

Marshall Memo 696

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

July 31, 2017

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Quotes of the Week

“I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday.”

Abraham Lincoln (quoted in item #3)

“Traditional school cultures that leave a single teacher responsible for addressing all of the learning needs present in his or her classroom are a recipe for disaster.”

Greg Kushnir (see item #1)

“At its core, the concept of professional learning communities is focused on improving student learning by improving teaching practice.”

Kimberly Rodriguez Cano in “The Recommender” in *All Things PLC*, Summer 2017

“Ideally, coach-talk should account for somewhere between 10 percent to 33 percent of a conversation. The ability to do this emerges from a deep understanding and belief that your role as a coach is not to fill someone else’s head with ideas, advice, or direction. Your role is to facilitate reflection.”

Elena Aguilar (see item #2)

“It’s now irrefutable that people learn better when they are interested, invested, and engaged. Science also validates that feeling safe, welcomed, and valued is key to brain and cognitive development. This scientific consensus has tremendous implications for schools... Students are most likely to learn and retain difficult academic content when the social, emotional, and academic conditions work together.”

Camille Farrington and Mary Helen Immordino-Yang in a letter to *Education Week*, one of many taking issue with an article by Chester Finn Jr. that linked social-emotional learning to the discredited self-esteem movement

“Parents’ opinions are important, but teaching is a real craft. A lot of science goes into it. And we need to do more to respect that.”

Ulrich Boser (quoted in item #5)

1. How Principals Can Orchestrate Effective PLCs

“If the goal is to increase student learning, one of the biggest mistakes education leaders can make is allowing teachers to work in isolation,” says Greg Kushnir in this *All Things PLC* article. “Traditional school cultures that leave a single teacher responsible for addressing all of the learning needs present in his or her classroom are a recipe for disaster.” Kushnir believes professional learning communities are the antidote, and he describes ten “cultural building blocks” that leaders must put in place for PLCs to be optimally effective:

- *Clear communication* – “Clarity precedes competence,” says Kushnir. “Too often school leaders make the mistake of organizing teachers into teams without spending the time to ensure that teachers understand the why, the how, and the what of a PLC culture.” *Why professional learning communities?* Because effective teacher teamwork is the key to getting all students to achieve at high levels. *How do they work best?* Teams with autonomy to make decisions about curriculum, assessment, intervention, and instruction develop intrinsic motivation because they have all of Daniel Pink’s key components: belonging, purpose, autonomy, and mastery. *What does this look like?* “All students,” says Kushnir, “not just the ones we like, the ones who are easy to teach, or the group of students who are currently successful. This has to be the driving force of the school’s work.” Some commitments that PLCs need to make for real impact:

- To collaborate at least an hour every week;
- To clarify the most important student learning outcomes;
- To create common interim and summative assessments;
- To collectively inquire and do action research;
- To use assessment data to guide next steps in instruction and intervention;
- To create systemic interventions that ensure extra time and support for all students.

How these commitments are expressed is important, says Kushnir: “The language of *I* and *try* must be replaced with *we* and *will*. The word *try* states an intention, not an action. The road to PLC failure is paved with good intentions. The word *will* is a commitment to action, and *we* means no one person is responsible for accomplishing our goals. Only through making collective commitments to actually change behavior will a culture develop in your school that actually increases student learning.”

- *Commitment to the PLC process* – Only by implementing the full professional learning community process will teams immerse themselves in “the difficult work of tackling the behaviors and practices that are getting in the way of continuous sustained improvement.”

says Kushnir. “This is by no means easy work, and all schools that engage in the process can expect to encounter conflicts between what they are currently doing and what we know to be best practice.”

- *Participation and shared responsibility* – “Each member of your school community must understand how his or her work connects to the work of others and how important that work is to the success of the whole,” says Kushnir. That includes singleton teachers, educational assistants, office staff, custodians, and part-time employees. At the same time, school leaders need to refrain from micromanaging PLCs, giving them autonomy for day-to-day decisions. A leadership team should monitor the overall process and provide support and guidance as needed.

- *Reciprocal accountability* – “A team must develop a belief that if we are to accomplish our mission of learning for all, then we all have to work together,” says Kushnir. “In other words, I am counting on you and you are counting on me.” For this to happen, there must be a shared goal that serves as a constant reminder of the work in process and a way of checking in on whether the chosen approaches are working. Goals should include the specific area for improvement; the target date for completion; the desired level of student performance; and an assessment to see if the goal was accomplished.

- *Relationships based on mutual respect* – Some school leaders believe PLC members must like each other, but that’s unrealistic given the inevitable pushback and dissension that arise when educators confront long-established practices that aren’t producing results. “What matters,” says Kushnir, “is that each member of the team commits to achieving high levels of learning for all students, treats the other members with respect, and acts in a professional manner... [O]ne of the challenges to becoming a highly effective team is to develop a process for respectful disagreement, discussion, and decision making... Having a culture of respectful relationships means that each team member feels safe in acknowledging his or her weaknesses and mistakes and seeks the team’s help to improve.”

- *Solution orientation* – In an effective PLC, teachers “move past identifying the problem to relentlessly pursuing the solution,” says Kushnir. “Collectively finding solutions that help previously unsuccessful students is highly motivating and inspiring for teachers... Successfully working together to solve problems develops a belief that their work is making a difference and dramatically changes a staff’s outlook and attitude toward the art of the possible.” PLCs escape the frequent downside of teachers working in isolation – not being able to solve students’ learning problems, becoming frustrated, and blaming external factors for their students’ poor performance.

- *Honesty* – “Since the first step to solving any problem is to admit we have one, becoming a PLC means that schools must develop the capacity to find fault without blame,” says Kushnir. “Identifying areas for improvement must be embraced by teams as opportunities to learn how to improve their practice and help more students learn at high levels.” This is cushioned by making improvement, not perfection, the goal.

- *Support* – Teacher evaluation is not a high-value strategy for improving performance, says Kushnir. Carrot-and-stick, punish-and-reward management was developed for the low-

level tasks of 19th-century factories, but it's not well suited to the complex, creative work of classrooms. Teachers and PLCs will make mistakes, and "the path to improved student achievement will have peaks and valleys and a few bumps along the way," he continues. What teachers need from their supervisors is understanding and support.

- *Equity* – Every day, teachers make decisions about instruction, assessment, and follow-up. When those decisions are made in isolation, a lot is left to chance variations in skill, knowledge, and repertoire. "While teachers are well meaning," says Kushnir, "the result is an inequitable classroom experience for students from one classroom to the next within the same school." High-functioning PLCs level the playing field for students by spreading effective practices and helping to eliminate pedagogy and materials that aren't working.

- *Celebration* – "A gain, no matter how small, is still a gain," concludes Kushnir. "PLCs recognize this fact, and as a result, they celebrate each success that moves them one step closer to accomplishing their shared goals. They understand that success breeds more success!"

"10 Steps to Creating a PLC Culture" by Greg Kushnir in *All Things PLC*, Summer 2017

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2. Exercising Restraint When Coaching Teachers and Principals

"Ideally, coach-talk should account for somewhere between 10 percent to 33 percent of a conversation," says Elena Aguilar in this *Education Week* article. "The ability to do this emerges from a deep understanding and belief that your role as a coach is not to fill someone else's head with ideas, advice, or direction. Your role is to facilitate reflection." Sharing lots of feedback and opinions is unlikely to get coachees seeing their growth areas and untangling instructional or leadership problems when they're on their own. It also communicates a lack of trust in a coachee's ability to figure things out. Better to start from a position of confidence in people's smarts and commitment, get them talking through their challenges and dilemmas, and limit advice-giving to one nugget per session.

The key is what Aguilar calls a "safe learning space," well-framed questions, and patience, since change usually won't be immediate. She recorded a coaching conversation with a principal and was able to capture her questions and prompts:

- Where would you like to start today?
- That sounds really hard. What else came up for you?
- What do you hope you'd do next time something like this happens?
- Tell me more.
- What did you learn about yourself as a leader from that experience?
- What else did you learn?
- And what else?
- I remember when this happened a year or so ago and how you responded then. What's your memory of that time, and how do you see your response then as different from now?

- Tell me more about that.
- How did you see your growth?
- How do you wish you'd responded?
- What do you think impacted how you responded to her?
- I agree with your thoughts. Yes, try that.
- What's most important for you to remember from this conversation?

"I had to listen very carefully," says Aguilar, "identify reflective questions that would best help this principal move deeper in his thinking, and I had to edit my words so that my questions were clear and sharp. But then I didn't have to do too much. It felt remarkably easy. The principal, on the other hand, said at the end of our conversation, 'Wow, that felt like a mental workout!'"

"Improve Your Coaching with One Move: Stop Talking" by Elena Aguilar in *Education Week*, July 20, 2017, http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/coaching_teachers/2017/07/improve_your_coaching_with_one.html

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3. Are You Decisive or Stubborn?

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell quotes Abraham Lincoln – "I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday" – and explores the continuum from wishy-washy to stubborn in day-to-day decision-making and implementation:

- Too flexible – "When you frequently change course, you devalue dedication and hard work," says Rockwell.
- Decisive and persistent – "Single-mindedness is the strength to press through obstacles, disappointment, and resistance," he says. "Team members keep trying when they believe you'll stay the course."
- Stubborn – Refusing to consider alternatives because they might require change. This demotivates teams and alienates high performers, leading colleagues to believe they should stop trying to fix problems because the boss won't budge.

"There's a thin line between stubborn and persistent," says Rockwell. "Successful leaders make decisions quickly and change their mind reluctantly. But stubbornness refuses to consider alternatives."

If you think you might sometimes be stubborn, "it's probably worse than you think," he says. Some advice: Surround yourself with strong, competent people who aren't afraid to speak up. Ask a trusted colleague for your telltale signs of stubbornness: What you do, what you say, and how your appearance and body language change. Develop a Plan B for any course of action. "It's not a change of course if you adopt a contingency plan," says Rockwell.

"Succeeding with the Thin Line Between Stubborn and Persistent" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, July 24, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2v2kyzX>

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4. Michael Fullan on Bottom-Up Accountability

(Originally titled “Making Progress Possible: A Conversation with Michael Fullan”)

In this *Educational Leadership* interview conducted by Naomi Thiers, Michael Fullan (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) says that putting accountability pressure on teachers hasn't been very effective at raising student achievement, nor has presenting teachers with research evidence or coming at them with moral exhortations. What improves day-to-day instruction, says Fullan, is “collaborative professionalism” – school leaders orchestrating conditions where small groups of teachers can work toward standards with a degree of autonomy “in relatively nonthreatening circumstances, with others who can be helpful. And then when they start to experience success with their students, with other teachers, they really get motivated. Then it kind of accelerates.”

This is what he calls bottom-up accountability – having a framework of goals, monitoring student learning results, and being transparent and specific about the evidence of what works and what doesn't. “[O]nce you have trust, transparency, specificity, evidence, and nonjudgmentalism,” he says, “you get a constellation of conditions that make progress possible.”

Fullan describes a meeting protocol used by Park Manor Middle School west of Toronto. Every Friday, grade-level teams sit together for an hour and examine the learning progress and challenges of one student from each of the three teachers' classrooms. “When you do that,” says Fullan, “you're pushing one another for what works. You pull out the knowledge.” In all-staff meetings, Park Manor has teachers describe two things they're doing with technology that are highly effective.

Fullan and his colleagues have identified six global competencies that are at the heart of deep student learning: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. “We're trying to change the nature of teaching so there's more partnership among students, teachers, and families,” he says. “The exciting part is, with these new pedagogies – which are more tied into real problems, more about humanity and citizenship – the students who are the most alienated from regular schooling are the ones who move the furthest and fastest into this learning mode...”

Fullan says that pilot programs rarely result in widespread improvement. Instead, he advocates diffusion through “intentional social movement.” Here's an example. The 900 high schools in Ontario were stuck at an average 68 percent graduation rate. All schools were offered the opportunity to apply for a program that would get students doing applied work in aviation, forestry, finance, or other areas of local interest. Schools began applying, and ideas and suggestions were disseminated rapidly by the organizers. “Eventually almost all the high schools were doing one or another part of this innovation,” reports Fullan, “and learning from one another.” The high-school graduation rate rose to 85.5 percent, and within a decade, 48,000 students were involved in these activities.

Of course not every innovation works as well as this one, which is why constant assessment and honest analysis of results are critical to success. Some programs are dropped, and others flourish.

“Making Progress Possible: A Conversation with Michael Fullan” by Naomi Thiers in *Educational Leadership*, June 2017 (Vol. 74, p. 8-14), <http://bit.ly/2t7weiQ>

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5. A Quiz on the Best Teaching and Learning Techniques

In this National Public Radio piece, Anya Kamenetz reports on a recent survey by Ulrich Boser (Center for American Progress) of 3,000 U.S. adults on their beliefs about teaching and learning. Here are the questions:

A. When it comes to learning, metacognition (thinking about thinking) can be just as important as intelligence. True or False?

B. What is the best way to learn from a text passage?

- Read and re-read the text.
- Explain key ideas of the text to yourself while reading.
- Underline key concepts.
- Use a highlighter.

C. Intelligence is fixed at birth. True or False?

D. You have a test coming up. What’s the best way to review the material?

- Circle key points in the textbook.
- Review relevant points of the lecture in audio format.
- Take an informal quiz based on the material.

E. To which of the following should you *not* tailor your learning?

- Learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.)
- Previous knowledge
- Interests
- Ability

F. Learning should be spaced out over time. True or False?

G. Right-brained people learn differently from left-brained people. True or False?

Here are the correct answers to the quiz, with Boser’s comments and some of the responses to his survey:

A. True – Research shows that people’s beliefs about the nature of intelligence affect their level of effort and in turn their performance. But 71 percent of respondents said teachers should praise students “for being smart.” Research by Carol Dweck and others suggests that this kind of praise is counterproductive, and that students do better if they are praised for effort and strategy.

B. Explain key ideas... Restating the text in your own words is another form of active learning. But almost 90 percent of respondents thought that simply re-reading material is “highly effective” for learning. Research suggests the opposite.

C. False – This belief is sometimes called “fixed mindset.” In fact, there’s plenty of evidence that IQ can increase over time given interventions like preschool or reading to a child. But more than a quarter of respondents said intelligence is “fixed at birth.”

D. Take a quiz... Quick assessments of learning are a form of active learning and the best way to learn and remember.

E. Learning styles... A major review of the research found “virtually no evidence” for the idea that people are best taught through their individual learning styles. But almost 90 percent of respondents thought they should receive information in their own “learning style.” They are captive to a highly intuitive myth.

F. True. Much research supports the idea that spaced repetition helps retain knowledge over the long term.

G. False. Recent brain-scan research provides no evidence for the idea that individuals are left-brain or right-brain dominant in the first place, much less that this supposed difference might affect learning.

An additional survey item that was not in the quiz: More than 40 percent of respondents said that teachers don’t need to know a subject like math or science, as long as they have good instructional skills. In fact, research shows that deep subject-matter knowledge is a key element of good teaching.

Despite survey respondents’ major misconceptions about teaching and learning, more than 75 percent considered themselves “above average” in their ability to judge teachers’ work. This last finding “helps explain why teaching has been so devalued for a long time,” says Boser. “We see it in how teachers get paid and treated... Parents’ opinions are important, but teaching is a real craft. A lot of science goes into it. And we need to do more to respect that.”

“You Probably Believe Some Learning Myths: Take Our Quiz to Find Out” by Anya Kamenetz, *National Public Radio*, March 22, 2017, <http://n.pr/2mPgYRf>

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6. What We Can Learn From Multiracial Students’ Academic Achievement

In this Brookings Report, Jonathan Rothwell reports on his analysis of the 12th-grade NAEP scores of multiracial students compared to other racial groups. Some key points:

- Multiracial students generally come from families with lower socioeconomic status than white students.
- Multiracial students attend schools where they are far more integrated with white and Asian students compared to African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Pacific Islander students.
- Multiracial students have the same average test scores as whites in mathematics, science, and writing.
- On reading tests, multiracial students outperform other groups, including Asians.

“These results contradict the controversial hypothesis that between-group differences in IQ result from genetic differences between races,” says Rothwell. “[T]hey suggest that the race gaps in academic achievement in the United States are the result of inequality, especially in terms of access to educational opportunities, and therefore could be closed under fairer political, social, and economic arrangements... The academic success of multiracial students bodes well for the future, demonstrating how the integration of schools and of the broader

society can eliminate achievement gaps between groups of children, regardless of their race, or indeed their races.”

“Multiracial Adolescents Show No Test Score Gap With Whites” by Jonathan Rothwell, Brookings Report, July 1, 2017, <http://brook.gs/2u59NcD>

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7. Short Items:

a. Reading Like a Historian – This website <https://sheg.stanford.edu/rh> from Stanford University has 73 U.S. history lessons, 37 world history lessons, and 5 on historical thinking. Each lesson provides relevant background information, poses a central historical question, gets students reading documents and answering guiding questions, and stimulates whole-class discussion. Among the topics: Salem Witch Trials, Slavery in the Constitution, Hamilton v. Jefferson, Louisiana Purchase, Irish Immigration, Sharecropping, Chinese Immigration and Exclusion, Battle of Little Bighorn, Spanish-American War, Jacob Riis, Child Labor, Anti-Suffragists, League of Nations, Prohibition, Scopes Trial, The Dust Bowl, The Atomic Bomb, Zoot Suit Riots, Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Women in the 1950s, Stonewall Riots.

Spotted in “Thinking Like a Historian: Developing Disciplinary Literacy in History Among Middle-School Struggling Readers” by Eric Claravall in *Literacy Today*, July/August 2017 (Vol. 35, #1, p. 32-33); Claravall can be reached at claraval@sfsu.edu.

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b. Khan Academy teams up with AP – Salman Khan announced last week that his organization has free online videos, articles, and practice exercises (for use in class or independently) to help students prepare for Advanced Placement exams. A sampling:

- U.S. History – <http://bit.ly/2tQtXjD>
- World History – <http://bit.ly/2uMX4h3>
- Art History – <http://bit.ly/2uNmQve>

“College Board, Khan Academy to Offer Free AP Test Prep” by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, July 28, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2tQKY3w>; Khan can be reached at salman@khanacademy.org.

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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 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, consultant, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

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- A collection of "classic" articles from all issues

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
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
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine