

Marshall Memo 93

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 27, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

“My father is a brain surgeon; this is more complicated.”

Tom Vander Ark, Gates Foundation official, on high-school reform (see item #2)

“If we want students to work twice as hard, especially those below grade level, we need secondary schools that are more challenging, more interesting, and more supportive.”

Ibid.

“Students need for their schools to be comprehensive *and* rigorous *and* meaningful... If we can help all high-school students find the one thing they are good at and that excites them, we will have an excellent chance of engaging them in the remainder of what is important in their secondary education.”

Monte Moses, David Livingston, and Elliott Asp (see item #1)

“The most important relationship in schooling is the one that binds teacher and student. When that relationship is grounded in mutual respect, high expectations, engagement, and cultural sensitivity, the student is poised for success.”

Ibid.

“Encouragement is what school people need. Trying to berate educators into embracing reform is not a viable management strategy.”

Ibid.

“It’s magical to see the transformation when students on a college visit realize that they can go to college.”

Diane Mero, Marlene Hartzman, and Elizabeth Boone describing East Harlem’s Young Women’s Leadership School in *Principal Leadership*, June 2002 (p. 11)

“We’re not smarter; we just work harder.”

Students at University Park Campus School, Worcester, MA (*ibid.*, p. 35)

“What can we do better?”

Perennial staff question at Duncan Polytechnical High, Fresno, CA (*ibid.* p. 44)

1. Preparing Every Student for “College Plus”

“Should every youngster be educated for college?” ask Monte Moses, David Livingston, and Elliott Asp, three Colorado school administrators, in this thoughtful *Education Week* article. Such a question would have seemed revolutionary just a few years ago. Now we are seriously contemplating the goal of higher education for all students. The advantages are obvious: a college degree produces \$1 million in additional lifetime income compared to a person with a high-school diploma. In addition, college success “promotes the examined life.”

But what about kids who, for legitimate reasons, do not choose to enroll in college after high school? Will they and their parents internalize a demeaning tone toward other life trajectories if schools are too gung-ho about college for all? Moses, Livingston, and Asp feel the compromise that is most respectful to the full spectrum of future choices is to make “college core plus” the goal.

But what does that involve? The central point of the article is that we have some serious work to do before the goal is attainable. “College preparedness for all is undoubtedly the answer,” say the authors. “But no one has invested the depth of thought required for such a massive undertaking to succeed. All of our students must be able to make postsecondary choices based not on the limits of their education, but on the depth and breadth of their interests, their achievements, and their hopes for the American dream.”

“[W]e owe it to students,” they continue, “to avoid the trap of defining preparedness for college and life too narrowly. Being ready for college isn’t the only responsibility we have to students. Helping each one develop fully at a human being is the higher calling.” To do this right, they believe educators need to attend to three issues: content, structure and relationships.

- *Content* – The goal should be all graduates prepared to start *and finish* college. This means taking a close look at the high-school curriculum and aligning it to college requirements as well as the increasingly rigorous demands of careers and technical education programs. It also means teasing a more demanding curriculum back into the lower grades so that all students meet key mileposts (for example, reading on grade level by the end of third

grade and enrolling in increasingly sophisticated math offerings in middle and high school). “When students have these experiences,” say Moses, Livingston, and Asp, “more of them will believe that college is within their grasp.” Getting all students on track for college will require lots of extra support for those who are behind, and that will cost money. There are no shortcuts, say the authors.

- *Structure* – To get all students ready for college, say Moses, Livingston, and Asp, we need to “backwards design” pre-kindergarten through high school, with every level seeing its contribution to the ultimate objective: “In the long run, achieving universal college preparedness may hinge on quality early-childhood education and related reforms,” they write. “It is our responsibility to bring coherence to the school experience of students, pre-kindergarten through college graduation. Breaking through the segmentation found at all levels of education is imperative.” It will also hinge, they say, on high schools getting away from a narrow orientation on courses and credits and making school a lively, relevant, and interactive experience for all students. They warn against “either-or” thinking about school reform: “Students need for their schools to be comprehensive *and* rigorous *and* meaningful... If we can help all high school students find the one thing they are good at and that excites them, we will have an excellent chance of engaging them in the remainder of what is important in their secondary education.”

- *Relationships* – “The most important relationship in schooling is the one that binds teacher and student,” say the authors. “When that relationship is grounded in mutual respect, high expectations, engagement, and cultural sensitivity, the student is poised for success.” They believe that it’s also vital to involve parents. If families have information gaps on college-entrance requirements, options, and funding, schools need to provide the information. Principals are also key players. Secondary school leaders in the authors’ Colorado district meet personally with recent graduates of two- and four-year colleges and listen to their suggestions on what will make a difference for future students. And answers go beyond “more rigor” and “more testing.”

Finally, the authors say that we need to be more positive toward educators: “Encouragement is what school people need,” they conclude. “Trying to berate educators into embracing reform is not a viable management strategy.”

“If College Is the Answer, What Are the Questions?” by Monte Moses, David Livingston, and Elliott Asp in *Education Week*, June 22, 2005 (Vol. 24, #41, p. 45, 47)
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/22/41moses.h24.html>

2. High-School Reform: Harder Than Brain Surgery

Tom Vander Ark, who heads up the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's work on high-school reform, shares several insights in this thoughtful *Education Week* article. He begins with a sobering confession: "It is even harder than we thought to create widespread improvement. My father is a brain surgeon; this is more complicated." He goes on to make five points:

- *Public education should have a clear focus on the goal: helping all students graduate ready for college, work, and citizenship.* He cites the America Diploma Project's 2004 finding that employers who hire high-school graduates want them to have college-admission-level skills. Currently, only about a third of students reach this level of achievement. "We cannot sustain our nation's competitiveness and civic well-being," writes Vander Ark, "if we continue to allow most of our young people to leave high school without the skills they need for long-term success." He suggests that school districts set higher and more specific expectations and metrics for achievement, promotion, graduation, and college preparedness.

- *New-school development is a promising strategy. Well-defined school models and strong support lead to success at scale.* Start-up schools can be particularly helpful in communities where there are few alternatives to large, dysfunctional high schools.

- *High-school improvement remains a difficult challenge.* Reforming existing high schools must center on improved rigor, relevance, and relationships, says Vander Ark. This requires major changes in curriculum, instruction, and structure. Many large high schools have begun by breaking into smaller schools or small learning communities. In some cases this has worked, but in others it has created massive logistical problems and distracted principals and teachers from instruction. An alternative strategy is to implement teaching reforms in the first year and use them to create gains in student achievement and momentum that can sustain restructuring and other reforms. Vander Ark recommends that schools adopt a well-established reform model such as First Things First, paired with strong technical assistance.

- *School districts should adopt system-wide reform plans.* "We increasingly view the system, including the community, as the ultimate lever of change," says Vander Ark, "...creating an aligned system focused on instructional improvements: a common view of quality instruction, feedback from instructional coaches, diagnostic performance data, and leaders focused on results." He also says that it helps if there are choices within the system, as has happened in Philadelphia's mixed portfolio of district, charter, and externally managed schools.

- *Leadership matters.* Vander Ark says we need to accompany ambitious college-for-all goals with high support: "This massive challenge will require engaged communities, public-private partnerships, skilled intervention teams, high-capacity reform models, data

systems that can track the achievement and promotion of every student, and skilled teachers in every classroom.”

Vander Ark concludes by swatting down the notion that if elementary schools do their job, higher achievement will necessarily flow into the upper grades. “If we want students to work twice as hard,” he writes, “especially those below grade level, we need secondary schools that are more challenging, more interesting, and more supportive.”

“Lessons from High School Reform: Achieving ‘Success at Scale’” by Tom Vander Ark in *Education Week*, June 22, 2005 (Vol.24, #41, p. 56, 46, 47)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/22/41vanderark.h24.html>

3. The Values Behind Competition in the Classroom

In this article in the July *American School Board Journal*, Susan Black summarizes familiar arguments on competitive classrooms and cooperative learning from Alfie Kohn, Marvin Marshall, and David and Roger Johnson. She concludes that there is a place for competition, but it’s best if it is reserved for students who choose to compete and is limited to activities outside the classroom (for example, spelling bees at the city, state, and national level).

In a sidebar, Black quotes two lists on the value systems lurking behind each kind of classroom:

• ***Competitive classrooms:***

- Some students are entitled to win because they’re smarter, faster, stronger, more competent, and more successful than others.
- Winning is more important than learning and understanding important curriculum concepts.
- Students should be rivals in the classroom.
- Only students who win deserve praise and rewards.
- Extrinsic rewards are necessary to motivate students.

• ***Cooperative classrooms:***

- Teachers show commitment and concern for every student’s learning and achievement.
- The emphasis is on teamwork and civic responsibility to achieve mutual goals.
- Teachers hold high expectations and extend encouragement to all students.
- Teachers value students for who they are and what they can contribute.
- Students are intrinsically motivated by interesting and important lessons that have genuine meaning in their lives.
- The classroom atmosphere is cheerful, safe, and supportive.

Black concludes by describing an interaction she witnessed recently in a high-school English classroom:

“The 11th-graders had just finished reading Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, a 1906 exposé of Chicago’s meat-packing plants. The teacher posed a series of deep questions as a homework assignment: If you were Upton Sinclair, what story would you write today? What point of view would you use to tell your story? What types of characters would you include? What commentary on your society would you want to make?

When the kids arrived for their first-period class, they clamored to begin the discussion. One boy had already written a first chapter, even though that was not an assignment. Another boy, who was often sullen and withdrawn, talked at length about immigration-related injustices and how he would tell his story from the viewpoint of migrant workers. Before I knew it, the 50-minute class period had flown by. Looking at my notes, I saw that every kid in this class had participated and learned.

They were all winners.”

“Research: And the Winner Is...” by Susan Black in *American School Board Journal*, July 2005 (Vol. 192, #7, p. 33-35), <http://www.asbj.com/current/research.html>. The sidebar is from “Cooperative Learning, Values, and Cultural Plural Classrooms” by David and Roger Johnson: <http://www.co-operation.org/pages/CLandD.html>

4. Work to Be Done Identifying and Treating Mental Health Problems

Half of all Americans will have a mental-health disorder in their lifetimes, and half of those disorders have begun by the age of 14, with anxiety disorders and major depression at the top of the list. This information is from a two-year nationwide study of 9,282 adults published in the June 2005 *Archives of General Psychiatry*. The study also found that less than half of those afflicted by these disorders received adequate treatment. “From a public-health point of view,” said Ronald Kessler, a Harvard public-health professor who headed up the study, “it’s distressing that so few people are getting treatment. It’s not a trivial issue.”

According to Mr. Kessler, these were the reasons that so many did not receive treatment:

- They didn’t believe they had a problem.
- They didn’t think treatment would help.
- They avoided treatment because of cost or personal embarrassment.

“Mental-Health Disorders Gain Foothold During Teenage Years” by Marianne Hurst in *Education Week*, June 22, 2005 (Vol. 24, #41, p. 12)

5. Short Items:

a. Online auction fundraising – Some savvy parent groups have begun using online auctions to raise funds for school coffers. For example, parents in Cohasset, Massachusetts recently launched a “Save Three Teachers” fundraising effort when three teaching positions were threatened by budget cuts. Parents did traditional fundraising activities but also solicited donations from local businesses (including jewelry and gift certificates) and launched an e-Bay type auction with competitive bidding, reaching out to parents, the local community, and alumni, some of whom had moved far away from the district. In all, they raised \$70,000, enough to save two of the teachers’ positions – and \$15,000 of that came from the online auction.

Several companies specialize in non-profit fundraising auctions, and they will post photographs of auction items, track bidding, set up online payments, create a detailed contact list, and generate e-mail messages to potential buyers and thank-you letters to successful bidders.

- <http://www.AuctionAnything.com> based in Orlando, Florida
- <http://www.cMarket.com> based in Cambridge, Massachusetts;
- <http://www.ReadySetAuction.com> based in Bainbridge Island, Washington.

Most companies charge as much as \$1,000 and also take 2-9 percent of the net revenue from the auction. This means that if the auction goes badly, it’s actually possible for the school to lose money!

“Online Auctions Prove Boon for School Fun-Raisers” by Rhea Borja in *Education Week*, June 22, 2005 (Vol. 24, #41, p. 8)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/22/41auction.h24.html>

b. A bullied student speaks out – Ronald Seawright, 7, was bullied in his St. Louis school and didn’t tell anyone for several weeks because his tormentor threatened him with bodily harm. When his mother finally got the truth out of Ronald and helped stop the bullying, he wrote a 17-page book, “The Bully,” exploring what makes a bully tick, why bullies exist, and what kids can do if they ever have a close encounter with a bully (“Tell somebody!”). Here is his definition of a bully:

- “A person who is tough and likes to fight and is always fighting or hurting people.
- A person with a bad attitude.
- A person who takes long looks at you with a mean frown on their face.
- A person who treats friends and others BAD.”

“Six Questions About Confronting a Bully” – an interview with Ronald Seawright in *American School Board Journal*, July 2005 (Vol. 192, #7, p. 11), no e-link available

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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 best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 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 39 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of 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, provide e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2003-04).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year (\$25 for a half-year, beginning late January). 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:

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- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Educational Research Journal

American Educator

American School Board Journal

ASCD SmartBrief

Atlantic Monthly

Bay State Banner

Boston Globe

CommonWealth Magazine

District Administration

Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)

Education Digest

Education Gadfly

Education Next

Education Update (ASCD)

Education Week

Educational Leadership

Educational Researcher

Edutopia

Elementary School Journal

Harper's

Harvard Business Review

Harvard Education Letter

Harvard Educational Review

Journal of Staff Development

Middle School Journal

NASSP Bulletin

New York Times

New Yorker

Newsweek

PEN Weekly NewsBlast

Phi Delta Kappan

Principal Magazine

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Psychology Today

Reading Research Quarterly

Reading Today

Rethinking Schools

Review of Educational Research

Teachers College Record

Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible.