Marshall Memo 644

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 4, 2016

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Reading and writing, like any other crafts, come to the mind slowly, in pieces. But for me, as an E.S.L. student from a family of illiterate rice farmers, who saw reading as snobby, or worse, the experience of working through a book, even one as simple as *Where the Wild Things Are*, was akin to standing in quicksand, your loved ones corralled at its safe edges, with arms folded in suspicion and doubt as you sink."

Ocean Vuong (see item #6)

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"
"Celebrating the fifth anniversary of your asking me that question."

An interview question and the response in "Risky Business: When Humor Increases and Decreases Status" by Bradford Bitterly, Alison Wood, and Maurice Schweitzer in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, forthcoming, summarized in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2016 (Vol. 94, #7-8, p. 25-26), www.hbr.org

"Start by accepting that our minds are stubborn beasts. It's very hard to eliminate our biases, but we can design organizations to make it easier for our biased minds to get things right."

Iris Bohnet (see item #2)

"I am not arguing that mindsets can never change. But what we generally find is for beliefs to change, people's experiences have to change first."

Iris Bohnet (*ibid.*)

"It seems that many youth who disrespect teachers do so as an expression of social conformity rather than a reflection of rebellion or personal values. Could it be that a majority of boys and young men of color, even among lower achievers, already have the right values but lack supports and opportunities to live those values?"

Ronald Ferguson (see item #1)

1. Improving the Life Chances of Boys and Young Men of Color

In this Urban Institute research report, Ronald Ferguson (Harvard Kennedy School) addresses the unique predicament facing boys and young men of color (BYMOC) in the United States – "a tangled web of home, school, peer-group, and societal factors that place BYMOC *from every socioeconomic level* at risk for underperformance in school and life," says Ferguson, "a complex web of circumstances for which no individual is to blame and that no one person can unravel." Across the nation, these young African-American, Hispanic, and Native American males are underrepresented among those who excel in school and overrepresented among those with low grades, low test scores, and disciplinary problems. Individual males "with ample resources or great determination can escape or avoid the predicament to various degrees," says Ferguson, "but none can dismantle it." That will require a social movement that begins at birth and includes robust interventions to promote effective parenting, improve the quality of pre- and K-12 schools, and change peer influences that act as anchors on achievement.

Ferguson believes the heart of the matter is the "person-environment fit" – how well boys and young men of color are prepared to assume roles that teachers, counselors, and administrators expect of them – and how willing and able those adults are to adapt in ways necessary to effectively teach and nurture all students. Improving the fit means achieving conditions that maximize:

- Parental preparation – Parents know or learn how to lay early foundations at home. "Under conditions of hardship and stress," says Ferguson, "parents may also need support to follow through *and actually do* the things they know (or learn) are important."
- Birth-to-5 child preparation – Boys arrive at formal schooling prepared to succeed academically, rather than already behind. Policy changes include parental leave to care for infants, enhanced parental preparation, and child care and pre-schools prepared to serve children of all backgrounds.
- K-12 educator preparation – Educators are willing and able to teach BYMOC effectively, including managing behavior in classrooms with high concentrations of disadvantaged students. This involves better staffing, training, and support so students get higher-quality teaching in safe and structured classrooms.

- K-12 organizational preparation – The school organization nurtures BYMOC responsively, using developmentally appropriate ways to manage discipline rather than methods that further alienate students.
- Community preparation – The community prioritizes all youth, mobilizes resources, and cultivates positive peer supports. This addresses the serious problem of negative peer pressures – even when boys have positive values, penalties for violating negative norms may be too great. Successfully resisting will often require outside support to establish climates that most youth actually prefer.

If this movement is successful, says Ferguson, the gap between the educational attainment of BYMOC and white and Asian males will gradually disappear as all groups reach much higher levels. He lists five major focus areas:

• *Birth-to-5 preparation* – "From birth," says Ferguson, "children's interactions with the people around them shape their readiness for the classroom… controlling their emotions and behaviors; performing age-appropriate literacy, reasoning, and numeric tasks; paying attention to instructions; following directions; communicating verbally; and performing basic perceptual, fine-motor, and gross-motor tasks… In a sense, the brain during this time is like a savings account with an extraordinarily high rate of return. The experiences and supports that parents and caregivers supply are the deposits."

The startling fact, reports Ferguson, is that by age 2 there are major socioeconomic, racial, and gender differences in children's literacy experiences and cognitive development. Parenting styles are handed down from generation to generation. Ferguson is not judging parents, but he says we have learned a set of effective practices that give children the best chance to succeed in school and life. [See Memo 629 for a summary of Ferguson's Boston Basics program.] Home visiting and early education programs like the Carolina Abecedarian Project apply these insights and make a difference in outcomes. Initiatives around the U.S. are listed on the Too Small to Fail website: http://toosmall.org.

High-quality pre-schools modeled after the Perry Preschool have a significant long-term impact on academic achievement and reducing "externalizing" behaviors – fighting, refusing to follow rules, cursing, and stealing. Effective initiatives chip away at the well-known 30-million-word gap between privileged and low-income children entering kindergarten. The most important correlation with later school achievement, studies have shown, is academic readiness and attention skills entering kindergarten. These affect the way children are treated by adults and peers, how they are grouped for instruction, and their self-concepts. The disparities are most striking for boys of color.

• *Quality of fit in K-12 classrooms* – Drawing on Tripod surveys in which students in upper-elementary urban classrooms anonymously commented on their teachers, Ferguson reports that there aren't systematic differences in how students of different racial groups *within* classrooms see the quality of instruction. The differences are *between* classrooms, the key variable being the concentration of needy students – and the concentration of low-SES students in some schools has increased in recent decades. "As long as concentrated disadvantage exists," he says, "teachers need special preparation to learn how the most successful teachers in

such schools serve their students. This will require policy supports at the district level, quality professional development approaches and resources, and school-level leadership." Ferguson notes that variations in teaching quality – clarity, caring, expectations, and respect – are more pronounced in secondary schools.

One of the trickiest parts of boys of color doing well in school is negative peer pressure. "Fear of social repercussions can lead students to behave publicly in ways that they privately disapprove of," says Ferguson. Tripod surveys show markedly higher levels of agreement with three statements among boys of color in schools with higher concentrations of poor and minority students:

- I do things I don't want to do because of pressure from other students.
- I worry that people might think I am too serious about my school work.
- At this school, I must be ready to fight to defend myself.

"By this measure, black and Native American males are the most socially conflicted of all the groups and most ensnared in a predicament," says Ferguson. "It seems that many youth who disrespect teachers do so as an expression of social conformity rather than a reflection of rebellion or personal values. Could it be that a majority of BYMOC, even among lower achievers, already have the right values but lack supports and opportunities to live those values?… Even inside the same schools and classrooms and with the same professed desires to learn, BYMOC were more likely than white males to report hiding effort, holding back, and misbehaving in ways that disguise their positive ambitions and sustain destructive stereotypes."

• *Disproportionality and bias* – Ferguson notes Pedro Noguera's belief that the demeanors, apparent priorities, and academic profiles of black boys do not fit well with what teachers would prefer them to be. "Teachers may respond in ways that are unsupportive and foster a downward spiral in teacher-student relationships and academic performance," says Ferguson. In secondary schools, it starts with academic placements, which are determined by grades, test scores, and teacher assessments – and the deck is stacked against boys of color. Then there's the quality of teaching in lower-level courses, where many schools tend to assign their less-experienced and less-proficient teachers. Finally, there's the peer-group environment, which is far from equal among the different academic tracks.

In elementary schools, many programs for gifted students have selection criteria that work against low-income students of color – especially boys. And at all grade levels, there is a strong tendency for boys of color to be overrepresented in special education compared with their share of the student body – and for the quality of instruction to vary from classroom to classroom. However, Ferguson cites evidence that racial and ethnic differences in placements by fifth grade are predictable based on skills measured at kindergarten entry. Therefore, the most important thing may be improving pre-school preparation and teacher skills at helping students who start out behind.

Boys of color are also overrepresented in disciplinary actions, especially out-of-school suspensions, but Ferguson notes that studies show the main variable here is the percent of students within a school who pose the most disciplinary challenges. "Because differences are more between-school than within-school," he says, "the findings do not generally support the

idea that black-white disproportionality in out-of-school suspensions is mainly the result of administrative stereotypes against black males or implicit bias… For administrators feeling overwhelmed, out-of-school suspensions may be an expedient response to their own predicament. Even so, experts on school discipline have concluded that out-of-school suspensions are not the best way of managing behavior." A number of districts, including Denver, Chicago, Baltimore, and Cleveland, have begun developing more-effective alternatives.

• *The person-environment fit predicament* – Ferguson summarizes the "intricate web of conditions" in which this predicament operates:

- Differences in preparedness – Racial, ethnic, and social-class differences in how students from different backgrounds are prepared for school;
- Differences in power and resources – Inequities in how societal resources are allocated to benefit children from different backgrounds;
- Societal stereotypes – Race and gender stereotypes in the larger society, which filter into schools every day; these are especially acute when students encounter adults they don't know in secondary-school hallways;
- Opportunities to learn – "On average, BYMOC have much less access than white males to orderly, on-task classrooms," says Ferguson.
- Educator beliefs – stereotypes about boys and young men of color;
- Race and gender disproportionalities in discipline and access to learning opportunities that are both consequences and causes of poor fit.

"BYMOC who fail to avoid or escape the person-environment fit predicament may be trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of underachievement and self-defeating behavior," says Ferguson. "Their skills and behaviors may seem to confirm negative stereotypes and justify disciplinary decisions that treat them as the 'other' rather than empathetically as valued members of the community."

"It appears," Ferguson continues, "that allowing concentrated disadvantage through racial segregation – with the resulting classroom-management challenges – is the primary way that power and resources affect the person-environment fit predicament in upper elementary schools. Consequently, policy should strive to reduce segregation. While fighting that uphill battle, policymakers and community stakeholders must not wait to support educators, parents, and students to perform better and achieve more under still-segregated conditions."

• *How schools improve for males of color* – The good news, says Ferguson, is that boys and young men of color are succeeding in some places. "When researchers look systematically at effective schools, classroom, and programs such as these," he says, "they find relentless, high-quality implementation of a core set of common principles backed by the skills and resources to enable implementation." Specifically:

- Teachers and administrators understand the key principles of high-quality instruction and work hard to master and apply them.
- Educators approach quality teaching as a moral obligation to each student.

- They are warm yet demanding with students, adapting their models and procedures to fit students' needs.
- They deliver personalized, respectful, culturally sensitive, and intensive time-on-task learning opportunities to all students.
- Teachers receive active and purposeful feedback from administrators.
- Educators use data from regular student assessments to drive instructional decisions.
- Many students receive tutoring, with heavy doses for students who need it the most.
- There is more time on task, sometimes including a longer school day and year.
- Educators explicitly emphasize goals and communicate high expectations for achieving them.
- Educators are students of the profession, curating available research and collaborating with colleagues around well-defined priorities for professional improvement.

"Developing whole systems of such schools should be our goal," says Ferguson, "but doing so will require more than an effective program. It will require norms of teacher and administrator selection, training, and support focused on building a more robust teaching profession as well as the resources to make these things possible… Virtually all school-improvement models and programs tend to be labor intensive, and the scarcest resource is the leadership needed to achieve effective implementation." Ferguson mentions several exemplary turnaround stories, including Robert Taft High School in Cincinnati and Brockton High School in Massachusetts.

In the classroom, Ferguson's "Tripod Seven C's" are the keys to successfully tailoring the instructional environment to boys of color:

- Care – Being attentive and sensitive while not coddling students;
- Confer – Encouraging and respecting students' perspectives but maintaining academic focus;
- Captivate – Striving to make lessons stimulating and relevant;
- Clarify – Striving to develop lucid explanations and respond to confusion with instructive feedback;
- Consolidate – Regularly summarizing lessons to remind students of what they have learned;
- Challenge – Requiring rigor, deep thinking, and persistence;
- Classroom management – Striving to achieve respectful, orderly, on-task behavior.

"These are basic propositions about effective teaching," Ferguson concludes, "but relentless administrator and teacher leadership is required to establish them firmly – and apply them to ALL students…"

"Aiming Higher Together: Strategizing Better Educational Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color" by Ronald Ferguson, Urban Institute, May 2016, http://www.urban.org/research/publication/aiming-higher-together-strategizing-better-educational-outcomes-boys-and-young-men-color/view/full_report; Ferguson can be reached at Ronald_Ferguson@hks.Harvard.edu; the Tripod Projects website is www.tripoded.com.

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2. Ideas for Reducing Gender Bias in the Workplace

In this *Harvard Business Review* interview with Gardiner Morse, Iris Bohnet (Harvard Kennedy School) says that diversity training programs largely don't change attitudes, let alone behavior. "Start by accepting that our minds are stubborn beasts," says Bohnet. "It's very hard to eliminate our biases, but we can design organizations to make it easier for our biased minds to get things right."

One of the best examples is the way U.S. symphony orchestras changed the way they select musicians. For many years, fewer than 10 percent of players in U.S. orchestras were women. There was no evidence that women's playing was inferior to that of men, but the percent of players didn't budge. Then orchestras began auditioning musicians behind a curtain, making gender invisible. The percent of women in orchestras is now almost 40 percent. "Note that this didn't result from changing mindsets," says Bohnet. "In fact, some of the most famous orchestra directors at the time were convinced that they didn't need curtains because they, of all people, certainly focused on the quality of the music and not whether somebody looked the part. The evidence told a different story."

There's a similar example with SAT scores. Previous versions of the test penalized students for guessing wrong, and many female students, knowing this, would skip questions rather than risk messing up – while male students, more prone to taking risks, would give their best guess, which often boosted their scores. One study showed that the guess-wrong penalty accounted for 40 percent of the gender gap in SAT scores. Then in 2016, the SAT changed its policy and told students that points would not be taken off for wrong answers, leveling the playing field for female students. "Notice," says Bohnet, "that the new SAT doesn't focus on changing the students' mindsets about risk but instead corrects for different risk tolerance. After all, the test is meant to measure aptitude, not willingness to take risks."

We all have biases, says Bohnet. When she took her baby boy to his first day at a Harvard day care center, she was startled to encounter a male teacher. "This man didn't conform to my expectations of what a preschool teacher looked like," she says. "Of course, he turned out to be a wonderful caregiver who later became a trusted babysitter at our house – but I couldn't help my initial gut reaction. I was sexist for only a few seconds, but it bothers me to this day."

"Seeing is believing," she continues. "That is, we need to actually see counter-stereotypical examples if we are to change our minds. Until we see more male kindergarten teachers or female engineers, we need behavioral designs to make it easier for our biased minds to get things right and break the link between our gut reactions and our actions." For managers, the key steps are gathering baseline organizational data to highlight organizational inequities, promoting experiments that level the playing field, and measuring what works – basically changing processes to limit the impact of our inevitably biased minds.

How can this be applied to hiring decisions where putting a candidate behind a curtain won't help? Bohnet points to tools like Applied, GapJumpers, and Unitive that allow hiring committees to strip age, gender, educational background, socioeconomic status, and race out of résumés and focus only on experience and talent. It's also important to "Stop going with your

gut," she says. "Those unstructured interviews where managers think they're getting a feel for a candidate's fit or potential are basically a waste of time. Use structured interviews where every candidate gets the same questions in the same order, and score their answers in order in real time."

Research has shown that the way a job is advertised can affect the applicant pool. For example, saying the ideal candidate for a teaching job should be "nurturing" and "supportive" can discourage men from applying, and describing the preferred candidate as "competitive" and "assertive" can discourage female applicants. "The point is that if you want to attract the best candidates and access 100% of the talent pool," says Bohnet, "start by being conscious about the recruitment language you use."

How can bias be reduced once people are on the job? "The same principle applies," says Bohnet: "Do whatever you can to take instinct out of consideration and rely on hard data. That means, for instance, basing promotions on someone's objectively measured performance rather than the boss's feeling about them. That seems obvious, but it's still surprisingly rare."

However, using the wrong data can be as bad as using none at all. For example, many managers have employees do self-evaluations and factor them into performance reviews. There are two problems with this, says Bohnet. First, people differ in how comfortable they are tooting their own horn or being self-critical, with well-known gender and racial differences. "To put it bluntly, men tend to be more overconfident than women – more likely to sing their own praises," says Bohnet. "Women, on the other hand, are more likely to underestimate their capabilities." Second, there's research on the "anchoring effect" – managers can't help but be influenced by numbers thrown at them, which means an inflated self-evaluation can pull that person's evaluation up and an overly self-critical self-evaluation can pull that person's down. "The point is," says Bohnet, "do not share self-evaluations with managers before they have made up their minds."

"I am not arguing that mindsets can never change," she continues. "But what we generally find is for beliefs to change, people's experiences have to change first. Being surrounded by role models who look like you can affect what you think is possible for people like you." This goes for the portraits on hallway and classroom walls. One study found that in computer science classes, replacing male-dominated *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* images with gender-neutral art and nature pictures strengthened female students' associations between computer science and possible careers.

Won't men resist changes that make competition stiffer for them? For example, the increase in female orchestra players means that not as many men are getting elite positions. "Few men oppose the idea of benefiting from the entire talent pool," says Bohnet, "at least in theory. But some are concerned about actually leveling the playing field… There is no evidence that protectionism has served the world well." She's found that fathers with daughters are among the strongest advocates of gender equity. "A big part is, simply, continued awareness building – not just of the problem but also of the solutions available to organizations."

"Designing a Bias-Free Organization" – An Interview with Iris Bohnet by Gardiner Morse in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2016 (Vol. 94, #7-8, p. 62-67), https://hbr.org/2016/07/designing-a-bias-free-organization; Bohnet can be reached at iris_bohnet@hks.harvard.edu.

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3. Angela Duckworth on Developing One's Passion

In this *New York Times* article, "grit" guru Angela Duckworth (University of Pennsylvania) notes that commencement speakers often exhort graduates to "Follow your passion." But what about young people who don't have a clear idea what they're passionate about? "As a psychologist who studies world-class achievers," says Duckworth, "I can say the reality of following your passion is not very romantic. It takes time to develop a direction that feels so in-the-bones right that you never want to veer from it. Thus, my advice to young graduates is not to 'follow your passion' but rather, to 'foster your passion.'" Three suggestions:

• *Move toward what interests you*. Highly engaging career paths are developed, not discovered. Julia Child had no idea when she graduated from college that she would fall in love with French cuisine and start writing cookbooks in her late 30s. Roberto Diaz didn't especially like playing the violin but developed a lifelong passion for the viola. "A good-enough fit is a more reasonable aim than a perfect one," says Duckworth. "Consider your first job as an opportunity to begin an unpredictable, inefficient trial-and-error process… Don't overthink it. Move in the direction of something that feels better than worse."

• *Seek purpose*. "People are hard-wired not only to gratify their personal desires but also to care for others," says Duckworth. "Self-oriented motives like interest and other-oriented motives like altruism are not mutually exclusive. In fact, personal interest and self-transcendent purpose are the dual engines of intrinsic motivation." Graduates might ask themselves, "In what way do I wish the world were different? What problem can I help solve? How can I contribute?" Getting your thoughts down on paper is important, says Duckworth: "Psychologists have found that asking people to reflect in writing on their core values has miraculous effects on motivation."

• *Finish strong*. Given the above, one's first job is unlikely to last very long. Duckworth dabbled in a number of different areas before discovering her lifelong passion, psychological research. But she picked up valuable skills and insights in every job, and believes it's important to give 100 percent to each, be professional, and "Work as hard on your last day as on your first."

"No Passion? Don't Panic" by Angela Duckworth in *The New York Times*, June 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/05/jobs/graduating-and-looking-for-your-passion-just-be-patient.html

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4. Dealing with Dishonest People

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Leslie John (Harvard Business School) has advice for dealing with people who don't tell the truth – which, according to the research, is just about everyone, to the tune of one or two lies every day. A common approach is getting better at detecting deception – looking for subtle behavioral cues – but this is actually not very reliable. Even the polygraph fails to pinpoint lies about a third of the time. People are especially bad at detecting lies that are cloaked in flattery. "We're wired to readily accept information that conforms to our preexisting assumptions or hopes," says John.

A better approach, she says, is focusing on prevention, and this is most helpful in any kind of negotiation.

• *Encourage reciprocity*. "Humans have a strong inclination to reciprocate disclosure," she says. "When someone shares sensitive information with us, our instinct is to match their transparency." People will be more honest with someone they know and trust, and sharing something that shows we're not perfect helps to build that kind of bond.

• *Ask the right questions*. "Most people like to think of themselves as honest," says John. "Yet many negotiators guard sensitive information that could undermine their competitive position. In other words, they lie by omission, failing to volunteer pertinent facts." For example, a person selling a business might not mention that some of the equipment will need to be replaced. Studies have shown that by asking direct questions, you'll get the correct information, and what works best is using questions with a pessimistic spin – for example, "This business will need some new equipment soon, right?" – rather than, "The equipment is in good order, right?"

• *Watch for dodging*. This is when someone avoids answering the question they were asked by answering one they weren't asked. People tend not to be very good at spotting dodges. John suggests writing down questions before you start and after each response, checking whether the question was really answered.

• *Don't overemphasize confidentiality*. Studies have shown that when people are assured that we'll maintain secrecy, it raises their suspicions and they clam up and share less. "Of course you should still properly protect any confidential information you receive," says John, "but there's no reason to announce that unless asked."

• *Cultivate leaks*. People will often let slip important confidential information, especially if we probe in an indirect way – for example, asking for a contingency plan in case things go wrong.

"Managing Yourself: How to Negotiate With a Liar" by Leslie John in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2016 (Vol. 94, #7-8, p. 114-117), https://hbr.org/2016/07/how-to-negotiate-with-a-liar; John can be reached at ljohn@hbs.edu.

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5. Should Students with Learning Disabilities Take a Foreign Language?

In this article in *Foreign Language Annals*, Richard Sparks (Mt. St. Joseph University)

addresses the common supposition that students with learning disabilities have a "glitch" when it comes to learning a foreign language. Despite anecdotes, case studies of individual learners, and many educators' personal opinions, says Sparks, this belief is not supported by empirical evidence – nor is the existence of a specific learning disability for acquiring another language. Here's his pushback on seven incorrect beliefs, focused mainly on high school and college:

• *Myth #1: Students who are classified as LD will have problems learning another language and will fail or withdraw from foreign language courses*. Not true, says Sparks. Researchers have found that students with learning disabilities pass foreign-language courses with average or better grades and those who struggle get grades similar to low-achieving students without learning disabilities.

• *Myth #2: Withdrawal from foreign-language courses is evidence of an undiagnosed disability for learning another language*. Sparks and other researchers studied the achievement history of students who withdrew from foreign-language courses and found their previous track record was solidly in the average range. Other factors seem to have been at play when students withdraw from courses.

• *Myth #3: Students classified as LD exhibit weaker language learning skills and foreign-language aptitude than low-achieving students without learning disabilities*. In fact, there are no significant differences between the academic and cognitive processing skills of these two groups of students – both are in the average range. The best predictor of difficulty in foreign-language courses is weak reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in students' native language.

• *Myth #4: Students classified as LD who are granted course substitutions or waivers exhibit below-average levels of language learning ability and are different from students classified as LD who pass foreign-language courses*. Once again, Sparks reports that there are no significant differences in the achievement of these two groups.

• *Myth #5: A low score on a foreign-language aptitude test and/or a discrepancy between IQ and foreign-language aptitude scores are evidence of a learning disability and/or potential foreign-language learning problems*. Not so, says Sparks, which means that foreign-language aptitude tests should not be used to deselect students from foreign-language courses.

• *Myth #6: Discrepancy between IQ and academic achievement is evidence of a disability for foreign-language learning*. Sparks says that "robust empirical evidence over many years has shown that IQ-achievement discrepancy is irrelevant in determining whether a student will exhibit FL learning problems… Instead, the evidence has shown that students classified as LD with and without discrepancies perform equally well in FL courses and on native language achievement and FL aptitude tests."

• *Myth #7: Students in foreign-language classes who are classified as LD meet criteria for the LD diagnosis*. Sparks reports several studies showing that college students classified as learning disabled achieve somewhat lower than their peers but still in the average range, and many actually don't meet the criteria for learning disability.

The bottom line, says Sparks, is that when it comes to learning a foreign language, there are no significant differences between students with and without learning disabilities.

Some students in both groups will have difficulty learning another language, but these are difficulties with *language learning* and are not specifically tied to learning disabilities. Teachers of these students need to focus directly and explicitly on the language skills that are necessary for communication and success in a foreign-language course – reading, spelling, written language, receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension, oral expression, and verbal memory. Students struggling in foreign-language courses may also need instructional modifications and testing accommodations.

Sparks's strong recommendation is that if waivers are granted from taking foreign-language courses (or course substitutions), they should be offered to all students, not just those with learning disabilities. "To do otherwise," he says, "is to ignore the empirical research on this issue and, in all likelihood, discriminate against students without a disability diagnosis."

"Myths About Foreign Language Learning and Learning Disabilities" by Richard Sparks in *Foreign Language Annals*, Summer 2016 (Vol. 49, #2, p. 252-270), available for purchase at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/flan.12196/abstract; Sparks can be reached at richard.sparks@msj.edu.

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6. A Fourth-Grade ELL Writes a Poem

In this *New Yorker* article, Ocean Vuong remembers coming to the U.S. from Vietnam as a toddler and hearing only Vietnamese at home for several years. "When I entered kindergarten," he says, "I was, in a sense, immigrating all over again, except this time into English." He learned his ABCs, thanks to the age-old melody, and within a few years was verbally fluent, but literacy was another matter. "Reading and writing, like any other crafts, come to the mind slowly, in pieces," he says. "But for me, as an E.S.L. student from a family of illiterate rice farmers, who saw reading as snobby, or worse, the experience of working through a book, even one as simple as *Where the Wild Things Are*, was akin to standing in quicksand, your loved ones corralled at its safe edges, with arms folded in suspicion and doubt as you sink."

His teachers excused him from serious writing tasks. "I would instead spend the class mindlessly copying out passages from books I'd retrieved from a blue plastic bin at the back of the room," he says. "The task allowed me to camouflage myself. As long as I looked as though I were doing something smart, my shame and failure were hidden."

The moment of truth came when a fourth-grade teacher asked students to write a poem. Vuong went to the library during recess to escape playground bullies calling him "pansy" and "fairy" and pulling down his shorts. He played a recording of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and was struck by the power of the man's voice, the roar of the crowd, and wondered why a doctor was speaking like this. "There must have been medicine in his words," says Vuong. "Can there be medicine in words?" He mouthed, "I have a dream" to himself, and realized he'd been mouthing his grandmother's stories as well. "Of course, not being able to read does not mean that one is empty of stories," he says.

And Vuong began to write: "My poem was called 'If a Boy Could Dream.' The phrases 'promised land' and 'mountaintop' sounded golden to me, and I saw an ochre-lit field, a lushness akin to a spring dusk. I imagined that the doctor was dreaming of springtime. So my poem was a sort of ode to spring. From the gardening shows my grandmother watched, I'd learned the words for flowers I had never seen in person: foxglove, lilac, lily, buttercup. 'If a boy could dream of golden fields, full of lilacs, tulips, marigolds…' I knew words like 'if' and 'boy,' but others I had to look up. I sounded out the words in my head, a dictionary in my lap, and searched the letters. After a few days, the poem appeared as gray graphite words. The paper a white flag. I had surrendered, had written."

Vuong's teacher immediately assumed the poem was plagiarized. "Where is it?" he demanded. Vuong pointed to the paper the teacher was holding up. "No, where is the poem you plagiarized?" he said. "How did you even write something like this?" Then he tipped Vuong's desk, spilling its contents onto the floor, looking for the incriminating source, the other students staring, "their faces as unconvinced as blank sheets of paper." Once again the teacher asked, "Where is it?"

"It's right here," said Vuong, pointing to the paper pinched between the teacher's fingers. "I had read books that weren't books, and I had read them using everything but my eyes. From that invisible 'reading,' I had pressed my world onto paper. As such, I was a fraud in a field of language, which is to say, I was a writer. I have plagiarized my life to give you the best of me."

"Childhood Reading: Surrendering" by Ocean Vuong in *The New Yorker*, June 6 & 13, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/06/ocean-vuong-immigrating-into-english

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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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 45 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).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

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
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 12 years

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
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
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 Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest