

# Marshall Memo 369

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

January 17, 2011

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## Quotes of the Week

“If childhood affords few experiences more pleasurable than that of waking up to a snow day, it holds fewer disappointments more crushing than having a snow day snatched from your giddy grasp.”

Andy Newman in “Dear Mr. Mayor: No Snow Day? It’s Just Not Fair!” in *The New York Times*, Jan. 13, 2011 (p. A21), no e-link available

“The negative message that gay teens get – just survive your adolescence and life will get better – is a disservice. The message should be that your life can be good right now.”

Ritch Savin-Williams (see item #1)

“Education is not a zero-sum game. Helping one group of students learn does not take learning away from other students.”

Richard DuFour (see item #5)

“Intelligence, academic performance, and prestigious schools don’t correlate well with fulfillment, or even with outstanding accomplishment. The traits that do make a difference are poorly understood, and can’t be taught in a classroom, no matter what the tuition: the ability to understand and inspire people; to read situations and discern the underlying patterns; to build trusting relationships; to recognize and correct one’s shortcomings; to imagine alternate futures.”

David Brooks in “Social Animal: How the New Sciences of Human Nature Can Help Make Sense of Life” in *The New Yorker*, Jan. 17, 2011 (p. 26-32)

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/01/17/110117fa\\_fact\\_brooks](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/01/17/110117fa_fact_brooks)

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## **1. How Widespread Is Emotional Distress Among Gay Teens?**

In this helpful *New York Times* article, Jane Brody cites research about gay and lesbian teenagers that is considerably less gloomy than what we often hear. One study by University of Utah professor Lisa Diamond found that gay adolescents had as many friends and were just as popular and socially connected as other teens. Interestingly, Diamond found that gay teens go out of their way to befriend peers of other races and those who are stigmatized for their looks. Gay and straight youth share one major worry: “anxiety about being alone as an adult, about finding the kind of partner they want.”

Diamond and other experts say that although severe emotional distress is somewhat more common among gay teenagers (partly because they are more likely to be harshly punished by schools and courts than their straight peers), the effects of bullying and discrimination are being overplayed in the media. “I’m concerned about the message being given to gay youth by adults who say they are destined to be depressed, abuse drugs or perhaps commit suicide,” says Cornell professor Ritch Savin-Williams. “I believe the message may create more suicides, more depression and more substance abuse. I worry about suicide contagion... The negative message that gay teens get – just survive your adolescence and life will get better – is a disservice. The message should be that your life can be good right now. Many gay youth have excellent, productive, happy lives.”

Savin-Williams says that research showing no significant differences between gay and straight teens doesn’t get published. “We don’t hear about normal gay teens,” he says, adding that the risk of being bullied is just as great for straight youth who are different; bullies pick on nonconformity and weaknesses. The risk factors for suicide are the same for gay and straight teens, he says: prior mental illness, depression, bipolar disorder, dysfunctional families, breakups in relationships, suicide in the family, and access to means. “What most commonly precipitates suicide attempts in both heterosexual and homosexual adolescents is being dumped by a romantic partner,” says Diamond. “Kids who lose someone they cared about need to be listened to in a sensitive way, offered support and comfort, and reassured that this is not their only chance of finding love.”

Another source of serious emotional distress for gay youth, says Diamond, is being rejected by one’s family. She advises gay teens who believe their parents are hostile to homosexuality to delay coming out. “There’s nothing harmful about keeping their same-sex attraction a secret for a while,” says Diamond. “Often parents are better able to deal with this information when the kids are older.”

And for parents of gay teens, Diamond has this advice: “Continue to express affection for your kids despite your own feelings about homosexuality. Let them know they are loved and accepted. Hug them, spend time with them, watch movies together.” On the issue of finding love, she says the anxieties are the same for gay and straight teens and have to do with normal anxiety about relationships and loneliness. “Adults should take a deep breath and answer their questions, saying something like, ‘I’m sure you’ll find someone who will love and appreciate you.’”

University of Utah professor David Huebner has produced an informational video entitled “Lead with Love.” It can be viewed free at <http://www.leadwithlovefilm.com>.

“Gay or Straight, Youths Aren’t So Different” by Jane Brody in *The New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2011 (p. D7), no free e-link available

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## **2. Judging Instructors by How Their Students Do in Subsequent Courses**

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article with clear K-12 implications, David Glenn reports that some universities are starting to evaluate professors’ performance partly on how their students do in subsequent courses – for example, how Calculus I students perform in Calculus II. Getting an A is supposed to mean that the student is “unquestionably prepared for subsequent courses in the field,” so looking at downstream data can test whether a professor’s A is an authentic measure of student mastery.

Ohio State economics professor Bruce Weinberg recently looked at the grades of 14,000 students as they moved through the course sequence and found that the data provided “a much, much more-reliable signal of quality than traditional course-evaluation forms.” Careful analysis can pinpoint which professors and section leaders were strongest, what kinds of homework and classroom designs worked best, and which professors are inflating grades.

The most detailed and reliable study of downstream course data was conducted at the U.S. Air Force Academy, where researchers looked at the performance of 10,000 students over seven years (see link below). This study had the advantage of getting data from an institution in which all students are required to take the full 30-credit mathematics sequence, are randomly assigned to small sections, take common final exams, and have their exams graded by a pool of instructors (one grades Question #1, another grades Question #2, and so on), eliminating all the distorting factors that are often present in universities. Here are the major findings:

- Students’ grades in intermediate calculus classes were higher if they had taken Calculus I with a senior, permanent faculty member rather than a short-term instructor.
- The seasoned instructors tended to be “harder” teachers and students struggled in their classes – but did better in subsequent classes in the course sequence.
- These instructors focused more on conceptual understanding, whereas the short-term instructors focused on getting students to memorize material so they would pass the common Calculus I final exam.
- Students who took Calculus I with the more-rigorous instructors were more likely to take elective courses in upper-level mathematics as juniors and seniors.

- When students filled out Calculus I course evaluations, positive evaluations correlated positively with high grades in that course – but negatively with performance in subsequent courses. “The more students liked their Calculus I section,” says Glenn, “the less likely they were (all else equal) to earn strong grades in follow-up courses... Students, this study suggests, are not always accurate judges of how much progress they have made.”

These results are intriguing, but some university researchers say that their academic environment isn't as “pristine” as the Air Force Academy – high-achieving students choose higher-quality section leaders and slackers choose “easy” graders, which makes it impossible to draw valid conclusions from downstream data. For example, let's say the data showed that the highest-achieving students in a Spanish II course had taken a Spanish I course that met at 8:00 a.m. Are they doing better because that Spanish I instructor was terrific – or because college students who are willing to get up at the crack of dawn are a self-selected group of higher achievers?

But proponents of downstream data use disagree, pointing to studies at Duke and Ohio State that produced almost identical results to the Air Force Academy study: instructors who assigned challenging work and held their students to high standards did a significantly better job of preparing students for downstream success than “easier” instructors, and student course evaluations were poorly correlated with subsequent achievement. “Seeing how people do in downstream courses provides the most convincing measure of what happened upstream,” says Bruce Weinberg. It's possible to control for entering student characteristics, he says, and these data are far more robust for judging the effectiveness of instructors than student course evaluations.

“One Measure of a Professor: Students' Grades in Later Courses” by David Glenn in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 14, 2011 (Vol. LVII, #19, p. A8-A9), available for purchase at <http://chronicle.com/article/One-Measure-of-a-Professor-/125867/>.

The U.S. Air Force Academy study is titled “Does Professor Quality Matter? Evidence From Random Assignment of Students to Professors” by Scott Carrell and James West in *Journal of Political Economy*, June 2010; it's available at:

<http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/staiger/files/carrell%2Bwest%2Bprofessor%2Bquality%2Bjpe.pdf>

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### **3. Video Cameras in the Classroom Full Time?**

In this provocative *Education Gadfly* article, Michael Petrilli reports on the evolving (and overlapping) methods used by the New York City Police Department to keep track of its peripatetic officers as they fought crime around the city:

- Rigid policies and procedures that officers were required to follow;
- Detailed, block-by-block statistics on crime to identify hot spots and problem areas and hold precinct commanders accountable (labeled CompStat);
- Video cameras in patrol cars that record officers' interactions with people they pull over.

School administrators face a similar supervisory challenge with teachers, says Petrilli.

Occasional classroom visits capture only a tiny fraction of teachers' work, and an

administrator's presence in a classroom affects what's happening (students improve their behavior and teachers take their performance up a notch). Even sophisticated value-added test-score analysis doesn't clearly differentiate between the impact of the individual teacher and other factors (including non-random student class assignments and the work of other teachers).

"So why not put video cameras in classrooms, and use the recordings as part of teachers' evaluations?" asks Petrilli. Harvard professor Tom Kane has been exploring this idea in his teacher-evaluation work with the Gates Foundation, using high-definition, 360-degree cameras to record thousands of hours of classroom activity. "There are a number of huge advantages to video," says Kane. "One is it gives you a common piece of evidence to discuss with an instructional coach or supervisor. Second, it will prove to be economically much more viable because you're not paying observers to drive around to various schools to do observations. [Furthermore], if a teacher doesn't think that their principal is giving them a fair evaluation because of some vendetta, they can have an external expert with no personal ax to grind watch and give feedback."

This is interesting, says Petrilli, but Kane's videotaping is limited to teacher evaluation: the camera is there only four times during the year, so it doesn't see what's happening on a day-to-day basis. "When the camera rolls out of the room, teachers know it's rolled out of the room," says Kane.

Petrilli has a bolder idea: what about having the camera there all the time? He notes that one company, WatchMeGrow, sells Internet video-streaming services to child-care centers, allowing parents to use their home computers to watch their children at any point in the day via cameras in classrooms, playgrounds, and other common areas. "It's not hard to imagine these parents wanting the same opportunity once their kids graduate to kindergarten and beyond," he says. "And think of the possibilities for curbing school violence and guarding against child abuse."

"Teachers may scream about infringements on their 'professionalism'," concludes Petrilli, "but effective teachers will have little to fear. Already, their expectation of complete autonomy – that they close their doors and do what they want – has been undermined by standards, tests, and other reforms of the modern era. Why not watch teachers in action? Sooner or later, that little video camera, always on, will just fade into the background."

"Opinion: Lights, Camera, Action!" by Michael Petrilli in *The Education Gadfly*, Jan. 13, 2011 (Vol. 11, #2) <http://www.edexcellence.net/news-commentary/education-gadfly.html>

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#### **4. A Utah Junior High School Cuts Its Failure Rate in Half**

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Utah principal Troy Peterson and assistant principal Peter Fawson describe their junior high school's three-year effort to address the needs of students who are having difficulty learning – the biggest problem being finding the time to help these students. The school's leadership team visited other schools for ideas and hit upon a plan. They decided to scratch the 25 minutes each morning devoted to watching Channel One's

news broadcast and substitute “E-Time” – a daily 25-minute burst of enrichment and extra-time help.

E-Time takes place between third and fourth periods (with five-minute passing times) and students decide whether to attend enrichment or remediation based on their daily mini-progress reports, which provide their status in all classes (teachers input grades at the end of each day and a computer program prints out individual grade reports that are distributed to students by third period the next day). Students with grades of C- and above go to enrichment rooms – computer time, athletic activities, craft classes, and movies). Those with one or more grades below C- (and any student who hasn’t reached mastery on a particular assignment) go to remediation, where they get one-on-one tutoring, modified lectures, or additional support from a certified teacher. Students who have below-par grades in more than one subject must decide which remediation class is the highest priority.

The school’s goal was to reduce the number of D’s and F’s by 5 percent, and it surpassed the goal: failure percentages for the same cohort of students from 2007-2010 went from 18.4% to 8.7% in the first trimester, 21.7% to 8.5% in the second trimester, and 22% to 9% in the third. Peterson and Fawson attribute this success to daily feedback to each student, immediate help for struggling students, and enrichment for successful students. “The learning culture has changed,” they say, “and student, teacher, and parent attitudes are more positive.” And all six junior high schools in the district have now adopted similar intervention programs.

“E-Time for Learning” by Peter Fawson and Troy Peterson in *Principal Leadership*, January 2011 (Vol. 11, #5, p. 48-52), no e-link available. The authors are at [peter.fawson@nebo.edu](mailto:peter.fawson@nebo.edu) and [troy.peterson@nebo.edu](mailto:troy.peterson@nebo.edu).

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## **5. Richard DuFour Rejects Triage**

In this paid column in *Education Week*, author/consultant Richard DuFour responds to a high-school administrator who asked which students to focus on to improve state test scores – the very lowest-achieving students, the next level up, or those close to proficient (the “bubble” kids).

“The answer is, the school must focus on each and every student who demonstrates he or she is not learning,” says DuFour. “How to respond will be different, but the goal should be to give any student who struggles additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, directive, and systematic.” He says that focusing on particular groups of students means the school is trying to game the system rather than educate all students to high levels.

When he led Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois, DuFour and his colleagues adjusted the schedule to give the lowest-achieving students a double dose of language arts (one period devoted to intensive reading instruction) and added at least an hour a day for intensive small-group instruction or individual tutoring (some tutoring was done by National Honor Society members to fulfill their service requirement). Other Stevenson students who were in danger of failing because they didn’t understand specific skills or concepts were identified by

regular interim assessments and required to devote extra time to learning the concepts – without missing any time from regular-class instruction.

“Principals and teachers should not be allowed to pick and choose,” says DuFour. “Education is not a zero-sum game. Helping one group of students learn does not take learning away from other students.” The key steps of the Professional Learning Community process are:

- Teacher teams clarifying what students must learn, unit by unit;
- Giving common, team-developed interim assessments to monitor student learning;
- Teachers using the results to inform and improve instruction and learn from one another;
- Using the results to give struggling students additional, non-negotiable time and support that is part of a schoolwide plan.

“In schools that become effective in this approach,” concludes DuFour, “state test scores take care of themselves.”

“Which Students Warrant Our Attention” by Richard DuFour in *Education Week*, Jan. 12, 2011 (Vol. 30, #15, p. 25), no e-link available

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## **6. Writing IEPs Aligned with the Common-Core Standards**

In this *Education Week* article, Christina Samuels reports on how some districts are linking Individualized Education Programs to the new Common Core state standards so students with disabilities are moving toward the same outcomes as their regular-education classmates. Here are the steps the California education department has developed to help teachers write grade-level, standards-based goals, geared to a hypothetical fourth grader who has trouble with reading comprehension and written language skills:

- *Use the student’s current level of performance.* Test results show that this student will do best if teachers concentrate on reading comprehension and writing strategies with an emphasis on organization and focus.
- *Choose the standard.* In this case, “Identify structural patterns found in informational text (e.g., compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequential or chronological order, proposition, and support) to strengthen comprehension.”
- *“Unpack” the standard.* The teacher breaks it down: identify compare-and-contrast patterns, identify cause-and-effect patterns, identify the author’s proposition.
- *Analyze the subskills.* The teacher decides to focus on “list the statements that support the author’s proposition.”
- *Develop the goal.* By the end of the school year, the student will read grade-level passages and support the author’s proposition with a minimum of six correct statements from each text passage on regularly scheduled, curriculum-based reading comprehension tests.
- *Write the short-term objectives and benchmarks.* By the middle of the school year, the student will identify the author’s proposition from the text correctly in four out of five

attempts, as measured by classroom discussion, daily reading journal entries, and work samples.

- *Monitor the goal.* At regular reporting periods, monitor and report progress on goals and short-term objectives and benchmarks.

“Special Educators Look to Align IEPs to Common-Core Standards” by Christina Samuels in *Education Week*, Jan. 12, 2011 (Vol. 30, #15, p. 8-9), available for purchase at [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/12/27/15iep\\_ep.h30.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/12/27/15iep_ep.h30.html)

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## 7. Working with Children Who Stutter

In this *Education Digest* article, Dean Williams of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and Florida State University professor Lisa Scott offer these tips to teachers working with students who stutter:

- Talk individually with the child and say that stuttering is okay with you, that all people sometimes bobble or repeat or get tangled up in words, and that with practice we improve.
- Initially, until the child adjusts to the classroom, ask questions that can be answered with few words.
- Talk individually with children who stutter about their preference on being called on in class – early or later in a discussion.
- Give all students plenty of time to answer.
- Don’t tell the child to “slow down” or “just relax.”
- Don’t complete words for or talk for him or her.
- Help all members of the class learn to take turns talking and listening. All children – especially those who stutter – find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions and they have the listener’s attention.
- Expect the same quality and quantity of work from students who stutter as from those who don’t.
- Speak with the student in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.
- Convey that you are listening to the content of the message, not how it is said.
- Have a one-on-one conversation with the student who stutters about accommodations in the classroom. Respect the student’s needs and don’t enable helplessness.
- Don’t make stuttering something to be ashamed of. Talk about stuttering just like any other matter.
- Deal firmly with teasing, talking individually to bullies and the victim.
- Help children who stutter get speech therapy, either through the parents or the school.

The Stuttering Foundation offers free referrals at <http://www.stutteringhelp.org>.

[*The King’s Speech* is a movie that deals powerfully and sympathetically with stuttering.]

“The Child Who Stutters at School” by Dean Williams and Lisa Scott in *Education Digest*, February 2011 (Vol. 76, #6, p. 60-62), condensed from a 2010 Stuttering Foundation report.

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## 8. Guiding Struggling Students to Figure Out Their Misconceptions

“When students get stuck, teachers must respond so that they can improve understanding, correct the error, or address a misconception,” say San Diego State professors Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher in this *Principal Leadership* article. “The way a teacher responds can leave the students feeling either successful or helpless.” The key is not to give struggling students the answer too quickly and get them to figure out the error themselves. Frey and Fisher suggest four steps, which they say are most effective with small groups of students:

- *Check for understanding.* The teacher asks questions to see if students have misconceptions or errors – for example, a science teacher asks students how they know if something is living and follows up by asking, “So is evolution a characteristic of life?”
- *Prompt.* When students’ answers reveal that they have a misconception, the teacher’s next move should be to provide prompts or clues, for example, remind students of the order of operations (in a math class) or the difference between speed and velocity (in a physics class).
- *Provide cues.* If prompts fail to resolve the learning problem, the teacher can become more directive and give a cue to get students focused on something they’ve missed or overlooked – for example “Take a look at the figure on page 112. Does that help?”
- *Explain.* If prompts and cues aren’t successful in getting students back on track, it’s time for a direct explanation, followed by having students repeat the information back in their own words or answering a direct question correctly.

“As instructional leaders, principals must ensure that teachers give this type of support to students who are stuck,” conclude Frey and Fisher. “Without guided instruction, students learn helplessness and become dependent on adults for information.”

“Guiding Learning: Questions, Prompts, and Cues” by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher in *Principal Leadership*, January 2011 (Vol. 11, #5, p. 58-60), no e-link available. The authors are at [nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu) and [dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu).

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## 9. Another Critique of Accelerated Reader

In this *Teacher Magazine* article, Texas sixth-grade teacher Donalyn Miller finds fault with Accelerated Reader. In this program, students get their reading level by taking a placement test on a computer, read books that match their level, take computerized tests on each book, and accumulate points that some schools use to give prizes. Miller has several concerns with Accelerated Reader:

- Students’ choices are limited to the books that have Accelerated Reader tests.
- Students read books only at their level, which doesn’t allow for interest and serendipity.
- The point value of each book is not linked to its literary merit or students’ personal interests.
- The program pushes students to read for points, not for enjoyment or knowledge.
- The computer questions on each book are low-level recall that don’t tap higher-order thinking or deeper comprehension.
- If students fail a test and try again, they take the same test.

- It's easy for students to cheat by getting answers from classmates.
- Teachers and librarians who use Accelerated Reader don't need wide knowledge of children's literature. "There are no replacements for knowing the reader and knowing the book," says Miller.

Miller's bottom line on Accelerated Reader and programs like it: "In order to make these programs work, schools must invest in books for students to read and teacher training in best practices. You could do this without spending thousands of dollars on reading management software. The value added by such programs is not research-proven on a large scale and does not justify the expense... Our students would be better served by hiring qualified staff and buying more reading material."

The crucial elements in boosting reading achievement, Miller believes, are the following:

- Access to high-quality books at students' independent reading levels;
- Student choice of reading matter;
- Time to read every day;
- Classroom conditions conducive to getting engaged in reading and building reading self-efficacy;
- Schoolwide support for reading in all subject areas;
- Well-stocked libraries with qualified librarians.

"How to Accelerate a Reader" by Donalyn Miller in *Teacher Magazine* (online), Sept. 5, 2010; see another article on Accelerated Reader in Marshall Memo 300, article #8.

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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](mailto: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 41 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:***

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- 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 log-in

## ***Publications covered***

*Those read this week are underlined.*

American Educator  
American Journal of Education  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews  
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  
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  
Teachers College Record  
The Atlantic Monthly  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The Language Educator  
The Learning Principal  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
The School Administrator  
Theory Into Practice  
Tools for Schools