Marshall Memo 278

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
March 23, 2009

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"The solution to low test scores is not lower standards – it's tougher, clearer standards."

President Obama in his speech to U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce last week (reported in *Education Week*, Mar. 18, 2009, Vol. 28, #25, p. 14), no free e-link

"The young Obama had a loving relationship with an adult passionate about his future. He also had at least one teacher, his mom, disinclined to put up with any crap."

David Brooks in "No Picnic for Me Either" in *The New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2009, referring to Obama's mother getting him up at 4:30 a.m. for tutoring and, when he complained, saying, "This is no picnic for me either, Buster."

"Nurturing, supportive relationships are important for all students, but they are of particular importance for immigrant youth adjusting to a new country, a new language, and a new educational context. These youth are critically in need of caring role models, cultural interpreters, and academic guides."

Carola Suarez-Orozco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin (see item #8)

"As California's failed experiment shows, the effective resource is not smaller classes but a *compound* resource: smaller classes *plus* well-educated teachers *plus* professional development focused on improved teaching *plus* adequate facilities."

Norton Grubb (see item #6)

"Staff development's brand is tarnished… Educators must become vocal and persistent advocates for new, more effective professional learning."

Hayes Mizell in *Journal of Staff Development*, Spring 2009 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 13)

"Goal setting has been treated like an over-the-counter medication when it should really be treated with more care, as a prescription-strength medication."

Adam Galinsky (see item #5)

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1. The Anatomy of a Turnaround

In this interview with Valerie Von Frank in *The Learning Principal*, Florida elementary principal Jo Anne Rogers tells how she rapidly turned around a high-poverty 527-student school that had received D or F grades from the state for six consecutive years:

• *Using existing personnel* – "I found good teachers in this school," says Rogers. "All it required on my part was coordinating the instructional effort… Teachers *want to know* how to fix the problem. Our teachers were *hungry*… Who wants to be part of an F school?"

• *Extra professional development time* – Many teachers were paid with Title I funds to work the entire month of July and a full week just before school opened. Staff were also required to work six Saturdays, and there were six district half-day professional days when students were dismissed at 11:30.

• *Effective use of PD time* – Every faculty meeting focused on a content-area strategy. "We developed specific lessons every time we had a chance…" says Rogers. "We focused on standards and content areas, identifying effective materials and instructional strategies, and instruction for students performing in the lowest 30%."

• *Teacher data analysis and collaboration* – Rogers instituted weekly 90-minute grade-level team meetings to follow up on interim assessments. Teachers zeroed in on weak areas (main idea, for example) and collaboratively developed lessons to improve achievement in those areas, getting feedback as a team from administrators. "All instructional staff had to be experts," says Rogers, "and we all had to understand the standards so that in every single classroom all children were exposed to quality instruction."

• *Weekly results meetings* – Every Monday, members of the administrative team (the principal, assistant principal, a special teacher on assignment, the learning team facilitator, and district staff) met individually with each of the school's 35 teachers to review each student's progress. "The expectation that someone was measuring students' proficiency on a weekly basis made a huge impact," says Rogers.

• *Frequent classroom supervision* – "They absorbed every opportunity to learn new strategies," says Rogers, "because they knew when I came to their classrooms I expected effective instruction that reflected the strategies they were learning."

• *Setting a high bar and providing support* – The school set 85% as the goal and immediately retaught or organized intensive corrective instruction when students did not achieve at this level. Test performance below 85% flagged a student for small-group

instruction, supplementary materials, or tutoring during the day, before school, or on Saturdays.

After only one year, the school earned an A from the state.

"Teacher Learning Turns School from F to A in One Year" by Valerie Von Frank in *The Learning Principal*, March 2009 (Vo. 4, #6, p. 2), no e-link

Back to page one

2. "Learning Walks" Help Transform a Rhode Island Middle School

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, education writer Julia Steiny describes how Kickemuit Middle School in Rhode Island used "learning walks" to catalyze major improvements in teaching and learning. Trained by consultants from the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning in 2002, the school's principal, Mike Carbone, began leading small teams of adults on tours of all classrooms in the school and giving feedback to the whole staff.

When Carbone heard about learning walks, he had already been principal for 12 years and was extremely frustrated that other improvement efforts he'd tried – advisories, teacher teams, sending teachers to workshops, hot-shot trainers, and more – hadn't borne fruit. Teachers still closed their classroom doors and did their own thing, and Carbone knew that was a big part of the school's flatlining student achievement.

When he introduced the idea of learning walks, teachers were resistant. They suspected that the visits were stealth evaluations to gather information to discipline or dismiss teachers. At first, only central-office personnel joined Carbone as he toured classrooms, and the learning-walk questions were all from the University of Pittsburgh. Carbone was not happy with what he saw in some classrooms, and knew that if teachers saw what he was seeing, they would recognize that things needed to change.

Finally teachers joined the learning walks, and naysayers became converts overnight. On one math-focused walk, team members saw that the sixth-grade curriculum duplicated what was being taught in fifth grade and students were bored. The team's letter to the staff recommended that sixth-grade teachers meet and work on their curriculum. Carbone reorganized the schedule so grade-level teams could meet more easily. On another walk, team members asked students "How do you know when you're doing good work?" and students replied, "I don't know, I never get any papers back." Another team saw that one seventh-grade social studies teacher was teaching Egypt while another was teaching the Civil War. "We had no curriculum mapping," says Carbone, "no sequence. It stood out."

Some learning walk participants had personal epiphanies. One teacher who had been opposed to the use of rubrics (they gave away the game to students, she said) saw rubrics being used effectively in a colleague's classroom and changed her position. She asked for copies of the rubric and immediately began developing and using her own. This was one of a number of situations where learning walks produced teacher-to-teacher professional development.

Learning-walk questions were increasingly tailored to the school's concerns, for example, "Do math classes have clear expectations of students?" or "How are the writing rubrics improving the kids' persuasive writing?" There was a set protocol, with Carbone telling the school when a learning walk was going to take place, and teachers and students clear that they should carry on as usual. Students were told to answer visitors' questions honestly, even if the answer was "I don't know." Team members jotted notes and conferred in the hallways after classroom visits, and then debriefed at the end of the walk, comparing impressions and composing a letter to the whole staff that began with positive impressions and then made specific recommendations.

Not all teachers fell in love with learning walks. In the next few years, several teachers transferred out, and Carbone estimates that 10 percent of teachers are still not on board. But learning walks are firmly embedded in the school's professional culture, and when the three-year contract with the University of Pittsburgh ended, the walks continued. Subsequently the school joined other Rhode Island schools in a variation of learning walks – laboratory classrooms or "learning sits" – in which some teachers (not necessarily superstars) engaged in professional development and then opened their classrooms to more intense half-day observations by teams of colleagues. As with learning walks, the debriefs have been extremely helpful to those observing and those being observed. Seeing is believing. Teachers make comments like, "I would never let my kids think-and-talk, or pair-and-share, and now I see it works." The school's teachers are now specific and sophisticated about the professional development they demand.

Carbone is enthusiastic about the impact of learning walks, crediting them with moving the school off the state's "insufficient progress" list in one year and vaulting it to high-performing status, including a state commendation, by 2008. He believes that learning walks provide far better professional development than workshops and courses. "You can see practice, good and bad, right in front of you," he says. "It's much easier to learn by watching people using a strategy than reading about it in a class and trying to figure out how to apply it."

"Learning Walks Build Hearty Appetites for Professional Development" by Julia Steiny in *Journal of Staff Development*, Spring 2009 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 31-36), no e-link available; Carbone can be reached at carbonem@bw.k12.ri.us.

Back to page one

3. A Report on the State of Professional Development Here and Abroad

In this *Journal of Staff Development* article, Stanford professor Linda Darling-Hammond and a team of researchers summarize the main points of a major international study on professional development (see link to the full report below). The authors analyze the current status of PD in the United States, what the research says is effective, and how professional learning in the U.S. compares to other countries.

The current status of professional development in the U.S.:

- More than 90 percent of U.S. teachers participate in PD that consists mostly of short-

term conferences or workshops (although there are big variations from state to state). Only 22 percent of teachers visited classrooms in other schools in 2004.

• Most U.S. teachers say their PD is not very useful. They want to learn more about the content they teach (23% say this), classroom management (18%), teaching students with special needs (15%), and using technology in their classrooms (14%).

• More than 2/3 of teachers say they haven't had a single day of training to improve their skills working with students with special needs and English language learners.

• Teachers need close to 50 hours of PD in a given area to improve their skills and their students' learning, but most PD is of much shorter duration.

• U.S. teachers report that collaboration in designing curriculum and sharing practices is infrequent and weak and doesn't focus on strengthening teaching and learning.

• U.S. schools have begun to recognize and respond to the need to provide support for new teachers. Induction programs are now the norm in more and more schools.

<u>What the research says is effective in professional development</u>

• *Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice*. It focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content, is connected to other school initiatives, and builds strong working relationships among teachers. Occasional workshops on discrete topics do not cut it! PD is most effective "when it addresses the concrete, everyday challenges involved in teaching and learning specific academic subject matter," write the authors, "rather than focusing on abstract educational principles or teaching methods taken out of context. Equally important, professional development that leads teachers to define precisely which concepts and skills they want students to learn – and to identify the content that is most likely to give students trouble – has been found to improve teacher practice and student outcomes."

• *Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote improvements that extend beyond individual classrooms*. "When all teachers in a school learn together," say the authors, "all students in the school benefit." This means it's essential to carve out meeting time for department and grade-level teams and across levels.

• *Sustained and intensive professional development for teachers correlates with gains in student achievement*. For example, 49 hours of PD in a school year boosts student achievement by 21 percent. "Sustained" is defined as between 30 to 100 hours a year.

<u>How PD in the United States compares with other countries:</u>

• Unlike their colleagues abroad, U.S. teachers bear most of the cost of professional development.

• U.S. teachers and teachers abroad sit through about the same number of short-term PD events, but the U.S. is far behind other countries in providing teachers with opportunities for extended learning and productive collaboration with colleagues.

• Nations that outperform the U.S. on international assessments invest heavily in PD and build time for ongoing, sustained teacher development and collaboration into teachers' work day.

• American teachers have limited influence in crucial areas of school decision making.

"State of the Profession: Study Measures Professional Development" by Linda Darling-Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, Althea Andree, Nikole Richardson, and Stelios Orphanos in *Journal of Staff Development*, Spring 2009 (Vol. 30, #2, p. 42-50), no e-link available; the full report, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*, is available at http://www.nsdc.org/news/NSDCstudy2009.pdf.

Back to page one

4. A District's High Schools Focus on Using After-School PD Time Well

In this *Principal Leadership* article, West Hartford (Connecticut) district leaders Catherine Buchholz and Karen List describe how they polled the faculties in the district's two high schools and found that teachers wanted increased collaboration with colleagues, including across disciplines, and more help for new teachers. In response, the district increased the number of early-dismissal days for the high schools and devoted nine of the two-hour after-school blocks to a collaboratively designed program called PLACE – Professional Learning and Collaboration Experience.

When teachers were told about the plan in June of 2007, there was concern that "administrivia" from principals and departments would gobble up the time. One math teacher wondered if he would actually be able to work with his colleagues refining algebra lessons. In response, the district developed a set of guiding principles to make sure the time was used as intended, backed up by a reporting sheet spelling out some of the options. Teams were asked to identify an overriding student learning outcome and then identify which of these activities (and others) they would pursue and what follow-up activities they planned:

Curriculum:

- Articulation of student learning goals
- Development of common lessons
- Content-area learning
- Vertical team/cross-grade conversations
- Interdisciplinary conversations

Instruction:

- Collaborative analysis of student learning
- Sharing of successful instructional practices
- Sharing of resources and materials
- Strategies for differentiation
- Lesson study

Assessment:

- Development of common interim assessments
- Collaborative scoring of interim assessments
- Development and discussion of strategies to improve student achievement based on assessment results

- Analysis and planning based on assessment results

Professional practice:

- Integration of technology
- Mentoring activity
- Coaching

The district put teachers in the driver's seat deciding how the time was used. One department chair got teachers to articulate worst-case and best-case scenarios for the PLACE time and then used carefully chosen books to teach meeting facilitation skills, norms for collaboration, and strategies for handling conflict.

After a year of implementation, PLACE won rave reviews from high-school teachers and a mandate to continue. Among the outcomes:

- A bio-ethics wiki and podcast to help biology students with their research projects;
- A library-media specialist helping students use Inspiration software to take notes;
- Math teachers developing ways to use graphing calculators to perform linear regressions;
- Two geometry teachers using Geometers Sketchpad to work with rectangles, rhombuses, and squares;
- A counselor and literature teacher using a unit on *Death of a Salesman* to teach about depression and suicide;
- Teachers in the small ninth-grade academy developed study skills strategies for struggling students;
- A math and physics teacher wrote a grant to make connections between the subjects and use probes and video analysis;
- A geometry and special-education teacher identified instructional approaches that work with students with special needs;
- An art and Spanish teacher worked on a unit and scoring rubric on the work of Picasso, Goya, and Dali;
- Technology teachers revised their curriculum to be more consistent across schools;
- World languages teachers looked at their grading practices and recommended ways to make them more consistent;
- Orchestra teachers found literature that supported differentiation;
- First- and second-year teachers received mentoring support from colleagues.

"A Place for Learning" by Catherine Buchholz and Karen List in *Principal Leadership*, March 2009 (Vol. 9, #7, p. 38-42), no e-link available

Back to page one

5. How Goal-Setting Can Cause Problems

In this *Boston Globe* article, staff writer Drake Bennett describes how setting goals can backfire. He describes how General Motors became obsessed with the goal of getting back to a 29 percent share of the U.S. auto market. For a while, the number 29 was a corporate mantra,

and executives wore "29" lapel pins. It didn't work. Why? Because GM focused on short-term strategies to sell cars rather than addressing the deeper problems that were causing it to lose market share. "The energy and time that might have been applied to the longer-term problem of designing better cars went instead toward selling more of its generally unloved vehicles," says Bennett. "As a result, GM was less prepared for the future, and made less money on the cars it did sell."

But isn't it good to set goals? Measurable targets are part of the conventional wisdom among business and education leaders, even making an appearance in Stephen Covey's best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, because vague aspirations (*I want to exercise more this year*) don't work. Goals can energize people into bursts of effective work. One oft-cited story is Southwest Airlines setting a "stretch" goal of reducing turnaround time at the gate to 10 minutes, which spurred employees to do the impossible and hit the target.

But there's increasing skepticism about the efficacy of goals, stemming from examples of arbitrary goals leading employees to cut corners or cheat. Narrow goals can keep people from asking the right questions. The most disastrous example is Ford Motor Company's goal of building a car (the Pinto) that would be under 2,000 pounds, cost under $2,000, and go on sale in 1970. The pressure of these targets led designers to ignore a major safety problem (the fuel tank was positioned behind the rear axle). As a result, fifty-three customers died when their Pintos exploded in rear-end collisions.

Goal-setting is most harmful when it's overly simplistic. "It can focus attention too much, or on the wrong things," says Adam Galinsky, a management professor at Northwestern. "It can lead to crazy behaviors to get people to achieve them. Goal setting has been treated like an over-the-counter medication when it should really be treated with more care, as a prescription-strength medication." This is particularly true in fields that require creativity and judgment [like education], where goal-setting can lead people to pursue low-level strategies [test prep to raise student test scores, for example] rather than deeper, longer-term initiatives.

[The problems identified in this article provide important cautions for educators. But student learning goals can spur effective action and improve achievement – provided they are wisely framed and executed with integrity and constant attention to the ultimate outcome of well-educated, successful students.]

"Ready, aim… Fail: Why Setting Goals Can Backfire" by Drake Bennett in *The Boston Globe*, Mar. 15, 2009 (p. C1, C2); the author can be reached at drbennett@globe.com; article available at http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/03/15/ready_aim____fail/

Back to page one

6. Six Ways Schools Can Cope in a Time of Scarce Resources

"These are dreadful times for public schools," says University of California/Berkeley professor Norton Grubb in this *Education Week* commentary article. He lists a number of programs that must receive adequate funding: staffing levels so schools are personalized; more counselors per student; release time for teachers to plan and engage in professional

development; maintaining higher teacher salaries to attract good teachers and reduce turnover. But Grubb believes there are four ways that schools can save money:

• *Cut wasteful spending*. This includes ending programs that don't raise student achievement and are, in some cases, counterproductive – for example, tracking, traditional vocational education, weak after-school programs, ineffective professional development, and teachers' aides without a clear purpose.

• *Recognize that narrow funding can miss the mark*. "Class-size reduction provides a clear example," says Grubb. "As California's failed experiment shows, the effective resource is not smaller classes but a *compound* resource: smaller classes *plus* well-educated teachers *plus* professional development focused on improved teaching *plus* adequate facilities." Grubb also points to the virtues of *complex* resources, for example, student achievement raised by the combination of teachers' effective use of time, control over instructional methods, encouragement of innovation, and the use of "balanced" instruction.

• *Maximize "abstract" resources*. These include a positive school climate, trust among key stakeholders, a coherent curriculum that doesn't keep changing, low turnover among students, staff, and leadership, and the absence of distractions to learning.

• *Recognize and eliminate the mistreatment of students of color*. Grubb praises some schools' use of culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural content, instructional methods that involve students and allow for critical perspectives, frequent classroom observations with feedback on unconscious mistreatment of students, and innovative approaches to student discipline. These don't require more money, says Grubb – just "understanding, leadership, and cooperation."

"Does Money Matter Most? Finding a Silver Lining for Schools in Recessionary Times" by Norton Grubb in *Education Week*, Mar. 18, 09 (Vol. 28, #25, p. 32, 24), no free e-link

Back to page one

7. What Makes a Difference for Students Arriving from Other Countries

In this *Teachers College Record* article, New York University researchers Carola Suarez-Orozco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin identify "behavioral engagement" as the key factor in the school success of newly-arrived immigrant students. Engagement includes attending classes, completing school work, and doing homework. Proficiency in English was also important to school success; students with better skills in English got better grades. Students who experienced their schools as threatening and violent were especially vulnerable to academic problems.

What contributed most to behavioral engagement? The authors found three important factors: Cognitive engagement, self-efficacy, and, most important, supportive relationships with adults and peers within the school. "Nurturing, supportive relationships are important for all students," say Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin, "but they are of particular importance for immigrant youth adjusting to a new country, a new language, and a new educational context. These youth are critically in need of caring role models, cultural interpreters, and

academic guides… Caring relationships in school appear also to attenuate the effects of school violence and enhance feelings of belong in the school setting, which in turn have implications for academic adjustment."

How can such relationships be fostered? The authors briefly mention three strategies: nurturing safe environments, creating effective advisory groups, and grouping students in smaller, multi-year cohorts (looping).

"The Significance of Relationships: Academic Engagement and Achievement Among Newcomer Immigrant Youth" by Carola Suarez-Orozco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin in *Teachers College Record*, March 2009 (Vol. 111, #3, p. 712-749), no e-link

Back to page one

8. How Touch Helps Learning

This *Science Daily* article reports on research in France showing that adults learn new words better when they hear and see the words and also touch the letters with their hands. The research team headed by Edouard Gentaz of the University de Savoie in Grenoble theorized that the sense of touch helps make better brain connections that improve learning. The researchers speculate that this is also true with children's vocabulary learning, and call for research using fMRI scans to document the mechanism of the three-senses approach in the brain.

"Touch Helps Make the Connection Between Sight and Hearing" in *Science Daily*, Mar. 18, 2009, http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090318112937.htm

Back to page one

9. Involving Students in Assessment and Self-Improvement

A new book by Jan Chappuis presents seven strategies for helping students take control of their own learning. The Marshall Memo doesn't usually summarize books, but the essential questions around which the strategies are organized are compelling:

Where am I going?

- Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
- Use examples and models of strong and weak work.

Where am I now?

- Offer regular descriptive feedback.
- Teach students to self-assess and set goals.

How can I close the gap?

- Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time.
- Teach students focused revision.
- Engage students in self-reflection and let them keep track of and share their learning.

Seven Strategies of Assessment FOR Learning by Jan Chappuis (Educational Testing Service/Assessment Training Institute, 2009)

Back to page one

10. Mostly Disappointing Results from Software Programs

In this *Education Week* article, Debra Viadero reports on a Mathematica Policy Research study of the classroom effectiveness of ten commercial software programs:

Grade 1 Early Reading:

- Destination Reading (Riverdeep)
- Headsprout (Headsprout)
- Waterford Early Reading Program (Waterford Institute)
- PLATO Focus (PLATO Learning)

Grade 4 Reading Comprehension:

- Academy of Reading (AutoSkill International)
- LeapTrack (LeapFrog Schoolhouse)

Grade 6 Pre-Algebra

- PLATO Achieve Now (PLATO Learning)
- Larson Pre-Algebra (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Grade 9 Algebra

- Cognitive Tutor (Carnegie Learning)
- Larson Algebra (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Only three of the programs – LeapTrack, Carnegie Learning's Cognitive Tutor, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Larson Learning Algebra 1 – made a significant difference to student achievement (the two algebra programs were effective only the same teachers used them two years in a row).

The study was criticized by some researchers for flawed methodology and not taking into account school-level variables. The study itself cautious language, saying that its findings don't mean that commercial software products that were ineffective in one school wouldn't work better in another.

"Reading, Math Software Found to Have Little Effect on Scores" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Mar. 18, 09 (Vol. 28, #25, p. 8), available to subscribers only

Back to page one

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

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 37 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:

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- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
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
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal