Marshall Memo 872

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 1, 2021

In This Issue:

1. Doing right by African-American history
2. Equity, inclusion, and social justice in the physics classroom
3. A teacher monitors unconscious bias
4. "Angels" unlock a young girl's potential
5. Enthusiastic, student-driven revision
6. Having students "turn and talk" is not enough
7. Links to virtual field trips
8. Children's books whose characters defy stereotypes
9. Resources for inclusive books

Quotes of the Week

"The kindly and well-intentioned advice to teachers to 'meet the children where they are' has tended to keep them where they are, reinforcing and even compounding inequities."

Robert Pondiscio in "The Unexamined Cost of Teachers' Time Spent Choosing Instructional Materials" in *Education Gadfly*, January 28, 2021

"Whenever we teach, we are making choices as to what to include and what to omit."

Moses Rifkin (see item #2)

"It is time to rebrand assessment as powerful information that reveals student strengths and next steps… Assessment has the power to ensure our systems respond with agility to meet the needs of all its diverse learners."

Nicole Dimich in "Assessment That Inspires Hope, Efficacy, and High Achievement" in *All Things PLC Magazine*, Winter 2021

"How do you get students to *want* to revise their writing?"

Alexis Wiggins (see item #5)

"Discussing race and racism with children is not always an easy task. As adults, we all have a desire to protect children's innocence for as long as possible, whether that's leaving Tooth Fairy money under their pillow after we suspect they no longer believe or ignoring racism because we know it's something they'll have to learn about eventually. When we shield children from racism, we miss a valuable opportunity to equip them with the tools to identify and call out racism and other forms of hate when it occurs. Silence, in any form, is complicity."

Brian Kayser and Abigail Amoako Kayser in "No, Elementary Students Are Not Too Young to Talk About Race" in *ASCD Express*, November 25, 2020 (Vol. 16, #6)

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1. Doing Right by African-American History

In this article in *Social Education*, LaGarrett King (University of Missouri) notes recent efforts to infuse African-American history throughout the year (versus a tokenistic blitz in February). King agrees with the rallying cry, *Black History Is American History*, but believes the integrated model has so far provided only the "illusion of inclusion." African Americans "might be present in the narrative," he says, but the curriculum remains Eurocentric, with largely cosmetic diversity. Two examples:

• July 4th is trumpeted as Independence Day in history textbooks, but in 1776, about twenty percent of the population was still enslaved. Juneteenth, National Freedom Day, and other Emancipation days get little or no attention.

• The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision is portrayed as a watershed moment that helped force integration and end segregation – but it's more complicated. The "all deliberate speed" clause allowed many states and school districts to drag their feet. In addition, a good number of African Americans believed their schools were equal to, or even superior to, the schools into which their children would be integrated; they disagreed with the NAACP strategy and advocated for equitable *funding* rather than integration. As desegregation proceeded, black students were disproportionately inconvenienced and thousands of black educators lost their jobs.

These examples, says King, show how the U.S. history curriculum teaches black history from the perspective of whites, not through the experiences of African Americans. Guided by textbooks, most history teachers' narratives include three major segments:

- Enslavement, in which black people are seen as passive and powerless;
- The post-Civil War and Reconstruction era, featuring a few heroic black leaders;
- The 1960s civil rights movement, emphasizing MLK's credo of nonviolence.

"These themes," says King, "are largely predicated on how white people wish to see or imagine black people to be through history education. They represent an effort to sanitize the ugliness, diminish achievements and contributions, ignore the diversity of blackness, and pigeonhole black people as monolithic in an effort to continue to empower, not to offend, or assuage white people about America's legacy."

King makes the case for "black historical consciousness" in classrooms, stemming from a robust, well-rounded curriculum that conveys black histories (versus the singular black history) in a way that recognizes the humanity, perspectives, and voices of African Americans. "Yes, the desired destination is for black history to be American history," he says, but right

now the curriculum "simply does not take black history or people seriously." Accurate history instruction, he believes, has six concepts at its core:

• *Power, oppression, and racism* – These "have to be understood as systemic and institutional, not individual or cosmetic," says King. Without that perspective, "we begin to believe that black people are naturally deficient compared to white people because we do not understand the systemic oppression that has limited and, in some cases, controlled black life histories." Some guiding questions (quoted directly; these come from the Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, which have developed a course based on the framework):

- How did enslavement undermine democratic principles?
- How did racism divide the country?
- How did slave owners use the government to their advantage?
- Why did the United States abandon Reconstruction?
- How do the Los Angeles riots of 1992 compare to Ferguson in 2014?

Key topics: Slavery in North and South America; the development and sustainability of chattel slavery; the emergence of Jim Crow segregation and political disenfranchisement; the nadir of race relations – lynching, race riots, and the defamation of African-American culture and humanity; redlining; the impact of Reagonomics and the war on drugs; mass incarceration.

• *Black agency, resistance, and perseverance* – Countering the paternalistic "black suffering" narrative, the key point is that although black people have been victimized, they were not helpless victims. They have the capacity to act independently, have made their own decisions based on their interests, and have fought back against oppressive structures. Some guiding questions (quoted directly):

- How do African Americans make social change?
- What makes movements successful?
- Was the civil rights movement successful?
- Should black people be considered founders of the United States of America?
- What was great about the great migration?

Key topics: African resistance to slavery; the abolitionist movement; the narratives of free black people; black military experiences; black reconstruction; the development of black social institutions; two great migrations; the long civil rights movement; NAACP and the courts; the Black Power movement; and inventions by African Americans.

• *Africa and the African diaspora* – This segment is important because it reminds us that black history did not begin with European contact and enslavement, putting it in the context of human origins and the rich history of the African continent. Some guiding questions (quoted directly):

- What are the legacies of Black Diaspora movements?
- Are we all Africans?
- How did trans-Saharan trade lead to West African wealth and success?
- How did the Haitian Revolution influence American enslavement?
- How have black people drawn on their African heritage in civil rights struggles?

Key topics: African origins of humans; African civilization, kingdoms, and dynasties; African explorers and pre-colonial presence; the anticolonial movement in Africa; African presence in New Spain, France, and English colonies; the impact of the Haitian Revolution; slavery in Africa versus race-based slavery.

• *Black joy* – This is "an extension of agency, resistance, and perseverance," says King. "Black joy is a liberation and radical project that defied oppressive structures of the time." These histories focus on times of happiness, togetherness, and the perennial fight for freedom. Some guiding questions (quoted directly):

- Were the 1920s a time of cultural change?
- How does African-American cultural expression define society?
- How did sports provide a source of pride?
- What is the lasting legacy of African Americans in sports?
- Is black joy agency or resistance?

Key topics: African and African-American family dynamics; black music, dance, and other cultural expressions; the arts, literature, and popular culture; African-American cuisine; the Harlem renaissance; African Americans in sports; the making of African and African-American holidays and traditions; and the Black Arts movement of the 1960s.

• *Black identities* – "Black history should not only be about black men who are middle class, Christian, heterosexual, and able-bodied," says King. "We need to expand those narratives… This is important because black people are not monolithic." Some guiding questions (quoted directly):

- Who is black?
- Why do we ignore black women in black history?
- Who wins and loses through black liberation movements?
- How did the Stonewall riots influence the black LGBTQ+ community?

Key topics: Black and Tribal experiences; black conservationism; black identities and the Diaspora; black HERstories; black LGBTQ+ history; black class conflict; black political thought; black feminists; the anti-apartheid movement; the Caribbean Black Power movement; Black Lives Matter; Afro-Latin cultural movements in South America and the Caribbean; black nationalism; and the Combahee River Collective.

• *Historical contention* – "Black histories have been problematic and susceptible to the evils of sexism, capitalism, and black ethnic subjugation," says King. "The point here is not to proclaim a 'See, you do it too' attitude, but to recognize that black people have complex and human dimensions." Some guiding questions:

- Are Africans to blame for the transatlantic slave trade?
- How did African indigenous populations fight against 1800s colonization efforts?
- Do black ethnic groups in the U.S. deserve reparations?
- How does sexism diminish the way we remember women's leadership roles during the civil rights movement?

Key topics: Colonizing Africa; black socio-political-cultural global movements, including Pan-Africanism, the Garvey Movement (UNIA), Black Marxism, black separatism, the reparations movement, Rastafarianism, and Black Consciousness.

"Black History Is Not American History: Toward a Framework of Black Historical Consciousness" by LaGarrett King in *Social Education*, November/December 2020 (Vol. 84, #5, pp. 335-341); King can be reached at kinglj@missouri.edu.

Back to page one

2. Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Physics Classroom

"Whenever we teach, we are making choices as to what to include and what to omit," says Seattle teacher Moses Rifkin in this *Edutopia* article. All too often, he says, science teachers don't cover the human side of science, or they convey the default narrative of white male scientists. He believes science teachers are ideally positioned to give their subject a more inclusive identity and nurture a more-diverse pool of future scientists.

To kick off his high-school physics class, Rifkin has students explore the biennial report, Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering, and compare the demographics of physicists with the U.S. population. "In my class," he says, "we generate a list of hypotheses that might explain the over- and underrepresentation that they see in their pie charts." They follow up with Internet research to test their hypotheses and then engage in all-class discussions. As the course proceeds, students explore how science is practiced in the real world and read about the ways sexism and racism have affected scientists' work and careers.

Students are fascinated and follow up by teaching younger students what they've learned, writing op-eds for the school newspaper, scrutinizing the school through the lens of disability justice, lobbying the administration to hire more faculty of color, and encouraging underrepresented students to pursue study and careers in science. Anonymous after-course surveys over the last 15 years have found that 95 percent of students believe this strand in the physics course is worthwhile. Rifkin has joined with others to create the free Underrepresentation Curriculum, which is widely used by teachers around the nation.

"In my experience, integrating social justice into science education is both exhilarating and uncomfortable," says Rifkin. "That discomfort is understandable – as science teachers, few of us received training in how to weave these threads together. And yet we must persist, as we do whenever we identify a change needed in our teaching practice." Who benefits? Students, the school, and society, says Rifkin, "as students enter it motivated and equipped to make concrete changes to make the world a more just place."

"Weaving Social Justice Into Science Instruction" by Moses Rifkin in *Edutopia*, January 22, 2021; Rifkin can be reached at mrifkin@universityprep.org.

Back to page one

3. A Teacher Monitors Unconscious Bias

In this *Edutopia* article, veteran middle-school teacher Jay Wamsted says he was "stung" when his African-American principal said there were problems with the ways he engaged with black boys in his classes. Wamsted decided to monitor how he, as a white educator, interacted with students of color in five specific areas:

- Discipline referrals – Minor infractions in class – out of seat, talking too loudly, cell phones – as well as detentions and calls to parents;
- Who gets called on – Choices he made when a number of hands were in the air;
- Cold calling – Firing a question at students whose hands were not raised, perhaps because they didn't seem to be paying attention;
- Placement errors – The feeling that underperforming students belonged in a lower track;
- Loosening up – "Which students get you to joke around and bring out your 'more than a teacher' personality?" asks Wamsted. "Which students do you swap stories with about activity in the outside world? Who pulls us into their orbit when we overhear an interesting conversation?"

After a month jotting notes, Wamsted concluded that the principal was absolutely right: there was unmistakable bias against certain students and favoritism toward others. The data "gave me something to work on," he says, "a plan to make, and an action item to fix. I know it's only scratching the surface of the work, but it gave me a place to begin. I don't doubt that it will do the same for you."

"A Simple Way to Self-Monitor for Bias" by Jay Wamsted in *Edutopia*, January 22, 2021

Back to page one

4. "Angels" Unlock a Young Girl's Potential

In this *Kappa Delta Pi Record* article, Karen Chilton Coleman remembers that as a second grader in Evansville, Indiana, she excelled in classroom discussions but did poorly on written assignments. "Every time the teacher handed out graded papers," says Coleman, "I would hold my breath before opening my results. As soon as I saw the D or F, I would slouch down in my seat and experience the four stages of grief. First came disbelief, soon followed by anger and tearful acceptance, and finally fear of presenting another failed grade to my mother that required her signature."

After Coleman had a particularly strong reaction to a failed test, the teacher took the sobbing girl out into the corridor and said she could take the test again after school. With mom's reluctant approval (she was a widow raising five children on her own), the teacher administered the test orally, and Coleman knew the answers. A subsequent evaluation revealed that the girl had dyslexia, and a vision check showed she needed glasses. The school provided special education support, after-school tutoring, another year in second grade, and continuous monitoring. By fifth grade, Coleman's grades were so good that she was double-promoted to

grade seven. With a lot of hard work and support in middle and high school, she graduated with her peers.

Now the CEO of a nonprofit supporting youth leadership, Coleman says she doesn't remember the names of the teachers, nurses, and administrators who supported her from second grade on, "but I will never forget their compassion and teamwork to help me reach my potential. Thank you, my angels."

"Thank You, My Angels" by Karen Chilton Coleman in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, January-March 2021 (Vol. 57, #1, p. 48); the author can be reached at kchilton62@gmail.com.

Back to page one

5. Enthusiastic, Student-Driven Revision

"How do you get students to *want* to revise their writing?" asks high-school teacher Alexis Wiggins in this *Education Week* article. "That is the $64,000 question." A few years ago, she had the idea of returning students' papers with formative feedback on each standard on a comprehensive three-level rubric (she got the idea from her father, Grant Wiggins):

- Publishable (A work)
- Revisable (anywhere from a B+ to a D-)
- Redo (completely missed the mark and needs a reboot)

Wiggins was delighted with the response: "My students largely worked their tails off to eventually move from the "Revisable" column to the "Publishable" column. The downside? It was killing *me*. I couldn't handle the volume of revisions I was confronted with and the amount of comments I had to write out on every single draft submitted to provide adequate feedback to help students revise and improve." This led her to abandon the idea after only a year, but she was stuck with the humanities teacher's emotions about grading: "Dread, loathe, and avoid."

Ten years later, it occurred to Wiggins that the three-level feedback system would be workable if students did most of their revising themselves using a detailed, standards-based rubric as a guide. This rating scale is "designed backwards from the end goals," says Wiggins: "persuasive, eloquent use of language and argument." All she did now was check the level at which a student's work was (Publishable, Revisable, Redo) and, if it wasn't already Publishable, jotted the student a quick note on what needed to be done to boost the level on that standard. Wiggins tried this last year with her Composition and Film classes, and found that grading time was cut in half, even though students were submitting similar amounts of writing.

The key point, she says, is that students don't get grades for individual assignments; all they get is a Publishable/Revisable/Redo on each rubric standard. At the end of the semester, Wiggins decides each student's grade based on a breakdown of how many assignments are in each of the categories. Students can revise as many times as they like before the due date (close to the end of the semester). The criteria are spelled out on the back of her rubric.

Wiggins says the rubric and targeted feedback are "the best system I have ever experienced in my 20-year career, hands down… Students have reported nearly unanimously in surveys that they have improved, wanted to revise their work, and paid attention to teacher feedback more than ever with this new system. Nineteen out of 20 of my students said this was

the best style of assessment they had ever experienced and that all teachers should use it." That's because they're less anxious now that they're in control of their grades, revisions, and what they learn. Why? When they got letter grades, there was an element of adult judgment that provoked negative emotions – and that happened to the teacher as well. "The reason I most dreaded grading before," says Wiggins, "wasn't so much the time commitment as the fear of how a student would respond emotionally to the grade I gave them." Now it's simply a joint effort to revise work up to the Publishable level – with students doing most of the work.

"'Publishable' and 'Not Yet Publishable'" by Alexis Wiggins in *Education Week*, January 3, 2021; Wiggins can be reached awiggins@ceelcenter.org.

Back to page one

6. Having Students "Turn and Talk" Is Not Enough

In this *Hechinger Report*, Jill Barshay notes Piaget's finding that students are more engaged when they ask questions and talk with their peers. "Yet when teachers open the classroom to group work and children's chatter," says Barshay, "peer learning can seem like a waste of time. Students often veer off-task, talking about Fortnite or Lizzo. Noise levels rise. Conflicts erupt. Are they really learning?"

A recent study by a team of U.K. researchers explored this question and found that students of all ages do learn more when they discuss or collaborate on an assignment in groups of two, three, or four. "Doing problems on your own isn't beneficial," said Harriet Tenenbaum, one of the researchers. The study also found that students learned the most when they interacted one on one with an adult.

Of course there are limits to how much individual time students can spend with their teacher, so it's a question of how to get maximum value from small-group interactions. The key factor, said the researchers, is teachers giving clear instructions to students before small groups convene – for example, arriving at a consensus or making sure you understand your partner's perspective. "Simply telling students to 'work together' or 'discuss' often didn't generate learning improvement," reports Barshay. "That's because students often repeat what they already believe in an unstructured conversation. The instructions force children to debate and negotiate, during which they can clear up misunderstandings and deepen their knowledge."

Barshay wishes this research team had also answered several important questions about small-group discussions:

- Do students learn from peers when one student dominates the conversation?
- How about when one student is slacking off and forcing others to do the heavy lifting?
- Do students learn as much from high-achieving as from struggling peers?
- What's the impact of students' prior achievement?
- When in a lesson is small-group work most productive?

All these need to be explored in future studies.

"The Science of Talking in Class" by Jill Barshay in *The Hechinger Report*, February 3, 2020

Back to page one

7. Links to Virtual Field Trips

In this *Edutopia* article, writer/consultant Monica Burns recommends six online platforms that can be used to take virtual field trips around the world, build vocabulary and background knowledge, check out the setting of a novel, or make connections to current events:

- AirPano https://www.airpano.com – 360-degree videos and images from around the world;
- Good Maps Treks https://www.google.com/maps/about/treks/#/grid - Destinations include Egypt, Nepal, India, Canada, and the U.S.;
- National Geographic https://www.youtube.com/user/NationalGeographic - Videos about different cultures, foods, animals, and more;
- Nearpod https://nearpod.com – 360-degree panoramic views to spark discussions in science, social studies, and other subjects;
- 360Cities https://www.360cities.net – A collection of panoramic images from around the world; here's a school version: https://schools.360cities.net;
- Google Arts and Culture https://artsandculture.google.com – Interactive views that let students walk through museums and explore notable architecture.

"6 Free Resources for Virtual Field Trips" by Monica Burns in *Edutopia*, January 26, 2021

Back to page one

8. Children's Books Whose Characters Defy Stereotypes

In this *Language Arts* feature, Grace Enriquez, Erika Thulin Dawes, and Summer Clark (Lesley University), Gilberto Lara (University of Texas/San Antonio), and Katie Egan Cunningham (Manhattanville College) spotlight books for elementary and middle-school children in which characters "defy stereotypes, straddle the borders of multiple identities, and live unique intersections of identity":

- *Octopus Stew* by Eric Velasquez (Holiday House, 2019)
- *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior* by Heather Gale, illustrated by Mika Song (Tundra, 2019)
- *My Footprints* by Bao Phi, illustrated by Basia Tran (Capstone, 2019)
- *A Girl Like Me* by Angela Johnson, illustrated by Nina Crews (Millbrook, 2020)
- *Indian No More* by Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell (Tu Books/Lee & Low, 2019)
- *Blended* by Sharon Draper (Atheneum, 2018)
- *What Lane?* by Torrey Maldonado (Nancy Paulsen, 2020)
- *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman (Nancy Paulsen, 2019)
- *Stargazing* by Jen Wang (First Second, 2019)
- *Amal Unbound* by Aisha Saeed (Nancy Paulsen, 2018)
- *King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender (Scholastic, 2020)

- *Once Upon an Eid: Stories of Hope and Joy by 15 Muslim Voices*, edited by S.K. Ali and Aisha Saeed (Amulet, 2020)
- *Prairie Lotus* by Linda Sue Park (Clarion, 2020)
- *Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks* by Jason Reynolds, illustrated by Alexander Nabaum (Atheneum, 2019)

"Shattered Stereotypes, Multiple Identities, and Vibrant Intersections: Books That Explore and Celebrate Complex Characters" by Grace Enriquez, Erika Thulin Dawes, Summer Clark, Gilberto Lara, and Katie Egan Cunningham in *Language Arts*, January 2021 (Vol. 98, #3, pp. 162-171); Enriquez can be reached at genrique@lesley.edu.

Back to page one

9. Resources for Inclusive Books

In this article in *ASCA School Counselor*, Georgia school counselor Jennifer Susko cites recent statistics on the characters depicted in children's books:

- White – 50%
- Animals, other – 27%
- African or African-American – 10%
- Latinx – 5%
- American Indian, First Nations – 1%

(The data come from a 2018 study at the School of Education, University of Wisconsin/ Madison; here's an infographic in the article showing these proportions.)

Susko suggests three online resources to support schools as they look for high-quality books that affirm all students:

- The Conscious Kid https://www.theconsciouskid.org
- Social Justice Books https://socialjusticebooks.org
- The Tutu Teacher and Diverse Reads https://thetututeacher.com

"Books As Mirrors and Windows" by Jennifer Susko in *ASCA School Counselor*, January/February 2021 (Vol. 57, #3, pp. 20-23); Susko can be reached at jennifersusko@hotmail.com.

Back to page one

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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
Cult of Pedagogy
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
Exceptional Children
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: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
Teaching Tolerance
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
Urban Education