Marshall Memo 593

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 29, 2015

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"How we treat each other at work matters. Insensitive interactions have a way of whittling away at people's health, performance, and souls… Civility lifts people. Incivility holds people down. It makes people feel small."

Christine Porath (see item #2)

"There is widespread agreement among educators and parents that communicating with each other benefits students. However, evidence suggests this communication is infrequent and unsystematic in most schools."

Matthew Kraft and Todd Rogers (see item #3)

"Every educator wants students to learn how to think. But nobody really knows what that means."

Barry Schwartz (see item #1)

"Everything is obvious once you know it… [T]eachers, at all levels, must overcome 'the curse of knowledge.' If they can't remind themselves of what they were like before they understood something well, they will be at a loss to explain it to their students."

Barry Schwartz (*ibid.*)

"The questions we ask in class teach students how to ask questions. How we pursue dialogue models reflectiveness. Students watch who we call on, or don't, and learn about fairness. We teach them when and how to interrupt by when and how we interrupt. We teach them how to listen by how carefully we listen. If they see us admitting that we don't know something, we encourage intellectual honesty as well as humility. We are always modeling. And students are always watching."

Barry Schwartz (*ibid.*)

1. The Goal of Education: Cultivating Eight Intellectual Virtues

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Barry Schwartz (Swarthmore College) takes note of the increasing pressure on colleges and universities to be accountable for results. But what do educational "results" look like? For departments educating nurses, accountants, teachers, physical therapists, and software engineers, it's pretty straightforward to measure outcomes. But what about liberal arts? The usual answer is that general educators are in the business of teaching students how to think. "But what does it mean to 'know how to think'?" asks Schwartz. "Is there one right way to think? If so, what is it? Every educator wants students to learn how to think. But nobody really knows what that means."

In this article, Schwartz takes a crack at defining desirable educational outcomes. For starters, there are some foundational skills:

- Expressive clarity;
- Quantitative ability;
- Analytical acumen;
- Conceptual flexibility.

But Schwartz believes there's a deeper set of "intellectual virtues" that the whole K-16 enterprise should be working toward, each with a moral dimension. Here's his list, which he puts forward "just to get the conversation started:"

• *Love of truth* – Finding the truth is difficult, he says, and our task has been made more difficult by a new relativism – you have your truth and I have mine, it's all a matter of perspective, knowledge is democratized. Previously excluded voices have indeed enriched our understanding in recent years, says Schwartz, and what used to be regarded as absolute truth has evolved. "But the reason they have enriched the public debate is that they have given the rest of us an important piece of the truth that was previously invisible to us. Not *their* truth, but *the* truth."

"When a significant minority of Americans reject evolution and global warming out of hand," Schwartz continues, "the desire to find the truth can't be taken for granted… Love of truth is an intellectual virtue because its absence has serious moral consequences. Relativism chips away at our fundamental respect for one another as human beings. When people have respect for the truth, they seek it out and speak it in dialogue. Once truth becomes suspect, debates become little more than efforts at manipulation. Instead of trying to enlighten or persuade people by giving them reasons to see things as we do, we can use any form of influence we think will work."

• *Honesty* – This quality "enables students to face the limits of what they themselves know," says Schwartz. "It encourages them to own up to their mistakes. And it allows them to acknowledge uncongenial truths about the world."

• *Fair-mindedness* – This is essential if we are to learn how to avoid "motivated reasoning" – the tendency to embrace evidence that is consistent with what we already believe and ignore what we don't want to hear. Fair-mindedness is essential in evaluating the arguments of others.

• *Humility* – When people are humble, they can face up to their own mistakes and shortcomings and ask others for help.

• *Perseverance* – Little that's worth knowing comes easily, says Schwartz, and educators need to develop students' tenacity and grit as if they were muscles.

• *Courage* – Risk-taking is part of learning, and so is stepping up in the face of disagreement by others, including those in authority.

• *Good listening* – This takes courage, since really tuning in to what others are saying opens the possibility that our views of the world and our plans for how to live in it may need modification.

• *Perspective-taking and empathy* – "Everything is obvious once you know it," says Schwartz. "[T]eachers, at all levels, must overcome 'the curse of knowledge.' If they can't remind themselves of what they were like before they understood something well, they will be at a loss to explain it to their students."

• *Practical wisdom* – This is what enables people to find the balance "between timidity and recklessness, carelessness and obsessiveness, flightiness and stubbornness, speaking up and listening, trust and skepticism, empathy and detachment," says Schwartz. "Wisdom is also what enables us to make difficult decisions when intellectual virtues conflict. Being empathetic, fair, and open-minded often rubs up against fidelity to the truth. Practical wisdom is the master virtue."

Schwartz sees these qualities as essential to success in all parts of adult life. "People with intellectual virtues," he says, "will be persistent, ask for help when they need it, provide help when others need it, and not settle for expedient but inaccurate solutions to tough problems… [They will be] flexible, able to admit to and learn from mistakes, and open to change." Employers should hire for these qualities and then train people in the specific skills needed in their workplace.

And institutions of learning should be much more systematic about developing these virtues. "The questions we ask in class teach students how to ask questions. How we pursue dialogue models reflectiveness. Students watch who we call on, or don't, and learn about fairness. We teach them when and how to interrupt by when and how we interrupt. We teach them how to listen by how carefully we listen. If they see us admitting that we don't know something, we encourage intellectual honesty as well as humility. We are always modeling. And students are always watching."

Schwartz concludes by taking issue with the distinction David Brooks recently made between vocationally oriented "résumé" virtues and deeper "eulogy" virtues [see Marshall

Memo 583 for a summary of this article]. "Eulogy virtues are just as important to becoming good doctors, good lawyers, good teachers, good nurses, good physical therapists, and even good bankers as are résumé virtues," says Schwartz. "And they are also important to becoming good children, parents, spouses, friends, and citizens. As Aristotle knew, virtue is needed for material success just as it is needed for moral success."

"Intellectual Virtues" by Barry Schwartz in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 26, 2015 (Vol. LXI, #39, p. B6-B9), no e-link available

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2. The Costs of Workplace Incivility

In this *New York Times* article, Christine Porath (Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business) shares her research on thoughtless, rude, and obnoxious behavior on the job, which has been increasing in the last 20 years. When Porath conducted a survey in 1998, one in four people said they were treated rudely at work at least once a week; in 2011, more than half said they were.

"How we believe others see us shapes who we are," she says. "We ride a wave of pride or get swallowed in a sea of embarrassment based on brief interactions that signal respect or disrespect. Individuals feel valued and powerful when respected. Civility lifts people. Incivility holds people down. It makes people feel small." Here are some examples of behaviors that people complain about – or confess they sometimes exhibit themselves:

- Interrupting others;
- Being judgmental of those who are different;
- Paying little attention or showing little interest in others' opinions;
- Taking the best tasks and leaving the worst for others to do;
- Failing to pass along necessary information;
- Not saying please or thank you;
- Being condescending;
- Putting people down;
- Cursing;
- Screaming at an employee who misses a typo in an internal document;
- Saying, "If I wanted to know what you thought, I'd ask you."
- Using jargon that excludes others;
- Sending brusque e-mails or text messages;
- Walking away from a conversation when he or she loses interest;
- Answering calls in the middle of meetings without leaving the room;
- Looking at a smartphone during a conversation;
- Playing games on a smartphone during a meeting;
- Openly mocking people by pointing out their flaws or personality quirks;
- Reminding a subordinate of his or her "role" or "title" in the organization;
- Taking credit for successes but blaming others for failures.

Here's a quick quiz on the toxicity level of a work environment: http://nyti.ms/1eQA2Lz

Porath has interviewed hundreds of culprits and heard a variety of excuses: *I'm overloaded. I don't have time to be nice. Being nice is less leader-like. People will take advantage of me if I'm nice. This is a competitive environment and flexing my muscles garners power*. And some people are clueless: a surgeon had no idea that residents he was working with thought he was being a jerk until he received some harsh feedback. *I was just treating them the way I was treated as a resident,* he said.

For all the rationalizations, uncivil behavior has a negative impact in a number of areas: "Insensitive interactions have a way of whittling away at people's health, performance, and souls," says Porath. Specifically:

• *Health* – Intermittent stressors – for example, from witnessing an angry interaction or even replaying it in your head – elevate the level of hormones called glucocorticoids, which increase appetite and obesity. Stress from incivility can also lead to cardiovascular problems.

• *Productivity and creativity* – Porath's research shows that people who are upset about rude behavior don't see items that are right in front of them and process information less efficiently. Another study found that people who had been belittled performed 33 percent worse on anagram word puzzles and came up with 39 percent fewer creative ideas than a control group. Just witnessing uncivil behavior negatively affected cognitive performance.

• *Safety* – In a study of more than 4,500 doctors and other health personnel, 71 percent said uncivil behavior led to medical errors, and 27 percent said it was the cause of patient deaths.

• *Key decisions* – A poll of juries by a Los Angeles judge found that the behavior of lawyers was a big factors in verdicts.

• *Organizational reputation* – People are less likely to patronize a business with an employee who is perceived as rude; they tend to generalize about other employees, the organization, and even the brand.

"Civility pays dividends," concludes Porath. "Given the enormous cost of incivility, it should not be ignored. We all need to reconsider our behavior. You are always in front of some jury. In every interaction, you have a choice: Do you want to lift people up or hold them down?"

"No Time to Be Nice" by Christine Porath in *The New York Times*, June 21, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1LC8pD2; see a related article on bosses being jerks in Memo 588.

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3. Light-Touch Communication with Parents Can Make a Big Difference

"There is widespread agreement among educators and parents that communicating with each other benefits students," say Matthew Kraft (Brown University) and Todd Rogers (Harvard's Kennedy School) in this *Economics of Education Review* article. "However, evidence suggests this communication is infrequent and unsystematic in most schools." Some evidence from recent studies:

- Only 40 percent of U.S. families with school-age children report getting a phone call specifically about their child from a school administrator the preceding year (2013).

- 66 percent of secondary-school parents do not agree that teachers keep them informed about classroom activities, events, and requirements (2011).
- Fewer than 25 percent of parents can name a basic milestone that their child should have learned in school over the previous year (2012).

"The challenge for policymakers and school administrators," continue Kraft and Rogers, "is to design policies that set clear but reasonable expectations for teachers while also designing systems that make communication efficient and effective." They designed an experiment in which they tried to "get inside the black box of communication between schools, parents, and students to examine how the frequency and content of those interactions matter."

The study took place in a summer credit-recovery program enrolling students from a number of urban high schools. Each week parents of students in the control group received one-sentence individualized messages about their child's performance via text message, e-mail, or phone call (parents said up front which they'd prefer). Some students received positive messages, for example:

- John was an active participant in class all through this week – great job!
- Kelly got an A- on her in-class quiz on cell biology – keep up the good work!
- Jamaal stayed focused in class all week – great improvement!

Others received messages that pointed out specific areas for improvement, for example:

- Kirk was easily distracted in class this week – it is important he try his best to stay focused.
- Tina missed two homework assignments this week – I know she can do better.
- Tom fell asleep in class twice this week – I need more from him.

It took teachers about half an hour a week to write the messages, making this a relatively inexpensive intervention.

What were the results? There was a 14 percent reduction in the failure rate of students in the experimental group. In addition, these students' attendance improved, there was more substantive parent-child communication, and more students were on track for graduation. Kraft and Rogers report that the specificity of the messages was what made the difference. There was no increase in the *amount* parents talked to their children about schoolwork; what changed was what they *said*, informed by teachers' actionable suggestions on what students needed to work on.

Interestingly, it was the more-critical teacher messages that produced the biggest improvements in students' performance. "We do not interpret these suggestive results as implying that teachers should exclusively communicate improvement information to parents," say Kraft and Rogers. "In practice, when teachers communicate directly with parents they can incorporate both positive and improvement information into their messages. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating actionable improvement information because this information enhances the productivity of parent-child interactions."

There were two counterintuitive effects of the experiment. First, students in the treatment group thought their own school performance was substantially worse than that of students in the control group (despite the fact that they actually performed better). Second,

teachers reported weaker relationships with students in the treatment group than with those in the control group. "Taken together," say Kraft and Rogers, "these findings suggest that while the increased parental involvement improved students' likelihood of earning course credits, it also produced psychological and social externalities. This is consistent with other research showing that increasing teacher communication with parents causes high-school students to misbehave less in class, but can also make them less willing to participate in class at all. Future research should explore how these externalities affect other measures of student engagement and achievement."

"The Underutilized Potential of Teacher-to-Parent Communication: Evidence from a Field Experiment" by Matthew Kraft and Todd Rogers in *Economics of Education Review*, April 20, 2015, http://bit.ly/1BLnFdp; the authors can be reached at mkraft@brown.edu and todd_rogers@hks.harvard.edu.

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4. Common Core Writing Standards: What's New?

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/ Chicago) dissects the implications of the Common Core State Standards for the teaching of writing. There's quite a lot of similarity with previous writing standards, he says, especially in the continuing emphasis on the writing process: students are asked to "develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, and trying a new approach." There are more-specific grade-by-grade expectations for students to write: (a) opinions or preferences, (b) informative/explanatory texts in which they convey complex ideas and information, and (c) narratives that relate real or imagined experiences. "Each of these types of writing should increase in the amounts and complexity of information that they express as students progress through the grades," says Shanahan, "and each requires the accomplishment of particular organizational, stylistic, and elaboration criteria."

One important difference from the previous generation of standards, he says, is a shift from persuasion to opinion and formal argument (the latter in middle school). "Persuasion is about trying to convince someone of your point of view using pretty much any approach including emotional appeals and anecdote," says Shanahan. "Argument implies more dispassionate analyses of problems and reliance on evidence… Persuasion assignments focus on personal appeals and consideration of what the audience might want to hear, while argument requires a deeper analysis of the opinion itself and its evidentiary supports." Another difference is Common Core's emphasis on the use of technology in writing, including the use of the Internet, electronic collaboration, and proficiency in keyboarding.

Is all this such a big shift? Not in the standards themselves, says Shanahan, but the assessments that measure Common Core will be different. Just having a high-stakes writing assessment will be a major change in many states, and there are also signs that PARCC and Smarter Balanced will have students writing less about what they *know and feel* (their own experiences, opinions, or imagination) and more about what they *read* – for example, gathering research information as the basis for their writing. "The emphasis of these standards is

definitely on public writing – the writing of the academy and the workplace – rather than on the more personal or private forms that have dominated writing lessons in recent times," says Shanahan. He thinks shifting instructional attention from one side of the coin to the other goes too far, and favors teachers using a balance of the two types of writing.

What are the classroom implications of the new standards? What should teachers be assigning their students? Common Core emphasizes three specific writing activities, and Shanahan adds a fourth:

• *Summarizing texts* – Research has shown that summarizing has a very positive effect on students' reading and writing achievement. Students need to be learn how to paraphrase grade-level material and cite/quote from sources, starting with well-chosen paragraphs and moving on to longer texts. Teachers need to scaffold the process of teaching students how to recognize main ideas and key details, disregard unimportant or repetitive ideas, construct topic sentences, paraphrase, and collapse or combine lists or events into general statements.

• *Text analysis and critique* – Students get better at this when teachers pose thoughtful questions about texts and, starting around fourth grade, get them writing analytically about what they read – for example, having fourth graders describe in depth a character's thoughts, words, or actions. Here the Common Core's close links between writing and reading are evident.

• *Synthesizing information from multiple texts* – Combining ideas from many sources together into one essay or presentation is "the most demanding and elaborate approach to writing about reading" in the Common Core, says Shanahan. "Synthesis is more than a summary, since it requires readers to reassemble the information differently than in the original texts and to deal with contradictions… To synthesize text effectively, writers have to become researchers, not just casual readers. They also have to recognize similarities and differences among the information in the sources. Authors may echo each other or contradict each other, or they might provide non-overlapping information. Helping students to chart or organize such information in a way that makes these repetitions and differences obvious can be a valuable early step in research guidance." Scaffolding and gradually withdrawing supports are key elements of effective teaching of synthesizing.

• *Writing to text models* – "Modeling is a valuable way to connect reading and writing," says Shanahan. "Basically, the idea is that if you want students to write a report, business letter, editorial, or any other kind of piece, it will be easier to learn how to write in such a manner if one has read such texts. The same is true for representing specific text features, such as linking a main idea to a series of key supporting details, using direct quotes within an argument, or reporting evidence from an original source." Students need to carefully and analytically read model pieces of writing, identify features of craft and structure, and imitate aspects of the models in their own writing.

"Common Core State Standards: A New Role for Writing" by Timothy Shanahan in *The Elementary School Journal*, June 2015 (Vol. 115, #4, p. 464-479), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1JeClSr; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu

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5. The Brain Benefits of Hands-On Learning

"When students use their bodies in the learning process, it can have a big effect, even if it seems silly or unconnected to the learning goal at hand," reports Katrina Schwartz in this article in *KQED News*. She quotes University of Chicago professor Sian Beilock: "We understand language in a richer, fuller way if we can connect it to the actions we perform."

Here's an experiment that Beilock conducted. Two groups of third graders were asked to solve this word problem: *Two hippos and two alligators are at the zoo. Pete the zookeeper feeds them at the same time. Pete gives each hippo seven fish. He gives four to the alligators. How many fish does Pete feed the animals?* One group of students read the problem twice and worked on solving it. The other group acted out the story as they read it, physically pretending to feed fish to the hippos and alligators. The second group did better, says Beilock. "What was important was matching the words with specific action; that led to enhanced learning. And after they'd acted it out they could actually do it in their head and get some of the same benefits… In order to really engage our students and help them perform at their best, we have to move beyond what's happening in the head… There is evidence that our ability to use our hands affects the structure and functioning of the brain."

In her 1936 book, *The Secret of Childhood*, Maria Montessori made the same point: "Movement, or physical activity, is thus an essential factor in intellectual growth, which depends upon the impressions received from outside. Through movement we come in contact with external reality, and it is through these contacts that we eventually acquire even abstract ideas."

Susan Goldin-Meadow, a colleague of Beilock's at the University of Chicago, has found that children's hand gestures sometimes indicate an emerging understanding that they can't yet express verbally. These "mismatches" can be useful clues for teachers, indicating that children are ready to take the next step. "Encouraging kids to use their hands brings out unsaid, and often correct ideas," she says, "which then makes them more open to instruction and more likely to learn."

Beilock found that this principle applies to older students as well. She and her colleagues had high-school students hold a spinning bicycle wheel and tilt it to feel the angular momentum. These students did better on a quiz a week later than students who observed them with the spinning wheel but didn't hold it themselves.

"Why Kids Need to Move, Touch, and Experience to Learn" by Katrina Schwartz in *KQED News*, March 26, 2015, http://bit.ly/1fVHx3W

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6. Classroom Fidgeting Is Good – For Some Students

In this *New York Times* article, Gretchen Reynolds reports on a new study suggesting that when students with ADHD fidget in the classroom, it actually helps them concentrate. If this is true, the previous approach of trying to redirect students' hyperactivity may be the wrong strategy.

Julie Schweitzer (University of California/Davis) devised an experiment to test this hypothesis. She and her colleagues compared 26 middle- and high-school boys and girls with ADHD to a control group of 18 students without ADHD. All the students wore an ankle activity monitor that measured how often and how vigorously they bobbled their leg – a common marker of hyperactive fidgeting. Students then took a computerized test of attention and cognitive control – they were asked to note the direction an arrow was pointing and immediately push a key showing that direction. There were other arrows on the screen pointing in various directions, so the task required close concentration. Students repeated this more than 200 times in rapid succession, and all of them struggled to concentrate.

The researchers were able to compare students' accuracy with how much their legs were moving. The result? The more students with ADHD fidgeted, the more accurate their answers. When they were not fidgeting, their answers were more likely to be wrong, indicating that they had trouble concentrating when they were not moving. Control group students didn't do much leg bobbling, and what little they did had no relationship to their accuracy.

Schweitzer concludes that fidgeting is fundamentally beneficial to children with attention deficits, helping them sharpen their mental control and cope with focusing challenges. "Hyperactivity appears to be a mechanism for cognitive self-regulation," she says. Schweitzer speculates that the constant movement increases mental arousal for children with ADHD, similar to stimulant drugs.

The implications for teachers are clear: to help hyperactive students concentrate, let them squirm, fidget, bounce, jiggle, and generally maintain constant restiveness. Teachers might also supply elastic bands students can play with under these students' desks without distracting classmates. Using yoga balls as chairs is another possibility, as is letting students do their work standing up.

"Fidgeting May Benefit Children with A.D.H.D." by Gretchen Reynolds in *The New York Times*, June 24, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1Lvk8SV

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7. Short Item:

Graphic animation of the Atlantic slave trade – This 2-minute animation by Andrew Khan and Jamelle Bouie shows each of the more than 20,528 slave ships crossing the Atlantic over 315 years. Coupling this with a brief video of a slave ship in progress (perhaps from the movie *Amistad*) would be incredibly powerful for middle- and high-school students: http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_history_of_american_slavery/2015/06/animated_interactive_of_the_history_of_the_atlantic_slave_trade.html

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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 44 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).

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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/Public Education NewsBlast
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
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
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
Wharton Leadership Digest