Marshall Memo 815

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 9, 2019

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"We feel trust when people keep their word and honor their commitments, are transparent and don't harbor a hidden agenda, and when we can see that someone can and will do what they say they're going to do."

Elena Aguilar in "You Can Coach for Equity Anywhere, with Anyone"
in *The Learning Professional*, December 2019 (Vol. 40, #6, pp. 10-11, 14),
https://bit.ly/2YqgBko; Aguilar can be reached at elena@brightmorningteam.com.

"A true team-teaching lesson is a thing of beauty. Two teachers whose personalities complement each other offer benefits for all students in the classroom."

Sean Cassel (see item #4)

"Coaching is a powerful professional learning strategy, but the process is only as effective as the coaches who lead it."

Cathy Toll (see item #3)

"Never attribute to malice what which can be adequately explained by misunderstanding."

Hanlon's Razor (quoted in item #2)

"Every job involves some degree of dull, irritating, yet necessary work."

Trisalyn Nelson and Jessica Early (see item #1)

"If you have only 15 minutes, do a 15-minute job. Learn to be efficient in short bursts of time."

Trisalyn Nelson and Jessica Early (*ibid*.)

"When youngsters who injure themselves seek help, they are often met with alarm, misunderstanding, and overreaction."

Benedict Carey (see item #6)

1. Is It Possible to Be Happy 80 Percent of the Workday?

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Trisalyn Nelson and Jessica Early, mid-career instructors at Arizona State University, noticed how much of the time they and their colleagues were griping about being overworked, overwhelmed, and stressed out. Nelson and Early decided to set a goal: having fun and being happy 80 percent of the average workday. They realized this wouldn't happen just by wishing it and made a concerted effort to approach their jobs with a new perspective, carving out time for renewal, creativity, and risk, and figuring out a way to get the "yuck work" done without undermining well-being and productivity. They decided on four strategies:

• *Learn to say No to discretionary tasks*. This is difficult, they acknowledge, because it might mean missing opportunities and being seen as lazy, negative, not a team player. "You are a pleaser and do not want to let anyone down," say Nelson and Early. "You fear you won't be asked again. You are tired, and saying yes seems like the path of least resistance." But saying No is the key to being less overwhelmed – as long as there's a thoughtful strategy behind it. Some questions for deciding without guilt:

- Will this task help me understand my colleagues and how the organization works?
- Does it allow me to make a meaningful contribution?
- Does it energize me?
- Will it help me grow professionally?
- If it's on the borderline, should I stall for time, hoping the job will be given to someone else in the meantime?

The downside of saying No is that your colleagues (or boss) may be unhappy with you. "The likability factor is particularly problematic for women," say Nelson and Early, "as many of us have been acculturated to be pleasant." But if you're asked to do something that doesn't meet the first four criteria above, being assertive is important. "Practice saying no," they advise. "It gets easier." And if you're asked to do a clearly inappropriate task, you might go to a higher-up and make the case for being excused from it.

• *Schedule the stuff you hate to do*. To reach 80-percent fun, it's necessary to carve out time for the inevitable paperwork, complex problems, difficult people, and anxiety-producing decisions. "We close our office doors and go into robot mode," say Nelson and Early, "crossing one small, annoying job after another off our lists. This feels amazing. With the yuck work clustered, our schedules become more available for creative work. It's like cleaning the house to clear your mind." Some of the tricks they use:

- Use hand-written lists and get the tactile satisfaction of crossing things off.
- Take a moment to notice how much you've accomplished.
- Reward yourself for progress – a short walk, a cup of tea.

- Do the unpleasant work in a pleasing setting, or use fun technology to do it.

Acceptance is also important. "Tedious or dreaded tasks might not seem like 'real' work," they say. "But they are. Every job involves some degree of dull, irritating, yet necessary work."

• *Get good at juggling*. Educators' days brim over with classroom instruction, necessary conversations with students, meetings, and service, all of which crowd out creative work, informal collegiality, exercise, and time to yourself. "Throw a family into this," say Nelson and Early, "and all of these balls you've got in the air just get harder and harder to juggle." Balance seems unattainable, but some insights can help:

- Multitasking is ineffective and "hurts the brain," they say. "Multitaskers make more mistakes and retain less information, and multitasking all the time is exhausting."
- It's important to focus fully on a task and then put it aside and transition to another, if possible with a break in between (physical movement, time outdoors, human interaction). "Try to avoid social media and other distractions," they advise. "What never works is checking Facebook."
- Chunk work so it can be done in pieces in the time available. "If you have only 15 minutes, do a 15-minute job," they say. "Learn to be efficient in short bursts of time."

Nelson and Early confess that doing all this is a daily challenge, but they've seen real improvement since embracing the 80-percent challenge.

• *Rest*. "Some semesters just aren't fun," say Nelson and Early. "Some projects, people, and committees are just plain hard to deal with. You get worn out." At that point, taking a break is vital: "Binge-watch something on Netflix. Plant a garden and talk to your tomatoes. Ride your bike. Hang a bird feeder. Bake cookies. Plan a trip. Read a book for enjoyment rather than for work. Sit on the floor and play with your kids or your pet…. Let your brain recharge. Careers are long. It all gets done."

"4 Ways to Have More Fun as a Faculty Member" by Trisalyn Nelson and Jessica Early in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 6, 2019 (Vol. LXVI, #14, pp. A36-37), https://www.chronicle.com/article/4-Ways-to-Have-More-Fun-as-a/247387; Nelson can be reached at Trisalyn.Nelson@asu.edu, Early at Jessica.Early@asu.edu.

Back to page one

2. A Way to Make Meetings More Productive

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, author/consultant Al Pittampalli (Modern Meeting Company) says many professionals have become cynical about why work meetings are so often pointless and unproductive: bosses convene underlings as a way of showing off their power; agendas aren't well crafted because of laziness; people are so preoccupied with their own work that they come to meetings unprepared. But after more than a decade working with organizations to improve meetings, Pittampalli says that Hanlon's Razor is his mantra: *Never attribute to malice what which can be adequately explained by misunderstanding*.

"Most bad meetings are not caused by lazy, power-tripped leaders or entitled, self-centered attendees," he says. "Instead, they are caused by a simple mistake made by everyone involved." The flawed assumption is that a problem-solving approach that works for

individuals will also work with groups. The intuitive process that works when one person faces a problem (whether it's ordering food online or solving a quadratic equation) involves five stages:

1. Define the problem;
2. Generate solutions;
3. Evaluate solutions;
4. Pick a solution;
5. Make a plan.

But people rarely move through these stages in that order, says Pittampalli. For example, here's a possible sequence for a person ordering dinner online:

- I'm thinking Mexican (stage 2)
- Wait a minute, I had Mexican for lunch yesterday (stage 3)
- How about Indian? (stage 2)
- My go-to Chicken Tikka Masala is more than I feel like tonight (stage 3)
- So what kind of meal will leave me feeling satisfied but not overstuffed? (stage 1)
- Sushi (stage 2)
- Does that seem right? (stage 3)
- Okay, I'll place the order (stages 4 and 5)

"This is called intuitive problem solving," says Pittampalli, "and it comes so naturally to us that, when we solve problems in this way, we're wholly unaware that we are doing it. All we have to do is place our attention on the problem and, much like a car's automatic transmission, our brain shifts gears for us. As a result, intuitive problem solving is remarkably efficient. Magical, even."

But when people try to use this approach to solve a problem in a meeting, he continues, "the result is often chaos." That's because for the intuitive process to work in a group without people talking past each other, everyone has to be at the same stage at the same time – and often they're not. One person may think the solution is obvious and the group just needs to execute (stage 5), while another is intent on generating possible solutions (stage 2), while yet another wonders if the problem is even a problem (stage 1). As the discussion progresses, people often switch stages without saying so; the result is poor communication and even worse problem solving.

The solution for groups, says Pittampalli, is to stop using intuitive "automatic transmission" and instead use a "stick shift": methodical discussions "that deliberately and explicitly aim to conquer just one stage at a time." That means naming which of the problem-solving stages is appropriate for each agenda item (for example, with this item we're generating possible solutions), spelling out what the measurable outcome will be, and tackling each item in sequence. If the stage is not clear, the group needs to ask the following questions to bring clarity and then focus appropriately:

- *Do we genuinely understand the problem we are trying to solve?* The group can move past stage 1 when there's a succinctly written problem statement.

- *Do we have an ample list of possible solutions?* If not, people should generate as many as possible.
- *Do we know the strengths and weaknesses of the various solutions?* If not, the task is to generate pros and cons for each option (without jumping to solutions).
- *Have we debated various solutions?* If yes, it's time for the difficult work of choosing – and putting the answer in writing.
- *Has a solution already been selected?* If so, it's time for an implementation plan: the meeting ends with a list of actions, who's responsible, and due dates.

"Why Groups Struggle to Solve Problems Together" by Al Pittampalli in *Harvard Business Review*, November 7, 2019, https://bit.ly/2LyPZbD; Pittampalli can be reached at al.pittampalli@gmail.com.

Back to page one

3. Getting the Most Out of Co-Teaching Partnerships

In this *Edutopia* article, high-school administrator Sean Cassel lists the potential benefits and possible downsides of the six ways in which co-teaching can be orchestrated:

• *One teaching, one observing for evidence of learning* – Potential benefits: The observing teacher is freed up to watch for what's working and what's not (and for whom), and then huddling with the other teacher to decide on effective follow-up strategies. Possible downsides: The observing teacher doesn't contribute to the lesson because of a lack of advance planning, content knowledge, or self-efficacy. "It takes time to develop a working relationship with another teacher," says Cassel. "When the relationship isn't working, this model appears more often, and often without purpose."

• *One teaching, one helping individual students* – Potential benefits: More eyes are on students, adding valuable insights on what's causing difficulty during a lesson. When teachers alternate between frontal and one-on-one instruction, they gain and share insights from both perspectives and are seen as co-equal by students. Possible downsides: The assisting teacher is relegated to the role of assistant and/or has little impact on learning. If teachers don't plan together, there's no systematic focus on particular students or sharing of insights on lesson execution and follow-up.

• *Parallel teaching of the same information to two groups* – Potential benefits: Students are instructed in much smaller groups, it's easier for teachers to manage behavior, differentiate, and check for understanding, and students get more support and attention to their questions. Possible downsides: If both teachers don't have good content knowledge and/or don't have time to plan, this model can be weak and shortchange students.

• *Stations with students rotating between teachers* – Potential benefits: Each teacher can own a specific piece of the content, craft an engaging way to teach it, play to his or her strengths, and work sequentially with small, manageable groups of students. If there are stations in addition to those taught by the teachers, students get practice at working independently. Possible downsides: Teachers need to work closely together on timing and curriculum coverage, which means co-planning time is essential.

• *Alternative teaching, with one teaching a small needs-based group* – Potential benefits: One teacher accelerates the learning of students who are behind, were absent for prior instruction, have gaps in knowledge, or need special support. Possible downsides: This requires effective and timely data collection and monitoring of achievement as well as close coordination between the teachers.

• *Tag-team teaching to the whole class* – Potential benefits: "A true team-teaching lesson is a thing of beauty," says Cassel. "Two teachers whose personalities complement each other offer benefits for all students in the classroom." This model also allows both teachers to share the spotlight. Possible downsides: Teachers winging it and not presenting coherent, effective instruction. Doing co-teaching well "requires years of experience, collaborative planning, and a positive, professional relationship that is always being refined and improved," says Cassel. That means administrators need to make thoughtful decisions matching teachers, provide adequate planning time for a high level of coordination, and observe classrooms to watch for situations where any of these models are not working as well as they should.

"How to Choose a Co-Teaching Model" by Sean Cassel in *Edutopia*, October 8, 2019, https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-choose-co-teaching-model

Back to page one

4. Choosing an Effective Instructional Coach

"Coaching is a powerful professional learning strategy, but the process is only as effective as the coaches who lead it," says Cathy Toll (Partnering to Learn) in this article in *The Learning Professional*. She believes three steps are key to choosing the right people for coaching positions:

• *A thorough job description* – Applicants should be crystal clear on how their time will be spent – for example, on demonstration lessons, working with teacher teams to study effective instruction, classroom observations, one-on-one coaching, and other duties. It's also important for candidates to know how they will be evaluated; one of the least effective ways, Toll believes, is using the same rubric as is used for teachers.

• *A vision of desirable qualities* – From her extensive experience working with coaches, Toll believes three characteristics are essential: (a) a desire to connect with others; (b) the ability to assume good intentions and be nonjudgmental with colleagues; and (c) trustworthiness so teachers feel comfortable and safe in a coaching partnership.

• *A well-thought-out interview process* – The usual steps are important – input from key stakeholders, careful screening of résumés, enough time for finalists to answer and ask questions, and reference calls – but Toll believes interview questions are particularly important with a job that may attract candidates with disparate ideas on how they will work with colleagues. In addition to content-specific questions (for example, for a math coaching position, *What is the goal of high-quality math instruction?*) and questions about the specific needs of the school, Toll suggests the following (these are Toll's exact questions; click the link below for her suggestions on what to look for and what to be cautious about with each one):

- *Describe your understanding of effective coaching: what is it and how does it look in practice?*
- *What qualities do you have that would make you an effective coach?*
- *Please give an example of a time when you connected well with a professional colleague. How do you know you connected well?*
- *What do you expect your schedule to look like on a typical day as a coach?*
- *What would you do if a teacher told you he or she didn't want to work with you?*
- *What would you do if a teacher had a different approach to instruction or a different class management style than you?*
- *What would you do if a teacher told you she wanted you to come into her classroom and work with a small group of students?*
- *Tell me about your own professional learning. How do you learn best? What have you learned recently? What would you like to learn as a coach?*
- *How would you know you are effective as a coach?*
- *How would you advocate for equity as a coach?*

"Effective Coaching Begins with the Hiring Process" by Cathy Toll in *The Learning Professional*, December 2019 (Vol. 40, #6, pp. 12-14), https://bit.ly/2rngCcE

Back to page one

5. A Step-by-Step Guide to Correcting Educational Misconceptions

"Combating education myths effectively means persuading colleagues to change their beliefs and their practices," says British educator Harry Fletcher-Wood (Ambition Institute) in this chapter in *The ResearchEd Guide to Education Myths*. That's not easy, especially with stubborn myths like gearing instruction to students' visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. "Letting sleeping myths lie is socially easier than combating them," he says, especially because of several characteristics that make them resistant to persuasion:

- Many myths are intuitively appealing.
- They often contain a grain of truth.
- They are rooted in beliefs and ideology.
- They are hard to pin down.
- Proponents tend to be resistant to evidence.

"What's a would-be mythbuster to do?" asks Fletcher-Wood. He offers the following suggestions, imagining a debate with Frank, a teacher who has been trying to differentiate instruction according to his students' learning styles:

• *Pinpoint the misconception*. In the words of Steven Covey, "seek first to understand, then to be understood." What exactly does Frank believe about learning styles? Is he conversant with the evidence pro and con? Does he perhaps believe in dual coding – for example, presenting students with both verbal and visual material and opportunities for study (which *is* an effective strategy)? How big a role does his belief in learning styles play in his daily teaching? The mythbuster might ask, "So when you plan, you try to make sure you have a variety of activities, including bits which students have to look at and which they have to listen

to?" Some possible follow-ups: "Can you tell me a bit more about this idea? How does your planning reflect this? Can you tell me a recent time you've used this in a lesson? So, am I right to say that your approach is…?"

• *Express appreciation for the teacher's thinking and efforts*. Fletcher-Wood suggests several possible ways to convey acknowledgement:

- *I really respect the trouble you're taking to ensure every student gets a chance to grasp the key ideas.*
- *I think you've described a powerful idea.*
- *I've faced the same problem, and I think the way you've approached this is potentially powerful because…*
- *I see why this could be helpful – I've found that my students appreciate a similar approach…*
- *I've always struggled to maintain students' full attention in the afternoon.*
- *I really like the way you've tried to encourage attention while still maintaining a focus on the learning.*

"I hope to convey that I'm learning, that I don't have all the answers," says Fletcher-Wood, "and that this is a discussion between professionals, not a lecture from me."

• *Present the evidence persuasively*. What doesn't work is talking about how many studies refute teaching to learning styles: many teachers are turned off by statements like "all the research says," and Frank may have read other studies that back up his approach – or simply be going with his gut as he works with his students. A better approach, says Fletcher-Wood, is taking Frank through the steps that researchers have followed as they've analyzed the efficacy of learning styles:

- Identifying students who are deemed visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners;
- Teaching the visual learners visually, the auditory learners auditorily, and the kinesthetic learners kinesthetically;
- Comparing students' learning with a control group and seeing whether same-learning-style instruction produces better results;
- In fact, in the voluminous research on learning styles, very few studies have gone through these experimental steps.
- Among those studies, there is virtually no evidence to validate the efficacy of learning styles and several studies flatly contradict the hypothesis.

It might also be helpful to tell Frank about a particular study that conveys this conclusion.

• *Gently challenge the misconception*. "Presenting the evidence, however, is only a foundation for our effort to influence Frank's beliefs and practices," says Fletcher-Wood. "It may encourage him to learn more about the topic, but it is usually insufficient, on its own, to convince him to change." The next step is to present specific, concrete, and uncontroversial examples that help Frank let go of the misconception – for example:

- In a geography lesson, using maps is important, even for auditory learners.
- Practicing speaking French is important, even for visual learners.

- Movement in a physical education class is important, even for visual and auditory learners.

These and other examples make the point that the most effective way to promote student learning is to consider the content being taught, not students' purported learning styles.

• *Offer something better*. If Frank were to stop planning for his students' learning styles, that would leave a vacuum as he plans activities and tries to meet different students' needs. The mythbuster's goal is not to win the argument with this teacher but to provide one or more strategies that will help him teach more effectively – for example, dual coding (presenting material visually and verbally) or removing extraneous stimuli and focusing on a few carefully selected ideas so as not to overload students' working memory. It's also smart to highlight similarities and differences between the new idea and the myth, and show the advantages of the new idea.

• *Turn abstract ideas into concrete changes*. The final step, says Fletcher-Wood, is working with Frank to implement better pedagogy. Some possible questions:

- Shall we look at an upcoming lesson and see how these ideas might fit in?
- Is there anything that might stop you from using this approach?
- Can we check in next week to see how this worked out?

Hopefully there are good results with students – and a decreased workload for Frank. He might seek advice on fitting the new approach to school policy and explaining the shift to students and parents.

"Don't Shoot the Mythbuster" by Harry Fletcher-Wood in *The ResearchED Guide to Education Myths* (John Catt, 2019, p. 93-100)

Back to page one

6. Cutting and Self-Injury

In this *New York Times* article, Benedict Carey quotes a New York City high-school student's description of the first time she cut herself at the age of 13: "I had this Popsicle stick and carved it into a sharp point and scratched myself. I'm not even sure where the idea came from. I just knew it was something people did. I remember crying a lot and thinking, 'Why did I just do that?' I was kind of scared of myself." Despite these feelings, when she felt a surge of sadness, anxiety, and shame, she used a knife or razor blade to injure her wrists, forearms, and other part of her body. "I would do it for five to 15 minutes," she said, "and afterward I didn't have that terrible feeling. I could go on with my day."

According to recent surveys in several countries, about 20 percent of adolescents report having harmed themselves at least once to soothe emotional pain, and a survey of U.S. college students found a similar percentage. "The apparent epidemic levels of the behavior have exposed a structural weakness of psychiatric care," says Carey. "Because self-injury is considered a 'symptom,' and not a stand-alone diagnosis like depression, the testing of treatments has been haphazard and therapists have little evidence to draw on… When youngsters who injure themselves seek help, they are often met with alarm, misunderstanding, and overreaction." Cutting can become addictive, as powerful as an opiate habit, providing

these troubled teens with one reliable comfort, a secret friend. "Something about it was so grounding," says a 32-year-old woman who cut herself regularly for more than a decade and finally stopped. "I got to the point where I cut myself a lot, and when I came out of it, I couldn't remember things that happened, like what set it off in the first place."

What are the origins of self-harm, and are any treatments effective? It used to be thought that it was limited to severely impaired youth with histories of sexual abuse and major body alienation. But self-harm has spread into the general population. Because no surveys with questions about self-harm were conducted before the mid-1980s, it's not clear whether the phenomenon has been fueled by social media. It's likely that reports of celebrities engaging in the behavior caught young people's attention: Princess Diana talked about self-harm, as did Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie, and a popular 1990s music video by Pink contained vivid scenes of cutting. Dozens of online forums provided support and understanding, and may have unintentionally portrayed the behavior as a sign of membership in a special club.

The most common misconception, says Carey, is that cutting is a suicide attempt. It's not. In the words of one 16-year-old, "you cut yourself for different reasons. Like, it's the only way you know to deal with intense insecurities, or anger at yourself. Or you're so numb as a result of depression, you can't feel anything – and this is one thing you can feel."

The most effective treatment is a specialized form of talk therapy (called dialectical behavior therapy, or D.B.T.) that was originally developed to treat borderline personality disorder. "Through one-on-one and group therapy sessions," reports Carey, "at least once a week for two months or more, people who injure themselves learn coping skills to weather troughs of misery."

"Getting to the Root of Self-Harm" by Benedict Carey in *The New York Times*, November 12, 2019, https://nyti.ms/2E2aoBD

Back to page one

7. Top-Rated Graphic Novels and Young Adult and Nonfiction Books

Here are *School Library Journal's* 2019 nominations for exemplary children's literature in three categories. Each link has the cover images, grade spans, and short descriptions:

• Best graphic novels:
https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=best-graphic-novels-2019-slj-best-books

• Best young adult books:
https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=best-young-adult-books-2019-slj-best-books

• Best nonfiction books:
https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=best-nonfiction-slj-best-books

"Best Books 2019" in *School Library Journal*, November 18, 2019 (online)

Back to page one

If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 50 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

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

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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