorn was bad for their health. At the time, theaters used coconut oil to pop their popcorn, and it was loaded with saturated fat – 37 grams in a medium-size bag, almost twice the 20-gram maximum that an adult can safely ingest in a day. After some careful thought, CSPI called a press conference and announced, "A medium-sized 'butter' popcorn at a typical neighborhood movie theater contains more artery-clogging fat than a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, a Big Mac and fries for lunch, and a steak dinner with all the trimmings – combined!" And they laid out all these items for the cameras next to a bag of popcorn. The presentation was a sensation. It was picked up by TV news and newspapers across the U.S., and soon people were avoiding movie popcorn in droves. Within months, movie theaters stopped using coconut oil to pop their popcorn.

The Heaths analyzed successful presentations like this, as well as countless examples of "unsticky" attempts to communicate, trying to pinpoint how people can get across ideas in a way that they are remembered. To make an idea stick, the authors found, teachers, leaders, writers, and others in the idea business need to build as many of these six characteristics into their message as possible:

- Simplicity
- Unexpectedness
- Concreteness
- Credibility
- Emotions
- Stories

(These can be remembered with the acronym SUCCESs.) Try applying this checklist to another example of successful idea communication – President John F. Kennedy's 1961 speech

announcing the intent to "put a man on the moon and return him safely by the end of the decade." This speech motivated and directed the efforts of millions of people and culminated in the successful 1969 Apollo 11 flight to the moon and back. Simple? Check. Unexpected? Check. Concrete? Amazingly so. Credible? Well, it sounded like science fiction, but the president was announcing it. Emotional? Check. Story? In miniature. If Kennedy had been a corporate CEO, he might have said, "Our mission is to become the international leader in the space industry through maximum team-centered innovation and strategically targeted aerospace initiatives." Instead, he presented his goal in a way that stuck.

More on the six key factors in a minute, but first, the "Curse of Knowledge." In a classic 1990 study [summarized in Marshall Memo 163], psychologist Elizabeth Newton asked people to think of a familiar tune and tap out the rhythm to a listener. Tappers guessed that there was a 50 percent chance their partners would guess the tune, but in fact, only about 2-½ percent did – 40 times fewer than predicted! What was going on?

The first problem, which plagues all teachers and leaders who want to communicate an idea with which they are familiar, is forgetting what it's like not to know it. There's an information imbalance, and because they're "cursed" with knowledge, it's hard to empathize with someone who has a blank slate; they present the idea *as if they were the audience*. "In the experiment," say the Heaths, "tappers were flabbergasted at how hard the listeners seem to be working to pick up the tune. *Isn't the song obvious?* The tappers' expressions, when a listener guesses 'Happy Birthday to You' for 'The Star-Spangled Banner,' are priceless: *How could you be so stupid?*"

The second problem is that most people believe that razzle-dazzle teaching skills matter most – but they don't. The Heaths describe a Stanford class in which students were asked to prepare one-minute presentations, got into small groups, gave their speeches to classmates, and were rated on how impressive and persuasive they were. Students who were the smoothest and most articulate got the top ratings and those who were less poised and whose first language wasn't English did less well. Ten minutes later, after distracting the class with a brief video, the professor asked students to get out a blank sheet of paper and write down everything they remembered from each speech. Most students found it difficult to remember more than one or two ideas, if that – and this was just a few minutes later! Significantly, the speeches that had received the highest ratings based on presentation skills were *not* the ones that got the highest scores on remembered information. In fact, there was almost no correlation between razzle-dazzle and "stickiness." The students whose speeches were remembered better were often lower-keyed speakers, but used certain techniques that made their ideas stick.

Here is more detail on each of the six factors that make presentations stick in listeners' minds:

• ***Simplicity*** – "It's hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable, chaotic environment," say the Heaths. "If we're going to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple. Not simple in terms of 'dumbing down' or 'sound bites.' You don't have to speak in monosyllables to be simple. What we mean by 'simple' is *finding the core of the idea*." This means

relentlessly prioritizing, pinpointing the most important, profound idea you're trying to communicate, and expressing it as compactly and economically as possible.

Three examples. First, newspaper reporters are trained to begin their stories with a lead-off paragraph that captures the most important point. "Don't bury your lead!" editors have barked at novice reporters through the years.

Second, during the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton's campaign managers boiled the candidate's core message down to this statement, which hung in the headquarters: *It's the economy, stupid*. This was extremely helpful in keeping the campaign (and the irrepressible candidate) focused on the issue that mattered most to the American people.

Third, starting in the 1980s, the U.S. Army required that each battle plan begin with a brief statement of the overall goal of the operation, labeled the Commander's Intent. The goal was that every soldier would know, "If we do nothing else during tomorrow's mission, we must…" The Commander's Intent came from the realization that *No plan survives contact with the enemy*. As Colonel Tom Kolditz of West Point explains, "Unpredictable things happen – the weather changes, a key asset is destroyed, the enemy responds in a way you don't expect. Many armies fail because they put all their emphasis into creating a plan that becomes useless ten minutes into the battle." The same applies in classrooms, say the Heaths: *No lesson plan survives contact with teenagers*.

But most people find it difficult to boil their ideas down to a single point and express it in simple English. This is especially true of smart people; they have ten points and want to make them all, leading to "decision paralysis." But if our ideas are going to be remembered, we have to discipline ourselves and get down to the real core idea and express it as compactly as possible. "Proverbs are the Holy Grail of simplicity," say the Heaths. They are "short ideas drawn from long experience" – for example, *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*, a powerful, simple idea that has cropped up independently in all parts of the world.

• ***Unexpectedness*** – The best way to get students to pay attention in the 48th history class of the year (for example) is to surprise them, violate their expectations, spark their interest and curiosity, grab their attention with counterintuitive information, open up gaps in their knowledge and then fill those gaps. People tend to not pay attention to routine information that sounds like common sense. "And why shouldn't they?" ask the Heaths. "If I already intuitively 'get' what you're trying to tell me, why should I obsess about remembering it?" So the teacher's or leader's challenge is to think about what is counterintuitive about the core message – some unexpected implications – and break your listeners' "guessing machines," opening up a gap in their expectations (which is uncomfortable), getting them paying close attention, keeping them guessing (*What will happen? Was I right?*), and then helping them put their understanding back together. "To make a message stick," say the Heaths, "you've got to push it beyond common sense to uncommon sense."

Kennedy's 1961 speech is a good example. *A man on the moon!* In 1961 this was an outlandish idea, and it sustained people through huge amounts of work and won support for enormous budget allocations.

Another example. When the young Nora Ephron walked into the first day of a journalism class in high school, the teacher passed out the following facts and asked students to write the lead paragraph of a news story about them: "Kenneth L. Peters, the principal of Beverly Hills High School, announced today that the entire school faculty will travel to Sacramento next Thursday for a colloquium in new teaching methods. Among the speakers will be anthropologist Margaret Mead, college president Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins, and California governor Edmund 'Pat' Brown." Students dutifully wrote about the eminent speakers, following the "who, what, where, when, and why" formula they already knew. The teacher collected the papers and scanned them quickly, put them aside, and told students what the lead should have been: "There will be no school next Thursday." For the rest of the year, he embedded in every assignment a hidden point that students had to figure out in order to produce a good story, and Ephron had begun her career in journalism and writing.

"This idea should be in the Sticky Hall of Fame," say the Heaths. "This teacher had a huge impact not because he was a dynamic speaker or a caring mentor – though he may have been both – but because he crafted a brilliant idea. It was an idea that, in a matter of seconds, rewrote the schema of journalism in the minds of his students… What made this idea work? First, the teacher knew that the students had a defective schema of journalism, and he knew *how* it was defective. Second, he made them publicly commit to their defective models with the 'write the lead' assignment. Then he pulled the rug out from under them with a well-structured surprise… [H]e took their mental models, gave them a swift kick, and made them work better." Overconfidence in students' minds (Ephron and her peers thought they knew what to do) is a barrier to learning new ideas, but by springing this kind of surprise, teachers and leaders can break through.

• ***Concreteness*** – Ideas are more memorable when they are expressed in terms of human actions and sensory information. A V8 engine is a tangible thing; "high-performance" is a concept about automotive propulsion. Our brains are wired to remember concrete data, not abstract ideas. Specifics give us "Velcro" to grab onto other ideas, especially abstractions. Concrete language is especially helpful when we are speaking with novices, say the Heaths. "Abstraction is the luxury of the expert. If you've got to teach an idea to a room full of people, and you aren't certain what they know, concreteness is the only safe language.… Abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it. It also makes it harder to coordinate our activities with others, who many interpret the abstraction in very different ways."

"This is perhaps the most important lesson that Aesop can teach us," continue the Heaths. "In proverbs, abstract truths are often encoded in concrete language: 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' Speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience… Abstraction demands some concrete foundation. Trying to teach an abstract principle without concrete foundations is like trying to start a house by building a roof in the air."

The main barrier to the principle of concreteness is forgetfulness – "we forget we're slipping into abstractspeak," say the authors. "We forget that other people don't know what we know." The Curse of Knowledge strikes again.

• ***Credibility*** – Ideas can be made believable by citing experts (the Surgeon General, for example) or reams of statistics. But often these are eye-glazing and ineffective. ["All the research says…" is usually not an effective approach with teachers, who have seen research manipulated and misused to justify one fad after another.] A better approach is to make the audience the experts, drawing on their own personal experience to prove the point. One of the most effective lines ever delivered in a presidential campaign was when Ronald Reagan, running against incumbent Jimmy Carter in 1980, said to the American people, "Before you vote, ask yourself if you are better off today than you were four years ago." In other words, don't believe me or all the numbers; see for yourself!

The Heaths suggest several other ways of making an argument more credible, such as:

- Including vivid details (a technique often used in urban legends), which can often be more persuasive than a barrage of statistics.
- Using a compelling physical model to convey abstract statistics. To illustrate the spread of nuclear weapons, Geoff Ainscow of the anti-proliferation group Beyond War drops a single BB into an empty metal bucket, saying this represents the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. After describing the devastation caused by that explosion, he noisily drops ten more BBs into the bucket; these represent the firepower of the missiles on a single U.S. or Russian nuclear submarine. Finally, he asks people to close their eyes and pours 5,000 more BBs into the bucket, one for every nuclear warhead in the world. This takes a little while, causing a low roar, and the audience is reduced to stunned silence.
- Reduce statistics to a human scale. Stephen Covey, in his book *The 8th Habit*, gives some statistics from a study of thousands of employees, illustrating how poorly they had absorbed their companies' goals (37 percent said they had a clear understanding of what their companies were trying to achieve, etc.). Covey then transports the statistics onto the arena of sports: "If, say, a soccer team had these same scores," he writes, "only 4 of the 11 players on the field would know which goal was theirs. Only 2 of the 11 would care. Only 2 of the 11 would know what position they play and know exactly what they were supposed to do. And all but 2 players would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than the opponent."
- Use the "Sinatra Test" – *If I can make it here, I'll make it anywhere*. Pick a statistic that is unassailable and subsumes all others, proving the point. "A single story that passes the Sinatra Test might overcome a mountain of skepticism," say the authors.
- Shock and awe. A final approach combines surprise with irrefutable data. A few weeks before the National Basketball season begins, all rookie players are required to attend a six-day orientation in a secluded hotel, with no pagers or cell phones allowed. One year, despite the secrecy, a group of female fans found their way to the hotel and caught the attention of some of the players in the bar and the restaurant. There was a lot of flirting, and players made plans to meet up with the women later in the orientation. The next morning, the rookies showed up to the first

meeting and were shocked to see the women sitting at the front of the room. They proceeded to introduce themselves one by one: "Hi, I'm Donna and I'm HIV positive." "Hi, I'm Sheila and I'm HIV positive" and so on. The message hit home far more effectively than it would from standard lectures and statistics.

• ***Emotions*** – All the techniques in the section just above help make a message credible, but to take action, people need to *care*. We're hard-wired to be empathetic, say the Heaths, so the key is to make the audience *feel* something about other people. "If I look at the mass," said Mother Teresa, "I will never act. If I look at the one, I will." International famine-relief organizations are far more successful raising funds when they portray a real person – Rokia, a seven-year-old girl from Mali, Africa, for example. Studies have shown that abstract statistics, no matter how compelling, result in people giving less money than they do with a simple, human appeal to help one girl.

Another example is a TV anti-smoking advertisement created by the American Legacy Foundation as part of the Truth campaign. A truck pulls up in front of a building and teenagers begin to unload long white sacks labeled "body bag," stacking them against the building. As the pile gets bigger and bigger, one of the teens shouts at the building through a megaphone, "Do you know how many people tobacco kills every day?" The answer is revealed: 1,800 – the number of body bags. This ad produced dramatic changes in smoking behavior compared to other campaigns. "What's the Truth campaign about?" ask the Heaths. "It's about tapping into anti-authority resentment, the classic teenage emotion. Once, teens smoked to rebel against The Man. Thanks to the ingenious framing of the Truth campaign – which paints a picture of a duplicitous Big Tobacco – teens now rebel against The Man by *not* smoking."

Another way of engaging people's emotions is appealing to their self-interest – because, after all, people care about themselves. But this needn't be crass, low-level self-interest. The Heaths argue that the most powerful appeals are to people's higher-level needs. They cite Abraham Maslow's research on human motivation, and his famous hierarchy of needs:

- Transcendence: help others realize their potential;
- Self-actualization: realize our own potential, self-fulfillment, peak experiences;
- Aesthetic: symmetry, order, beauty, balance;
- Learning: know, understand, mentally connect;
- Esteem: achieve, be competent, gain approval, independence, status;
- Belonging: love, family, friends, affection;
- Security: protection, safety, stability;
- Physical: hunger, thirst, bodily comfort.

According to recent research, say the Heaths, Maslow's assertion that people pursue their needs from the bottom of this hierarchy "is bogus – people pursue all of these needs pretty much simultaneously," they write. "There's no question that most starving men would rather eat than transcend, but there's an awful lot of overlap in the middle." So when we talk about appealing to people's self-interest, we should avoid "Maslow's basement" and appeal to their

better angels – the people they aspire to be. Studies have shown that such appeals are far more successful.

A classic example of this is Floyd Lee, a U.S. Marine Corps and Army cook who came out of retirement to run Pegasus, a chow hall near Baghdad Airport. The food in this eatery, prepared on the same budget and with the same ingredients as all the others in Iraq, is so superb that soldiers risk the dangerous drive to Pegasus to partake and enjoy a few hours away from the craziness of the war. "As I see it," says Lee, who has motivated his workers to create this amazing oasis, "I am not just in charge of food service; I am in charge of morale."

Another example is one teacher's answer to the perennial question in Algebra class: "Why do I need to know this? When will I ever use algebra?" Dean Sherman, a high-school math teacher, used to give the standard answers, but now he says: "Never. You will never use this." When students get over their shock, he goes on to say that people don't lift weights so that they will be prepared should, one day, someone knocks them over on the street and lays a barbell across their chests. "You lift weights so that you can knock over a defensive lineman," he says, "or carry groceries or lift your grandchildren without being sore the next day. You do math exercises so that you can improve your ability to think logically, so that you can be a better lawyer, doctor, architect, prison warden, or parent. Math is mental weight training. It is a means to an end (for most people), not an end in itself."

A final example is the way Dan Syrek, an expert on litter, handled the challenge of Texas's escalating, $25 million-a-year problem by appealing to people's identities. Syrek saw that standard anti-litter messages and $50 fines were not effective with the people who were doing the littering – 18-25-year-old, pickup-driving, anti-establishment men who liked sports and country music. Syrek named his target audience "Bubba" and created an advertisement that featured two hulking Dallas Cowboys players, Ed "Too-Tall" Jones and Randy White, picking up trash on the side of a highway. "Too-Tall steps toward the camera and says, 'You see the guy who threw this out the window… you tell him I got a message for him.' Randy White steps forward with a beer can and says, 'I got a message for him too…" An off-camera voice asks, 'What's that?' White crushes the can with his fist and says threateningly, 'Well, I kinda need to see him to deliver it.' Too-Tall Jones adds, '*Don't mess with Texas*.'" Subsequent ads featured other Texas-based athletes and country musicians. The campaign was dramatically successful; within a year, litter had declined 29 percent. In the first five years, visible roadside litter decreased 72 percent and cans by 81 percent. Syrek had succeeded in making Bubba care about his behavior "by showing him that real Texans didn't litter."

• ***Stories*** – "How do we get people to act on our ideas? ask the Heaths. "We tell stories… Stories have the amazing dual power to simulate and to inspire… Stories can almost single-handedly defeat the Curse of Knowledge." The Heaths share a number of dramatic stories that proved far more powerful in changing people's behavior than other approaches. Here's one: In a hospital's neonatal intensive care unit, a baby's color suddenly turned a deep blue-black. The doctors and other technicians who rushed to the scene assumed the problem was a collapsed lung and prepared to pierce the baby's chest and insert a tube to suck the air from around the lung. But a nurse was convinced it was a heart problem, pneumopericardium,

in which air fills the sac around the heart, pressing inward and preventing the heart from beating. She had seen it before, and the baby had died before a correct diagnosis was made. "It's the heart!" she shouted, but the doctors pointed to the heart monitor, which showed a normal beat. The nurse persisted, pushing their hands away and putting a stethoscope on the baby's chest. No sound. The heart was not beating. Just then, the chief neonatologist arrived and the nurse slapped a syringe into his hand and said, "It's a pneumopericardium! Stick the heart!" He did, and the baby lived. Afterward, the team realized why the heart monitor was giving misleading data: it was measuring electrical activity, not the actual heartbeat. The baby's heart nerves were firing, telling the heart to beat, but it couldn't because it was being strangled by the air pocket. This story became a legend in the hospital, told and re-told to make the points about data, persistence, not trusting every machine all the time, and listening to each other.

Stories help people simulate events and prepare for the real thing. "Mental simulation is not as good as actually doing something," say the Heaths, "but it's the next best thing… the right kind of story is, effectively, a simulation. Stories are like flight simulators for the brain."

Creating really effective stories is an art form, say the Heaths, and not everyone can do it. But there are stories all around us. It's relatively easy to *spot* a good story and use it effectively. There are three archetypal story lines, they say: The Challenge Plot, where a hero overcomes impossible odds and triumphs (David and Goliath); the Connection Plot, where someone helps others in a time of distress (the Good Samaritan); and the Creativity Plot, where someone makes a mental breakthrough, solving a long-standing puzzle (the apple falling on Newton's head). The trick, say the Heaths, is to be on the lookout for good stories and "recognize when life is giving you a gift."

Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (Random House, 2007)

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2. Using Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

In this *Theory Into Practice* article, University of Houston professor Bernard Robin starts off with the sobering results of a 2007 U.S. Department of Education study, which found that computers and software made virtually no difference in student achievement. Has all the money that's been invested in educational technology been wasted? Not so, says Robin. The problem is that many schools just haven't been using technology in the right ways. Plunking computers in conventional classrooms without the proper training won't get results, he says. The key is effectively *integrating* computers into classroom instruction so they "bring out the very best in how teachers teach and how students learn."

The first step is understanding the way young people use technology in their personal lives – MySpace, FaceBook, YouTube, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and social bookmarking, among others. What some adults haven't grasped is the sea change that's taken place from the first generation of Web communication – which involved uni-directional, *one-to-many*

communication – to the current generation, which is set up for interactive, *many-to-many* communication. Today's students are accustomed to using computers in personalized, dynamic, highly unpredictable ways. They find most school computer applications "lame" by comparison.

What's the answer? Digital storytelling, says Robin – getting students to create presentations that involve them personally and use technology to the max. Digital storytelling involves selecting a topic, conducting some research, writing a script, developing an interesting story, and enhancing it with computer-based graphics, recorded audio, computer-generated text, video clips, and music. This approach was pioneered in the late 1980s, but with today's technology – advanced computers and software, scanners, digital cameras, audio capture devices – even novices can produce quite polished products. The instructional advantages are obvious: active student engagement, using multiple senses and learning modalities, making abstract material more understandable, and hooking students' interest. Digital storytelling can also be used by teachers as a more powerful way of conveying material that might previously have been presented in lectures.

Students might produce personal narratives revolving around significant life events; informative stories involving content in math, science, and art; and stories that examine happenings in the news and historical events. For examples of digital storytelling from the University of Houston, see http://www.coe.uh.edu/digital-storytelling/examples.htm. For ideas and other resources, see http://www.coe.uh.edu/digital-storytelling/resources.htm .

Robin shares seven guidelines to guide students in digital storytelling (these are from the Center for Digital Storytelling):

- Point of view: What is the main point of the story and what is your perspective?
- A dramatic question: What will keep the viewer's attention – the question will be answered at the end of the story?
- Emotional content: Serious issues that come alive in a personal and powerful way and connect the story to the audience;
- Your voice: A way to personalize the story to help the audience relate to the content;
- An effective soundtrack: Music or other sounds that support and embellish the storyline;
- Economy: Using just enough content to tell the story without overloading the viewer;
- Pacing: The rhythm of the story and how quickly or slowly it unfolds.

"Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom" by Bernard Robin in *Theory Into Practice*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 47, #3, p. 220-228), no e-link available; the author can be reached at brobin@uh.edu.

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3. Using Frequent Assessments as Part of Flexible, Agile Teaching

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Jeffrey Selingo reports on an interview with Lee Shulman, who is retiring after 11 years as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Shulman says that the key to effective teaching is frequent low-

key assessments that are used to improve teaching and learning. He calls end-of-the-year tests "high stakes, low yield" and during-the-year assessments "low stakes, high yield." The latter are part of everyday learning, he says, giving students "an intellectual GPS so they know where they are."

Switching to a medical analogy, Shulman says that taking your blood pressure, if done frequently, is a low-stakes assessment that can give an ailing person a chance to start doing what's necessary to bring the blood pressure down. Taking one's blood pressure infrequently makes it a high-stakes assessment that might send a person in for open-heart surgery. The parallel to testing in schools is obvious.

Shulman worries that schools set too rigid a schedule for learning. In Algebra I courses, for example, he says, "People fail because they are unable to learn at the pace that is arbitrarily set. They have a chapter for every week of the school year. And since math is cumulative, if you fall behind, you're dead in the water." Shulman says that technology can help students learn at their own pace and give them feedback on how they are doing along the way.

Schulman has similar worries about the fixed amount of time that students are supposed to spend in college. "At what point did God speak to Moses and say a college education is four years?" he asks. "Go to Europe and it's three years. Did God speak to them on a different day?"

"The Future of Teaching Lies in the Power of Ideas" by Jeffrey Selingo in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Aug. 8, 2008 (Vol. LIV, #48, p. A4), no e-link available

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4. Rick and Becky DuFour Weigh in on Tracking

In this article on the "All Things PLC" website, Rick and Becky DuFour respond to a question from a school that was considering instituting tracking as a way to differentiate instruction. "While we enthusiastically endorse the idea of differentiated instruction," they respond, "we do not endorse the idea of tracking students as the best strategy for promoting differentiation, for four reasons:"

• *Research advises against tracking*. "Students in the lower tracks receive an education that is qualitatively and quantitatively inferior to that provided to children in the upper tracks," they say. Whatever schools distribute that matters educationally, lower-track students get less of it." Studies have shown that less is learned in the lower tracks, that students in these classes are disproportionately lower-income, Hispanic, and African-American, and that once a student is in a lower track, it's very difficult to escape.

• *Tracking widens the achievement gap*. "It is illogical to argue that the way to close the achievement gap is to assign some students into curriculum that is less rigorous and moves at a slower pace than the standard curriculum," write the DuFours.

• *Tracking sends the wrong message to students*. It tells them that the school expect less of them, and they internalize this message and blame themselves for their lack of success in school, concluding that they are not smart. Schools should be giving the opposite message:

"You can be successful here if you work hard. All of you will learn, some of you will need some extra help and more time, but all will succeed."

• *The presence of lower-track classes provides an easy way out when teaching fails*. In schools with tracked classes, the path of least resistance becomes dropping students to lower groups when they aren't successful. "Instead of intervening with more time and support to help students achieve standards," write the DuFours, "schools simply lower the standards. Students come to recognize that 'the less I do here, the less I have to do.'"

What's the alternative to tracking? The DuFours are against having separate and unequal *curriculums* for different groups of students, but they are in favor of differentiated *instruction* according to need. Here are their suggestions:

- Place students in heterogeneous groups for most of the school day.
- Have teachers work in collaborative teams that give frequent, common interim assessments.
- Use the results of these assessments to see which students need more time and support and which students are ready for deeper application and enrichment.
- Assign students to flexible, fluid homogeneous groups for a designated part of each day, with each teacher responsible for providing extra time and support for intervention and enrichment.
- Middle- and high-school students should have access to an accelerated program in math – as long as they are open to all students willing to take on the challenge. "Schools could then serve as a bridge to the advanced curriculum rather than a barrier," conclude the DuFours.

From the "All Things PLC" website blog at http://www.allthingsplc.info/wordpress.

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5. A Book About Being a Muslim Teenager in America

In this *New York Times* column, Samuel Freedman describes a book written by two American teens, Yasmine and Imran Hafiz, and their mother, Dilara Hafiz: *The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook* (Acacia, 2007). Improbably modeled after *The Official Preppy Handbook*, the Hafizes' book aspires to bridge the cultural chasm by describing their everyday religious and cultural practices.

The idea for the book came from Yasmine's realization that the young-adult section of her local bookstore had books about Christian, Jewish, and Wiccan teenagers, but none about Muslim teens – and also from the harassment that Imran experienced in the wake of 9/11. The Hafizes present a moderate, flexible version of Islam, emphasizing moral intent versus rigid observance of every rule (the family avoids liquor and pork, but mother and daughter don't wear the hijab or head scarf). "We believe Islam is a personal journey," says Hamid Hafiz, the father of the family. "We want to get away from the judgmentalism."

"Turning Humiliation Into Inspiration" by Samuel Freedman in *The New York Times*, July 26, 2008 (p. A13),

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/26/us/26religion.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Turning%20Humiliation%20Into%20Inspiration&st=cse&oref=slogin

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6. Short Items:

***a. A website for using* Civilization** – This site has custom game downloads, case studies, resources, and online forums for educators interested in using the *Civilization* series in their classrooms: http://Civworld.gameslearningsociety.org.

Spotted in *Theory Into Practice*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 47, #3, p. 269-70),

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b. An ancient history simulations website – This website was created by Jeremiah McCall, a secondary social studies teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio and features ways of using games to teach history: http://www.historicalsimulations.net/sitemap.htm; McCall can be reached at jmc.hst@gmail.com.

Spotted in *Theory Into Practice*, Summer 2008 (Vol. 47, #3, p. 270),

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

Website:

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Atlantic Monthly
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
CommonWealth Magazine
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
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 (online)
Teachers College Record
The Language Educator
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal