Marshall Memo 38

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 17, 2004

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Our teacher took us out at night and pointed out the stars. She said to us, 'You are among the stars. You are bright, and you are constant, and you are always expected to shine.'"

Clifton Taulbert on his elementary teacher in segregated, 1950's Glen Allan, Mississippi (interview in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 p. 21)

"[T]he core mission of formal education to not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn."

Richard DuFour (see item #1)

"Despite compelling evidence indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation… Educators must stop…hoarding their ideas, materials, and strategies and begin to work together to meet the needs of all students."

Richard DuFour (*ibid*.)

"Even the grandest design eventually translates into hard work."

Richard DuFour (*ibid*.)

"Knowing how people learn doesn't make it easy. Just as we cannot force people to engage in aerobic exercise to improve their health, we cannot mandate where and how students address their mental energies."

Robert Shireman (see item #6)

"…the fact that students tune out does not mean that they need to be taught something different. It means that they need to be taught *differently*."

Robert Shireman (see item 6)

"At school, you have no choice but to work hard. They're on you from the time you first get here. If you don't do your homework, they call home, and then they make you do it. You can't get away with nothing here, and after a while you start to realize that everybody's working, and it starts to feel good to know that everyone is going to make it. They make sure that we're all going to college at this school."

11th-grader in a successful Boston pilot school (see item 4)

1. What Effective Teacher Teamwork Looks Like

In this important lead article in the new *Educational Leadership*, Richard DuFour lays out three "Big Ideas" on what he calls professional learning communities:

• *Big Idea #1: Ensuring that Students Learn* – DuFour asserts that "the core mission of formal education to not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn." He urges schools to go beyond the usual mission-statement rhetoric about "learning for all" and organize to ensure the success of each student. To do this, a school must answer three crucial questions:

1. What do we want each student to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Most schools leave it up to individual teachers to answer the third question. This produces an inconsistent and idiosyncratic response to student failure. "Some teachers conclude that the struggling students should transfer to a less rigorous course or should be considered for special education. Some lower their expectations by adopting less challenging standards for subgroups of students within their classroom. Some look for ways to assist the students before of after school. Some allow struggling students to fail."

In a professional learning community, there is a *schoolwide* policy on how to respond to struggling students, and that response is:

- *Timely* – Students are identified as soon as they don't "get it."
- *Immediate* – Students don't have to wait for summer school or until they are retained in the same grade to get help.
- *Non-negotiable* – Struggling students are required (versus invited) to get extra help and spend extra time.

Here's what this looks like at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois (a 4,000-student school where DuFour was principal and superintendent): Every three weeks, all students gets a progress report. Students who are having difficulty get help from the teacher, counselor, and faculty advisor to resolve the problem, and parents are notified. Struggling students get a pass from study hall to a school tutoring center to get special help, and an older student mentor works with the student's advisor to help the student with homework during a daily advisory period. If the student is still having trouble after six weeks, he or she is required to attend tutoring sessions during the study halls. Counselors start making weekly checks on progress. If tutoring fails to

improve performance within the next six weeks, the student is assigned a daily guided study hall with no more than ten students. The supervisors of these study halls get homework assignments from classroom teachers and make sure the work is done. Also at this point, parents come up and sign a contract with the student, counselor, and teacher on what each party will do to help the student meet standards.

• *Big Idea #2: A Culture of Collaboration* – Ensuring that every student learns can't be done by teachers operating in isolation, so structures for collaboration are essential. DuFour notes that many schools pay lip service to collaboration but have not operationalized it where it counts. "Some school staffs equate the term 'collaboration' with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs join forces to develop consensus on operational procedures, such as how they will respond to tardiness or supervise recess. Still others organize themselves into committees to oversee different facets of the school's operation, such as discipline, technology, and social climate." Although useful, this kind of collaboration is not the heart of the matter. "The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement."

DuFour describes how teacher teams work in Boones Mill Elementary School in rural Virginia. All staff members are members of a grade-level or subject-area team and have scheduled times when they are required to meet. To plan a curriculum unit, a grade-level team looks at state and national standards, the district's curriculum guide, and student achievement data and asks the next grade-level's teachers what incoming skills and knowledge they want students to have in this area next year. The team then agrees on the essential knowledge and skills that all students should learn by the end of the unit, writes common assessments to measure students' mastery of these outcomes, and sets an outcome goal (e.g., 85 percent of students proficient and above). They agree on a standard for proficiency for each skill and concept and the criteria they will apply to evaluate student work. Finally, they agree on a schedule of formative and summative assessments. The formative assessments tell teachers: "Are students learning what they need to learn?" and "Who needs additional time and support to learn?" After each assessment, teachers score their students' work and the team meets to analyze how the whole grade level performed and discuss how they can build on the strengths and address the weaknesses.

DuFour asserts that this kind of results-oriented teacher collaboration is the key to high student achievement. "Educators must stop working in isolation and hoarding their ideas, materials, and strategies and begin to work together to meet the needs of all students." DuFour says that school leaders should stop making excuses (we don't have time, we don't have consensus) and mandate times when teachers do this kind of work. "In the final analysis," he writes, "building the collaborative culture of a professional learning community is a question of will." He also says that schools must "stop pretending that merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum." Schools must go beyond the *intended* curriculum and the *implemented* curriculum and focus on the *attained* curriculum – what students actually learn.

- *Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results* – When a school says "We will adopt the Junior Great Books program" or "We will create three new labs for our science course," it is adopting *process* goals. Far more effective are *results* goals (e.g., 90% of student proficient and above on our final writing assessment by June) and using interim assessment data to find the best methods and materials to get students to the target. "Every teacher team," writes DuFour of the results-oriented school, "participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress." For this to happen, it's crucial that teachers look at data together, avoid using averages scores (which mask the true spread of student results), and compare their students' progress on standards with other teachers' results, making best use of the "ideas, materials, and strategies, and talents of the entire team." Teacher teams must constantly ask themselves, "Have we made progress on the goals that are most important to us?" This is hard work, but in the end it's what produces high achievement for all students.

"What is a 'Professional Learning Community'?" by Richard DuFour in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 6-11); no e-link, but article can be purchased at http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200405/toc.html

2. The Characteristics of "Star" Urban Teachers

In the article, Martin Haberman, the Wisconsin professor who created the Haberman Urban Teacher Selection Interview, updates his research-based definition of a "star" urban teacher and gives advice to principals about the tricky challenge of

having one or more "star" teachers in a school. Here's what star teachers (who make up about eight percent of the teacher population) do:

• *They recognize the imperative of student success*. Star teachers see their students' achievement as a matter of life and death.

• *They have irrational faith in their impact on students*. Star teachers know that their total influence on students may be less than that of society, neighborhood, or the gang, yet they see themselves as winning and take pride in turning students on to learning and making them educationally successful in the midst of failed urban school systems.

• *They see themselves as teachers of children as well as content*. Star teachers want to encourage students to become better people, not just high achievers.

• *They are learners*. Star teachers are vitally interested in some subject or avocation that keeps them continually learning, and this makes them good models for students.

• *They recognize and compensate for their weaknesses*. Star teachers know what they don't know and what they don't do well, and strive to overcome or work around those areas.

• *They hear what students and adults say to them*. Star teachers listen well and have excellent communication skills.

• *They respond as professionals and are not easily shocked*. When horrific events occur, as they frequently do in urban schools, star teachers respond as thoughtful professionals, asking themselves, "What can I do about this?" If they can help, they act. If not, they get on with their work and their lives.

• *They tend to be nonjudgmental*. Star teachers try to understand the motivation behind a given behavior rather than judge the behavior.

• *They are not moralistic*. Star teachers know that preaching and lecturing are ineffective.

• *They do not see themselves as system reformers*. Star teachers are realistic about changing their schools and districts, focusing instead on their students.

• *They have no need for power*. Star teachers get their satisfaction from teaching their students.

• *They sometimes go their own way*. Star teachers can disagree with district policies (on suspending students, for example), or might not feel the need to follow every page of the curriculum if their own expertise takes the subject matter further.

• *They do not work in isolation*. Star teachers know that burnout can affect anyone, especially those working in isolation, and they network and create their own support groups.

• *They derive energy and well-being from their interactions with students*. Star teachers enjoy being with students so much that they can put up with the sometimes foolish demands of their school systems. They feel vitalized and energized from every day at work.

Haberman goes on to describe how star teachers react when administrators mandate the use of the "Bumstead" reading program or the "Surefire Method" of instruction: "If the district or building administration operates on the assumption that teacher-proof programs can improve schools, then star teachers will detach themselves from the process."

Haberman believes that the principal's challenge is to win the hearts and minds of the 40 percent of teachers in the middle – satisfactory teachers who are as susceptible to becoming discouraged and accepting failure as they are to emulating the more positive approach of the stars. With this in mind, it's tricky for a principal to have star teachers on the faculty, because they sometimes threaten or put off other teachers. Some principals make life difficult for star teachers and consciously or unconsciously drive them out. "The challenge to the principal, or to those seeking to create a learning community," writes Haberman, "is to use star teaches in unobtrusive, supportive ways that do not threaten the rest of the faculty and continuously remind them of their inadequacies… Stars can have a positive impact if other teachers see that the stars are not seeking promotions out of their classrooms and are not trying to control the behavior of their peers… administrators should never request teacher to observe star teachers' classrooms unless the teachers themselves request it." Haberman advises principals to use star teachers as committee members (but not chairpersons) and most of the time let them focus on their classrooms (which is what they want to do anyway).

Haberman concludes by telling the story of two failing Texas schools that he was allowed to re-staff using his teacher and principal selection interviews. The schools made dramatic turnarounds because all teachers "focused on effort rather than ability as their explanation for school success. The teachers saw effective instruction as a matter of life and death for students. Moreover, the teachers expected to have problems as part of their daily work. They viewed working with English language-limited students and inclusion students as an integral, not an extra, part of

their jobs. And they accepted accountability for student achievement." Haberman asked the teachers in these schools to follow best practices rather than obsess about the Texas tests, looking at the tests as minimum, not maximum, levels of what their students could achieve. Sure enough, the test scores took care of themselves.

"Can Star Teachers Create Learning Communities?" by Martin Haberman in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 52-56); no e-link, but this article can be purchased at
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200405/toc.html

3. Helping Rookie Teachers C-O-P-E

How can a brand-new teacher deal with the challenges of being a rookie and avoid becoming a statistic (a quarter of new teachers leave the profession in the first two years, and one third leave after three years)? Cynthia Millinger, who was mentored when she was a beginning teacher, mentored new teachers when she had more experience, and now runs a mentoring program in Fairfax, Virginia, has reduced her wisdom to the acronym COPE: Co-development and cooperation; Observation and feedback; Policies and systems; and Encouragement and support.

- *Co-development and collaboration* – New teachers and peer mentors should work *with* each other in a partnership, not *for* each other. It's easy for well-intentioned mentors to overwhelm novice teachers with a whole year of lesson plans; they should cool it and help the rookie deal with one day, one week, and one unit at a time.
- *Observation and feedback* – Mentors should invite their mentees in to observe their own teaching, asking for feedback on a specific area. This helps pave the way for the mentee to feel more comfortable having the mentor observe his or her own class.
- *Policies and systems* – New teachers need tips on practical matters that are usually not included in the school's policy manual, like what to do when the copying machine breaks or where to line students up for the Thanksgiving assembly. These items should be addressed at the teachable moment when they arise. Mentors should also share their systems for organizing and managing teaching and paperwork.
- *Encouragement and support* – Sometimes new teachers need more than a pat on the back: they need permission to take a day off for reflection and recuperation, or a luncheon to praise and support new teachers, or some other tangible sign of recognition and help.

"Helping New Teachers Cope" by Cynthia Simon Millinger in in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 66-69); no e-link, but article can be purchased at

http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200405/toc.html

5. Boston High Schools: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

In this stinging article, New York University education professor Pedro Noguera reports on a study of ten Boston high schools, eight of which were depressingly ineffective. Noguera describes the failing schools' failure to align the curriculum with standards, their poorly-implemented "test prep" courses, their half-baked block schedules and "small learning communities," and their advisory groups with little real advising by poorly-prepared teachers. When the researchers asked students in these schools if there was an staff member to whom they would turn if they were experiencing a serious personal problem, more than 80 percent said "No," and 56 percent said they did not think their teachers really cared about them.

Most disturbing of all, the various innovations in these schools had not changed traditional instruction; the lecture method and passive learning were pervasive, and researchers saw classrooms in which students were sleeping, putting on makeup, or watching films unrelated to the course content. As Noguera and a colleague entered one classroom, a student groused that the visitors would prevent him from having his usual card game. But "[t]o our surprise and dismay, the student's fears were unfounded: Even with two researchers seated at the back of the classroom, most of the students played cards for the entire class period while the teacher presented an assignment to a small group of students seated at the front of the room."

Noguera observed that administrators in the unsuccessful schools assumed that changes in the organizational structure (block scheduling, advisories, small learning communities) would produce changes in classroom teaching. Not so! For that to happen, he says, principals need to pay much closer attention to what is happening in classrooms and provide much more effective training and support to teachers accustomed to the old way of doing things.

At the two successful Boston schools (one a pilot school and one a charter school), Noguera and his colleagues found a much different story – although they are at pains to say that there were "no secret strategies," only a more effective implementation of basic reform principles. "What set these schools apart," writes Noguero, "was not what they did, but how they did it. Rather than simply introduce a reform and hope for the best, these schools took the time to make sure that teachers, parents, and students understood the purpose behind a given reform strategy. Equally important, they looked for evidence that the reform was achieving its goals."

Administrators had a "laserlike focus on teaching and learning." There were much higher expectations for student work (see quote above), a clear expectation that students would go to college, highly-developed school cultures, and a high level of parent participation. Almost all students felt there was at least one adult in the school to whom they could go with problems – and all students passed the rigorous Massachusetts MCAS tests.

"Transforming High Schools" by Pedro Noguera in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 26-31)
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200405/toc.html

5. Turning Around a Kansas City High School

In this article, Thomas Sergiovanni, a Texas education professor and storied writer on school leadership, describes the dramatic turnaround at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas, starting in 1995. Adopting a reform framework called *First Things First* developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, the staff embraced seven conditions for school improvement to transform their school:

- *Continuity of care* – The school was divided up into eight small learning communities of 150-200 students, and each cohort stayed with the same group of ten teachers for most of each day and looped with them for four years.
- *Clear standards* – Teachers spelled out high, clear, and fair standards for conduct and for what students were expected to know and be able to do by graduation and at key points along the way.
- *Small classes* – The student-teacher ratio was reduced to 15:1 during core instructional periods by redeploying instructional staff.
- *Differentiation* – Students were given enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.
- *Good teaching* – Teachers were given clear expectations about what good teaching and learning looked like and were equipped, empowered, and expected to teach the curriculum in a way that actively engaged students. Teacher teams were allowed to make instructional decisions, which created opportunities for continual staff learning.
- *Flexibility* – Teacher teams were able to quickly redirect time, money, people, and space to meet emerging needs.
- *Accountability* – Teacher teams were collectively responsible for student outcomes, and there were incentives for improvements in student performance – and

consequences for lack of progress.

Over a period of years, Wyandotte High registered dramatic gains, going from one of the worst schools in Kansas City to one of the highest-performing and most popular with parents.

"Building a Community of Hope" by Thomas Sergiovanni in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 33-37); no e-link, but this article can be purchased at http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200405/toc.html

6. The Case for a Rigorous High-School Curriculum for All Students

In this back-page commentary piece in *Education Week*, Aspen Institute researcher Robert Shireman talks about what he calls the three R's of high-school learning – relationships, relevance, and rigor – and warns against selling our high-risk students short under the banner of "multiple pathways" to success.

- "*Relationships* are important because students are more likely to stay engaged when they know that somebody – especially an adult – actually cares." Small schools have a big advantage fostering better relationships among students, staff, and parents.
- "*Relevance* is important because students learn better when the topic is connected to something that they know or are interested in." This can happen through career themes or individual teachers linking classroom subjects to students' interests and prior knowledge.
- "A *rigorous* curriculum is one that guides students through progressively deeper interactions with subject matter." Shireman asserts that warm relationships and relevant curriculum are not enough for students to make meaningful academic progress. Rigor, done right, can actually increase students' motivation and engagement as much as relationships and relevance. "It is not only about difficult subject matter; it also refers to the type of instruction. Aiming students toward high levels of achievement, rigorous instruction requires using a variety of mechanisms to determine whether students are understanding and making progress. By doing so, effective teachers decide when to review material, when to move on, and how to revisit a difficult concept."

Shireman agrees with the conventional wisdom among high-school reformers that students should see "multiple pathways" to a good future : college, apprentice-ships, community service, and the military. "These approaches can bring relevance to all students, but particularly to those students who might otherwise drop out or

barely engage in school." But he feels strongly that marginal students should get the same basic academic content as students who are sure they will go to college. The standard curriculum should be customized, he argues, not watered down. There are two reasons for this. "First, the fact that students tune out does not mean that they need to be taught something different. It means that they need to be taught *differently*." And second, because nobody has come up with a better alternative to the core high-school curriculum. "We should think of the list of courses in the same way that Winston Churchill described democracy: the worst solution except all those others that have been tried."

Shireman concludes, "There might be rigorous courses of study that could some day replace some of the ones on the list, but let's figure out what they are before denying our most vulnerable young people the benefit of the ones that have already been identified. And in our discussions of high school reform, let's stop talking about multiple pathways and start focusing on how the reforms are supposed to affect teaching and learning of core courses, and whether they are having the effects that are intended."

"Where Do 'Multiple Pathways' Take Us?" by Robert Shireman in *Education Week*, May 12, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #36, p. 44, 35),
http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=36shireman.h23

7. An Educator's Daughter Turns Away from Suicide and Gives Hope

In this poignant essay, Morton Sherman, a New Jersey school superintendent, describes how his teenage daughter, Rachel, plunged into clinical depression and, despite close observation, tried to kill herself. Rachel survived, got help, returned to school, and spoke about her ordeal in a moving, could-hear-a-pin-drop graduation speech. After this speech and a similar talk to the juniors in her school, her father describes how students "flocked to her, crying, saying thanks, and just wanting to hold on to someone." Rachel has since made many other speeches about depression, helping students, teachers, and parents think about the unthinkable and address a growing mental health phenomenon among teenagers.

"My daughter Rachel has spoken out," writes Sherman, "and we believe she has made a difference. Sometimes, I have joined her at the podium, talking about her life and about our lives as a family. I get to hug her in public and tell her how much we love her. We are fortunate for that. But for a few seconds, a few changes in circumstance, we would not have Rachel with us. For our family, and for all those

who care about children, we as a society and as school people must get beyond the stigma associated with mental-health issues. We have work to do."

"A Story of Hope" by Morton Sherman in *Education Week*, May 12, 2004 (Vol. XXIII, #36, p. 34), http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=36Sherman.h23

8. Short Items:

a. Lesson study websites – Two websites have information on the application of "lesson study" to American schools: Columbia University Teachers College's Lesson Study Research Group is at http://www.tc.columbia.edu/lessonstudy and Research for Better Schools has a site with frequently-asked questions at http://www.rbs.org/lesson_study/faw.shtml
From "Web Wonders" in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 94);

b. New teacher induction programs – The Public Education Network's new report, *The Voice of the New Teacher*, has valuable information on supporting teachers as they enter a school. It's at:
http://www.publiceducation.org/pdf/PEN_Pubs/Voice_of_the_New_Teacher.pdf
From "Web Wonders" in *Educational Leadership*, May 2004 (Vol. 61, #8, p. 94)

c. No Child Left Behind tutoring resources – Information on tutoring available to students attending public schools "in need of improvement" is available at http://www.tutorsforkids.org. The Supplemental Educational Services Quality Center at the American Institutes of Research organized the website, which provides information on the extra academic help to which students are entitled. The site has basic information about supplemental education services (SES), detailed guidance on SES for families, providers, educators, and policymakers; state-by-state profile of SES implementation; national trends data on SES implementation; and links to tools and resources on SES. (Spotted the *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, May 14, 2004)

Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should be covered, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your "designated reader," searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

• *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.

• *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.

• *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.

• *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.

• *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate; safety-net programs.

• *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.

• *And…* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
Curriculum/Education Update (ASCD)
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Harpers
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
Middle School Journal
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible to give access to the full article. If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

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