Marshall Memo 526

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
March 3, 2014

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Great schools are measured not by the accomplishments of their students, but by the lives led by their alumni."

Michael Chun (quoted in item #6)

"Real reform occurs when teachers convene, trade ideas, implement and refine them in their classrooms, and become sounding boards and resources for one another."

Diana Lam (see item #8)

"Mistakes are evidence that the questions I asked are tough enough to make you smarter."

Dylan Wiliam (see item #2)

"Right now, districts are in the near-impossible situation of operationalizing new standards before high-quality curriculum and tests aligned to them are finished… Think of it this way: we're still in spring training, a period when focusing on the fundamentals, teamwork, and steady improvement is more important than the score."

Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli (see item #3)

"Curriculum publishers were suspiciously quick to proclaim that what they are selling is aligned with the Common Core – and districts are rightly wary of such claims."

Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli (*ibid*.)

"When there is an empty space where a father should be, sorrow often grows. The void creates in a child an injury that the child is often unable to articulate or even recognize. And what children miss at home, they will often seek in the street, to ill effect."

Charles Blow (see item #1)

1. Building Better Boys and Repairing Broken Men

In this powerful *New York Times* Op-Ed article, Charles Blow cites some statistics from a recent study conducted by Child Trends:

• The percentage of fathers who hugged or showed physical affection to their pre-adolescent children every day in the past month:

- White – 76%
- Hispanic – 73%
- Black – 56%

• The percentage of fathers who told their children that they love them every day in the past month:

- White – 65%
- Hispanic – 63%
- Black – 45%

"I don't scold these fathers," says Blow, who is African American; "I weep for them and with them. I understand, on a most personal level, that conditioning. Sometimes men don't see that masculinity is as much about tenderness as about toughness. Sometimes they don't know how to manage emotions. Sometimes the world has so beaten them and so hardened them that expressing any vulnerability feels like providing an opening for an enemy… The issues facing many of these men are so complicated and layered with pain that they are incredibly daunting. There is a deficit of hope and a surplus of hurdles – familial, cultural, behavioral, and structural."

Blow recalls his own emotions from a fatherless childhood: "I was forced to experience him as a distant form in a heavy fog, forced to nurse a longing that he was neither equipped nor inclined to satisfy… When there is an empty space where a father should be, sorrow often grows. The void creates in a child an injury that the child is often unable to articulate or even recognize. And what children miss at home, they will often seek in the street, to ill effect. Many boys with that empty space lash out and act up, trying to be seen, searching, as people do, for love and affirmation, wanting desperately to be validated. And too many of us, in turn, see them as menaces rather than as boys struggling – often without sufficient instruction and against a tide of systemic inequity – to simply become men… We, as a society, must change our perspective when considering these boys and men, and more fully engage our empathy."

How can we do that? Through programs like Youth Guidance's Becoming a Man, says Blow, helping boys develop impulse control, emotional self-regulation, the ability to read

social cues and interpret others' intentions, raising their aspirations, and developing their sense of personal responsibility and integrity. This program was highlighted by President Obama in a White House ceremony last week launching the public/private My Brother's Keeper initiative. The task is daunting, concludes Blow, but "We can and must break these cycles of pain, building better boys and repairing broken men."

"Fathers' Sons and Brothers' Keepers" by Charles Blow in *The New York Times*, Mar. 1, 2014 (p. A19), http://nyti.ms/1hFvcNw

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2. Dylan Wiliam on Effective On-the-Spot Assessments

In this thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, Dylan Wiliam (University of London) describes the *initiate-respond-evaluate* cycle: the teacher asks a question, calls on a student with a raised hand, says whether the answer is right or wrong, and moves on. The teacher's intent is to check for understanding, but there are several problems:

- Student participation is voluntary, which leads to the "Matthew Effect" (the rich get richer, the poor get poorer).
- Calling on one or two students doesn't give the teacher an adequate sampling of the whole class's understanding.
- Low-level, off-the-cuff questions can mislead the teacher into thinking students understand when they don't.

"Trying to manage the learning that is happening in 30 different minds at the same time will always be extraordinarily challenging," says Wiliam, but he believes there are ways to do better:

• *Cold-calling* – The teacher tells students to raise their hands only to ask questions, not to answer them, and calls on students at random (using an electronic randomizer or popsicle sticks). This simple shift can have a major impact on teaching and learning, says Wiliam – but it often meets resistance from students: eager beavers aren't able to show off their knowledge, and non-participators have to pay attention. Nevertheless, a no-hands-up policy equalizes class participation, increases engagement, and gives the teacher a more accurate idea of the class's understanding.

• *Posing the question first* – Wiliam recommends asking a question first, pausing to get everyone thinking, and then calling on a student.

• *Using statements rather than questions* – For example, rather than asking, "Which country was most to blame for the outbreak of World War I?" the teacher says, "Russia was most to blame for the outbreak of World War I" and invites students to agree or disagree, with evidence.

• *Planning better questions* – Teachers should put more time into formulating questions, says Wiliam, "because we cannot peer into students' brains to see what is going on" and "you can't give good feedback until you find out what's going wrong in the first place."

For example, asking students to simplify the fraction 16/64 can produce a correct answer (1/4) for the wrong reasons (the student "cancelled" the sixes).

• *Pushing the envelope* – "If the students are answering every one of the teacher's questions correctly," says Wiliam, "the teacher is surely wasting the students' time. If the questions are not causing students to struggle and think, they are probably not worth asking." He is fond of saying to his students, "Mistakes are evidence that the questions I asked are tough enough to make you smarter." Research indicates that long-term learning improves when students make mistakes and correct their answers.

• *Asking multi-level questions* – This allows students at different achievement levels to participate. For example, the teacher might write two math problems on the board and ask, "Which of these two questions is harder and why?"

• *Using all-class response systems at least every 20-30 minutes* – Wiliam favors low-tech methods – dry-erase boards, ABCD cards, and students holding up fingers – and recommends multiple-choice questions to simplify analysis. "The powerful thing about all these approaches is that the teacher can quickly scan the students' responses and make an immediate decision about what to do next," he says.

• *Using exit tickets* – This can help the teacher decide where to begin the next lesson. If students write their names on the back of their answers, it can also allow the teacher to group students by misconceptions or creating mixed-answer groups for peer instruction.

"The Right Questions, the Right Way" by Dylan Wiliam in *Educational Leadership*, March 2014 (Vol. 71, #6, p. 16-19), http://bit.ly/1pSAwBF; Wiliam can be reached at dylanwiliam@mac.com.

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3. How Four Early-Implementing Districts Are Faring with Common Core

In this helpful *Education Gadfly* article, Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli report on a new study, conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Education First, of how Common Core implementation is going in four districts: Kenton County (KY), Metro Nashville (TN), District 54 (IL), and Washoe County (NV):

• *Teachers and principals have been the key to shaping public perceptions of the new expectations*. "Early and often, they explain how the Common Core differs from prior standards, what students should know and be able to do by year's end, and what new testing items will look like," say Northern and Petrilli. However, the most difficult part will be when more-rigorous tests are introduced and scores go down. Preparing parents for this is crucial.

• *Common Core gets traction when district and school leaders make it the linchpin of instruction, PD, and accountability*. These districts have worked hard to get principals to the point where they can speak knowledgeably about what Common Core-aligned instruction in their schools should look like and how to help teachers who are struggling with implementation. Still, teachers in these districts have worries: will principals understand the big idea of Common Core – that fewer standards, taught more deeply, will translate into higher student achievement? "Further," say Northern and Petrilli, "teachers fret, will they be evaluated

unfairly if their own principals don't appreciate the instructional shifts called for by the new standards?"

• *Finding or creating aligned curriculum materials has been a challenge*. "Curriculum publishers were suspiciously quick to proclaim that what they are selling is aligned with the Common Core," say Northern and Petrilli, "and districts are rightly wary of such claims… Yet creation of homegrown materials carries the same uncertainty as vendor-developed materials: Are they truly aligned? Are they any good? Will they produce the desired results in students?" Still, teacher-developed materials have the advantage of fostering buy-in for the new standards.

• *Professional development on Common Core has been uneven*. All four districts have relied on instructional coaches and master teachers. However, say Northern and Petrilli, "Teachers and principals report that the stronger specialists help them analyze lesson plans and student work in the context of the new standards, while the weaker ones add little value at best – and misinformation at worst."

• *The lack of aligned assessments is a major stumbling block*. Like educators in other Common Core states, these districts have been implementing the new standards while still administering old state tests that don't accurately measure them. "This void creates two problems," say Northern and Petrilli. "First, misaligned assessments undermine the critical link between what is reported in accountability systems (test-score and teacher-evaluation data) and what districts purport to value (Common Core-aligned instruction and student success with the new standards). Second, without Common Core-aligned summative data, districts don't know whether their implementation strategies are effective on a school- and district-wide scale."

"Right now," conclude Northern and Petrilli, "districts are in the near-impossible situation of operationalizing new standards before high-quality curriculum and tests aligned to them are finished. Until we have those in place, implementation will remain uneven. Yet time is passing, and the new tests and truly aligned textbooks are coming. Think of it this way: we're still in spring training, a period when focusing on the fundamentals, teamwork, and steady improvement is more important than the score. But districts oughtn't dawdle: they are just a year away from the big game. Batter up!"

"Common Core in the Districts: An Early Look at Early Implementers" by Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli in *The Education Gadfly*, Feb. 27, 2014 (Vol. 14, #9), http://edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-weekly#56668

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4. Preparing High-School Students to Deal with College Lectures

In this useful *Kappan* article, Newark charter school leader Paul Bambrick-Santoyo asks what can be done to prepare high-school students to be successful when they get to college and need to sit in lecture halls and master a flood of information often delivered with the most traditional pedagogy. "In the past, many of us hoped high school could instill a love of learning strong enough to buoy students during the toughest coursework," says Bambrick-Santoyo. That has clearly not been effective – witness the significant college dropout rate.

College-going graduates of his school report, "These teachers don't teach like you. We don't do activities. We have lectures."

Another approach is to make high-school courses more like college – in other words, boring. "But that move just pushes down to high school the premise that learning is solely for those who already know how to engage when the going gets tough," he says. "It ensures that many students will sink even sooner."

What's needed instead, says Bambrick-Santoyo, is "swimming lessons" – using the high-school years to explicitly teach the skills needed to be a successful undergraduate. These include:

• *Learning to take fast, comprehensive notes* – A step-by-step process includes teaching students to paraphrase ideas in class discussions, learning how to jot a fast summary after reading a few paragraphs of text, and mastering the Cornell Notes system. In Bambrick-Santoyo's school, students practice taking notes on a lecture, get critiqued by peers, and then get the teacher's feedback on accuracy and clarity. Students who go through this process are prepared to capture the key ideas in a college professor's presentation.

• *Learning to engage professors* – Lectures tend to be a one-way street, says Bambrick-Santoyo, so students need to learn how to ask pertinent questions when the time is right (and they may have only one chance). Since most college professors don't take questions till the end of a lecture, it's essential for students to jot ideas as they do the reading and listen to the lecture and choose the questions that are the most interesting and meaningful. The goal is for the professor to say, "Now *that's* a great question!" rather than, "I believe I covered that in today's lecture."

• *Learn to engage with peers* – "For students to be truly successful during a lecture, they must learn to be successful after it," says Bambrick-Santoyo. "They must be able to assemble study groups where they can… compare notes, clarify misunderstandings, develop questions for the professor, or complete a related problem set… By the time they reach college, students' vision for what a study session looks like must be crystal clear."

"Make Students College-Ready in High School" by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2014 (Vol. 95, #5, p. 72-73), www.kappanmagazine.org; the author can be reached at pbambrick@uncommonschools.org.

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5. A Teacher Reflects on His Impact

In this introspective article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, English professor Douglas Howard (Suffolk County Community College/Ammerman) describes his feelings when a former student returned to tell him that she'd been accepted into a highly competitive nursing program. "I have to admit that, for a while after she left, I felt pretty good," says Howard, "about my job, about my college and its mission, and about the whole idea that education can improve and transform lives and that we, as instructors, do play an important role in making that happen. Here was a student with dreams, and we had helped her turn them into reality."

But Howard's mood turned somber as he realized that he has no idea what happens to the vast majority of his students. "That is the strange reality of teaching," he says. "For a few months, we are front and center in our students' lives… And then it all comes to an end. Students leave, move on, transfer, graduate, and, quite often, we never see or hear from them again… Teaching, in this regard, is the great open-ended narrative, the romantic fragment, the perpetually unfinished symphony. And, like all great fragments, a good portion of it works on and through our imaginations… Did Jim, who talked about becoming a therapist, go on to graduate school in psychology? Did Jessica, who argued so passionately in class against the death penalty, make it as a lawyer?"

There is the possibility, says Howard, "that some students – maybe most of them – will leave our classrooms, walk out into the world, and never give us, our lessons, maybe even our subjects another thought. Years later, the point of our entire course, or the concept that we drilled so repeatedly and emphatically, could be a multiple-choice question that they will get wrong."

But then his mood turns more hopeful. Maybe some students "got the message and will put it to some use down the road, whether or not they remember our names… Months or even years after they've graduated, students may develop an interest in a topic that they first learned about in our classrooms. Without even realizing or crediting us for it, a student may understand some allusion, get more out of some film, contribute to some conversation, figure out some mathematical equation, or make sense of some scientific data all because of something we said or did – because of a paper that they struggled with, an exam that they studied for, or a lesson that went completely as planned or horribly awry."

Howard concludes with an analogy. His two-year-old daughter, he says, probably won't remember most of what her parents did with her in the early years – the birthday party, the kiss goodnight, a family vacation. And yet all those things have played a part in sculpting her as a person. "The same goes for my students," he says. "I want to believe that what I do in the classroom matters on some level, that it has helped to shape their sense of the world and is responsible, in some small way, for their sense of self and belonging. If teaching is an act of faith, then we need to believe in order to do our jobs."

"A Teaching Career in Fragments" by Douglas Howard in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 28, 2014 (Vol. LX, #24, p. A31-32),
http://chronicle.com/article/A-Teaching-Career-in-Fragments/144911?cid=megamenu

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6. How Can We Measure a School's Success?

"Ranking schools is a hollow, misleading exercise that can do more damage than good," say John Gulla (Edward Ford Foundation) and Olaf Jorgenson (Almaden Country School, CA) in this article in *Independent School*. But they agree that educators can't "reflexively dismiss all efforts to apply some elements of quantitative analysis to our work." They list nine measures of school effectiveness – three traditional and six more recent.

Selecting judiciously which of these to use, say Gulla and Jorgenson, might give a good sense of a school's quality:

• *Parent satisfaction* – This includes the level of parent demand, a low rate of attrition, and positive ratings on a well-constructed parent survey. As important as giving a survey is how well the results are used. "If a measurement matters at all," says information expert Douglas Hubbard, "it is because it must have some conceivable effect on decisions and behavior. If we can't identify a decision that could be affected by a proposed measurement and how it could change those decisions, then the measurement simply has no value."

• *Standardized testing* – Standardized multiple-choice tests can be seen as measuring (in the words of John Austin of King's Academy in Jordan) "the educational equivalent of factory work" – better suited to the Industrial Age that faded decades ago. Far more valuable, say Gulla and Jorgenson, are SAT II, AP, and IB tests with their open-ended and creative-response questions. The key data to watch for are trends over time and the value a school adds to students' entering achievement levels.

• *Accreditation* – A thorough audit can provide valuable insights on a school's effectiveness as measured against its mission and aspirations, in the context of its resources and capacities. But a lot depends on the quality of the visiting team and the school's self-study.

• *Value-added assessment* – The College and Work Readiness Assessment (CWRA+) is designed to measure how much a school contributes to a student's 21st-century skills from freshman to senior year – critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and ability to communicate in writing. This assessment is a "compelling alternative" to the limited range of the SAT I, say Gulla and Jorgenson.

• *Student surveys* – Well-crafted questionnaires can quantify students' level of engagement, providing important insights on how students feel about their school's purpose, relevance, rigor, and challenge, as well as relationships, support, and connectedness. The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE – see following article) can provide information that is "[p]otentially far more institutionally useful than data from standardized achievement testing," say Gulla and Jorgenson.

• *Benchmarking* – The key factor in a meaningful analysis of schools is comparing apples to apples and not rank-ordering, say the authors. "Healthy benchmarking collectives… are characterized by member school commitment to collegiality and use of data to benefit the greater good," they say.

• *Data dashboards* – These corporate-inspired tools for displaying a school's "vital signs" in a user-friendly format can include enrollment and re-enrollment data, budget information, student and staff attendance, course selections, test results, college placements, post-graduate achievement, and more. "Still, much of what we do in schools cannot be easily measured and is not always subject to quantitative analysis," say Bulla and Jorgenson. "Variables including curiosity, resilience, self-control, and determination – what we sometimes refer to as personality traits or simply 'character' – are even more critical than measures of IQ or academic achievement in determining how and why children succeed."

• *Longitudinal alumni surveys* – "Great schools are measured not by the accomplishments of their students, but by the lives led by their alumni," said Michael Chun, past president of Kamehameha School in Hawaii. John Austin agrees: "Are they active and involved in their communities? Have they put their own educations to work in the service of others? Are they doing what Howard Gardner and his team at Harvard call 'good work' – work that is excellent in quality, socially responsible, and meaningful to its practitioners?" Insights on questions like these can be gleaned by periodically surveying graduates and asking them for critical reflections on the school and how well it prepared them – or didn't prepare them – for occupations, relationships, collaboration, leadership, self-advocacy, and coping.

• *A senior survey* – Harvard professor Richard Light is developing an interview protocol for graduating seniors designed to elicit information about both student life and the academic program.

• *The Mission Skills Assessment* – This assessment is designed to measure middle-school students' curiosity, teamwork, resilience, ethics, and time management. Comparing data with other schools might provide valuable insights on the most effective practices in developing these vital life skills.

This is an exhaustive – and exhausting – list of possible measures of school effectiveness, conclude Gulla and Jorgenson. The trick is to select the measures that most accurately and efficiently measure what a school wants to do. "As school leaders, we must be courageous, resisting the significant pressures to commodify education as a neatly defined, measured set of metrics and program outcomes," they say. "At the same time, we do our students and ourselves no favors if we reject all efforts to measure the value we know we deliver."

"Measuring Our Success: How to Gauge the 'Value Added' by an Independent School Education" by John Gulla and Olaf Jorgenson in *Independent School*, Spring 2014 (Vol. 73, #3, p. 28-36), www.nais.org

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7. An Informative High-School Student Survey

In this article in *Independent School*, Amada Torres (National Association of Independent Schools) reports on her organization's three-year pilot of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), which is designed to measure three aspects of students' life in school:

- Engagement of the mind – Cognitive, intellectual, and academic;
- Engagement in the life of the school – Social, behavioral, participatory;
- Engagement of the heart – Emotional.

Here is a sampling of questions with the stem, "How much has your experience at this school contributed to:

- Writing effectively
- Thinking critically
- Reading and understanding challenging material

- Learning independently
- Developing creative ideas and solutions
- Speaking effectively
- Using technology to gather and communicate information
- Acquiring skills for a job after completing high school
- Developing career goals
- Applying school-based knowledge to everyday life
- Understanding why what you learn in school will be important after high school.

To see a sample HSSSE survey, go to http://ceep.indiana.edu/hssse/HSSSE_ForResearch.pdf; for general information, see http://ceep.indiana.edu/hssse.

"Assessing Student Engagement" by Amada Torres in *Independent School*, Spring 2014 (Vol. 73, #3, p. 16-18), www.nais.org

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8. A Charter School, District School, and Parochial School Collaborate

In this *Kappan* article, Diana Lam describes how her Boston charter school is partnering with a parochial school and a regular Boston public school, each sharing its strengths. The partnership focuses on five areas:

- Designing project-based Expeditionary Learning curriculum units and implementing effective classroom practices aligned with Common Core;
- Using interim assessment data and student work to refine instruction and reteach concepts that students failed to master (Achievement Network is helping the schools with assessment design and coaching teacher teams);
- Implementing arts programs, including joint musical performances (the charter school is implementing the El Sistema orchestral music program);
- Implementing programs in social-emotional learning being used by the parochial school;
- Focusing on effective practices for English language learners pioneered by the district school.

"Every school has something to learn and something to teach," concludes Lam. "There is nothing fundamentally different about the students or teachers at a public school, private school, or charter school… Real reform occurs when teachers convene, trade ideas, implement and refine them in their classrooms, and become sounding boards and resources for one another… When teachers can reach through the political haze of school competition, students and communities benefit."

"Charter, Private, and Public Schools Work Together in Boston" by Diana Lam in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2014 (Vol. 95, #5, p. 35-39), www.kappanmagazine.org; Lam can be reached at dlam@conservatorylab.org.

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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.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 43 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
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Knowledge Quest
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NASSP Journal
NJEA Review
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Reading Today
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
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Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Wharton Leadership Digest