Marshall Memo 876

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

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"The pandemic has shined a bright light on systemic inequities in K-12 education and on the urgent need to provide stronger professional support to teachers."

Mark Elgart (see item #2 in last week's Memo)

"More controversially, you might also consider *decreasing* the amount of work you assign to your students this semester. While it is true that time on task is one of the most important predictors of students' learning, that relationship may not matter if students are not equipped to actually spend that time, or spend that time productively… In this moment when our students are so clearly struggling, their well-being is my top priority."

Betsy Barre (see item #1 in last week's Memo)

"We must think of race not as a *subject* that begins and ends with any particular course of study, but as one of the most important *lenses* that can be applied to *any* unit of study."

Matthew Kay (see item #4 in last week's Memo)

"In other words, after two generations of research, scholars have repeatedly asked, 'Do charter schools work?' and the answer is a resounding, 'Sometimes! It depends!' Not exactly the stuff of great headlines."

Eve Ewing in "End the Fight About Charter Schools" in *The New York Times*, February 23, 2021

"I don't believe all homework is good homework, especially when it requires significant parental involvement."

Christine Koh in "You Can Care About Education and Still Be OK Writing This Year Off" in *The Boston Globe Magazine*, February 28, 2021

1. A Study of Quiet Students

In this *Journal of the Learning Sciences* article, Klara Sedova and Jana Navratilova (Masaryk University) report on their study of students who don't raise their hands during whole-class discussions. The researchers' working assumptions were that when students talk in class (versus the teacher doing all of the talking), more learning takes place, and students who don't participate learn less because they're not as cognitively engaged. Which students speak most in class? Previous research, say Sedova and Navratilova, has found that "higher participation rates are typically found in high-achieving students, students from families with higher socioeconomic status, extroverted students, cognitively strong students, and motivated students." But this is not always true. The way teachers orchestrate class discussions, as well as student-to-student dynamics, can influence patterns of participation.

It's often assumed that students who are silent in class are low achievers who want to avoid making mistakes and failing. It's not that simple, say Sedova and Navratilova. By observing ninth-grade language arts classes in the Czech Republic, studying classroom videos, and interviewing teachers and students, they found that some of the silent students were low achievers and some were doing well. Interviews revealed that both groups had a common feature: they felt uneasy about speaking in front of others and did not raise their hands to volunteer. Additional findings:

• Teachers called on high-achieving silent students quite a lot, often asking challenging questions. Those students' answers were above average in length and elaboration, and there were often prolonged interactions with the teacher. But most of high-achieving silent students' learning took place at home and in solo studying and reading.

• Teachers rarely called on low-achieving silent students, partly because these students seldom answered, and partly out of a desire to avoid setting them up for embarrassment and failure. When teachers did call on low-achieving silent students, they asked easy-to-answer, low-level questions. Teachers wanted to get these students participating, but didn't want to throw questions at them that would cause negative social and academic consequences.

• When high-achieving silent students spoke, classmates listened; when low-achieving silent students were called on, other students raised their hands to answer the teachers' questions.

• High-achieving silent students participated only if they believed they had better answers than classmates. That meant they didn't participate in exploratory classroom talks, which limited their learning opportunities – but they compensated with independent study. The result was that speaking less in class had no negative consequences for them.

• "High-achieving silent students use silence to gain power," say Sedova and Navratilova. "Through participation in difficult tasks, they build and consolidate their identity as exceptionally capable students in the eyes of the whole class. Even when they are silent, the others think they know the answer." These students avoided appearing over-eager and weren't regarded as the "teacher's pet," reinforcing their popularity with peers.

• Low-achieving silent students had a quadruple disadvantage: (a) by not volunteering in class discussions, they didn't get the benefits of greater cognitive engagement; (b) teachers calling on them less often, and asking easy questions, prevented them from improving their understanding of the subject matter; (c) because these students weren't grappling with challenging questions (or participating in exploratory discussions), they didn't receive important corrective feedback from teachers; and (d) this day-by-day dynamic reinforced their negative academic identity – and continuing low achievement.

• Sedova and Navratilova noticed that a few teachers were successful at engaging low-achieving silent students, changing the typical pattern of reticence and failure. This can happen when teachers "sensitively evaluate the signals coming from these students. It is necessary to identify the moment when the silent student has a spontaneous urge to participate and to create space for that student's contribution in the classroom – calm the other students, give the silent student focused attention, and ask contingent questions. It is vital to let low-achieving silent students succeed, even in cases when their utterances are not absolutely correct or elaborated. For teachers, this means to show their interest in what these students say instead of only evaluate the answer as such. For once low-achieving silent students succeed, the echo effect can start to work – the students might increase their initiative and the teachers allow themselves to call on them more often."

"Silent Students and the Patterns of Their Participation in Classroom Talk" by Klara Sedova and Jana Navratilova in *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, September-December 2020 (Vol. 29, #4-5, pp. 681-716); the authors can be reached at ksedova@phil.muni.cz and jana.navratilova@recetox.muni.cz.

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2. Getting an Accurate Assessment of Latinx Parents' School Satisfaction

In this article in *Theory Into Practice*, Edward Olivos (University of Oregon/Eugene) reports a puzzling finding from his research on parental satisfaction in dual language immersion programs: that surveying Latinx parents to gauge their satisfaction with a school may have the effect of "silencing" their concerns, opinions, and input.

"The concept of parental satisfaction draws from the notion that schools provide a product or a service and that children and their parents are the consumers or the clients," says Olivos. Striving to be customer focused and entrepreneurial in an increasingly competitive K-12 market, many schools are conducting surveys asking parents for feedback on children's educational experience and the school's policies and practices. In theory, the feedback allows schools to fix problems and improve services to students and parents in real time.

But Olivos believes there are several reasons that surveys may not be getting the whole story from Latinx families:

• Immigrant parents may be comparing their U.S. school to the schools they or their children attended in their country of origin. The result: U.S. schools may be given a high = rating on a survey even when parents are not completely satisfied with how their children are doing – especially compared to white students in a dual language program.

• Immigrant parents may interact with U.S. schools using a "dual frame of reference," he says, especially when they have criticisms, combining "concern and gratitude" and "frustration and gratitude." This can unintentionally mislead educators to believe that everything is fine.

• Parents may be expressing satisfaction with "education" – the key to their aspirations for the next generation – without approving of specific school practices or policies they are encountering. In addition, parents may not be well informed about how well their children are doing and the levels of achievement needed to reach aspirational goals.

• Latinx parents may attribute their children's "academic difficulty to a perceived innate inability on the part of their children and not on inadequate school programs or educational opportunities," according to research cited by Olivos.

• Parents may be using "neighborhood standards" to judge their children's achievement, considering the Cs and Ds children who live nearby are receiving as the norm for school performance.

• Parents may be reluctant to express their dissatisfaction with the school and their children's achievement because they want to please school authorities by telling them what they want to hear, in hopes that the school will do a little more for their children. They may also, says Olivos, "chose to 'silence' themselves to avoid conflict with their children's teachers and the possibility of compromising their children's relationship with the school." Meanwhile, the Anglo parents in the dual language program may be more assertive with their concerns and elicit more responsiveness from school authorities, thus becoming the school's "main audience."

• Latinx and white parents chose the dual language immersion program for different reasons. Latinx parents were most interested in the maintenance of cultural values, identity, and language and with intergenerational communication. This may lead Latinx parents to be less assertive around academic achievement and test scores. White parents, says Olivos, may see dual language programs as providing their children with "another 'tool' which can be used to secure social advantage as adults."

• In parent meetings and other interactions, the voices of middle-class white parents may get more attention from school officials.

How can educators counteract these distorting factors? "Educators and researchers must not only use multiple means (surveys, interviews, check-ins, conversations, etc.) to gauge Latinx parental 'satisfaction,'" says Olivos, "but they must also examine the parents' experiences in U.S. schools and the nature of their relationships with educators and with other parent populations." This means taking into account:

- Parents' educational background and knowledge of U.S. schools;
- Parents' goals for their children, including reasons for enrolling in a dual language immersion program;
- Parents' access to the school's power structure.

"Capturing these factors," concludes Olivos, "in my estimation would provide a more nuanced understanding of the often-reported high levels of Latinx parental satisfaction" in dual language education.

"Silencing Bicultural Parental Voices Through Educational Satisfaction: What Do We Need to Know?" by Edward Olivos in *Theory Into Practice*, Winter 2021 (Vol. 60, #1, pp. 72-82); Olivos can be reached at emolivos@uoregon.edu.

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3. Keys to High-School Success for African-American Males

In this article in *Urban Education*, Brian Wright (University of Memphis) lays out the grim statistics on African-American males in U.S. schools and beyond: overrepresentation in special education, underrepresentation in gifted and college prep programs, high rates of suspension, expulsion, and dropping out, high rates of unemployment, discrimination in the job market, racial hate crimes, and police violence. "Against this lethal backdrop of disparaging circumstances," says Wright, "lurks the universal mischaracterization of this population 'as hopeless thugs who care nothing about their education, communities, and futures.'"

To counter all this, Wright analyzed the strategies used by five male African-American high-school juniors and seniors who consciously chose a different path and "who do manage to succeed socially and academically with astute critiques of the very system that they are asked to navigate." Wright describes how these young men deal with the demands of home and school, peer pressure, stereotypes and low expectations, and different communication styles, with what he calls Urban Critical Literacy. Here are the elements:

• *Intrapersonal reflection* – The families of one of the adolescents imposed a strict curfew so he would be well-rested and alert for school each day – and avoid the temptations of gangs and violence in his community. This young man was envious of his friends, but engaged in an inner dialogue about who he was, what he wanted to become, and what was likely to become of his peers who were out late every night.

• *Code-switch speech* – The five young men became skilled at adapting how they spoke at home, at school, at work, and with peers. "You gotta know how to switch it up because people will think you are not smart," said one. "You know what I'm saying? I already know that if I use slang, like at work, people will think I am not smart or something. You know all the stereotypes out there."

• *Code-switch dress* – One of the young men spoke of dressing "nice" for school and work to impress teachers and employers. "Like my teachers know that when I come to class, I'm there to learn," he said. "But when you're hanging out in your hood, you want to switch it up with some sweats and stuff and put a little swag in it so my boys know that I am cool and

stuff." Wright points out (and the young men seemed to know) that speaking and dressing in middle-class ways did not guarantee that racism and stereotypes wouldn't still be present.

• *A metacognitive stance* – Most important, the young men were keenly aware of the pressures and negative stereotypes that stood in their way, and the personal strength they would need in order to deflect and resist pressures and be successful inside and outside of school. They did so, says Wright, "through the development of a powerful language of critique of schools and society in the social reproduction of discourse, dialogue, and the oppressive practices that continue to position the urban poor as different." They managed to avoid overreacting to these and other daily challenges with peers, educators, family members, police officers, and other adults through a four-step process:

- Reflecting on it – They had a deep understanding of society's influences, especially in urban settings, which made them careful to avoid being ensnared in "the street."
- Speaking it – Wright describes this as "the ability to draw on various language registers or styles to communicate with different audiences as dictated by the context."
- Naming it – This is the ability to see and confront injustice and prejudice and find smart and effective ways to respond.
- Replacing it – The young men had the ability to "recast" what they knew to be unfair societal pressures and inequalities and overcome obstacles moment by moment.

The five young men Wright interviewed and observed provided a final insight: the critical importance of teachers and other adults understanding the challenges that young black males in America face, recognizing and supporting their efforts, and being effective advocates for them.

"Five Wise Men: African-American Males Using Urban Critical Literacy to Negotiate and Navigate Home and School in an Urban Setting" by Brian Wright in *Urban Education*, March 2021 (Vol. 56, #3, pp. 451-483); Wright can be reached at blwrght1@memphis.edu.

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4. A Strategy for Dealing with Concurrent Hybrid Instruction

In this online article, Catlin Tucker says teaching with some students in the classroom and some remote is "the *most* challenging teaching assignment I can imagine." Teachers she knows who are working this way "are exhausted, frustrated, and not feeling particularly effective." What's most difficult, keeping teachers up late at night planning, is holding all students' attention.

The answer, says Tucker, is designing lessons that allow the teacher to focus on one set of students at a time – a two-station rotation that she calls flip flop. Key steps:

• Identify the target standard and craft a clear learning objective that will be shared with all students.

• Design a 10-15-minute kick-off task that will engage students in meaningful work while the teacher welcomes online students into the virtual classroom, handles administrative tasks, and deals with technology issues. Some possibilities:

- Bell ringer – Students engage in review activities, retrieval practice, or spiral review.

- Spark activity – A prompt piques students' interest in a topic, gets them doing creative writing, or encourages inquiry.
- Goal setting – Students set an academic, personal, or behavioral goal for the week and reflect on actions and behaviors needed to reach the goal.
- Feedback forms – Students give their thoughts on what's working, their struggles, and questions or suggestions.
- Connect and reflect – Students make connections between curriculum topics and their lives, or orient new learning in a larger context.
- Self-assessment – Students evaluate a piece of their own work using a simple rubric.
- Formative assessment – A writing prompt or quiz collects quick, informal data on students' understanding of the previous day's lesson.

Practice gets students to the point where they automatically enter the class (whether in-person or remote) and get right to work on the kick-off task.

• The teacher pulls all students together for a short review of the lesson, or students watch a prerecorded video of the teacher's introduction. Students then go to one of two "stations," one self-guided, the other with the teacher. Tucker suggests that the teacher works first with the remote group and gets the in-person group working on the self-guided activities with a short recorded video or screencast to reduce questions and confusion. After a set amount of time, students rotate to the other station.

• At the in-person station, the teacher provides guided practice, engages in interactive modeling, real-time feedback, or has students apply what they've learned.

• At the independent work station, students might practice with adaptive software, watch a video lesson, do online research and exploration, collaborate on shared tasks using Google Suites, or have an online discussion about texts, topics, and issues using FlipGrid or the discussion tool on their learning management system. Students present in the classroom can do pen and paper practice, read and annotate, compose a piece of writing, work on an art project, create a flowchart or concept map, or "tinker to learn."

• The lesson ends with an exit ticket to collect quick formative information and give students a chance to ask questions or request help.

See the article link below for Tucker's suggested planning template.

"Using a Flip Flop Design for the Concurrent Classroom" by Catlin Tucker, November 13, 2020

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5. Updating Classroom Jobs

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez says getting students involved in doing helpful classroom jobs "might actually be the thing that helps wake up a lot of our remote and hybrid classrooms from the white-knuckle, just-get-through-it mentality many of us have settled into as the '20-21 school year grinds through its second half." Gonzalez says that as a middle-school teacher, she was too much of a "control freak" to assign jobs to students;

she also thought of it as more an elementary thing. But since talking with Texas middle-school teacher Thom Gibson, Gonzalez sees how students of all ages can help lighten the teacher's load and liven up remote and in-person classes. "On top of that," she says, "they'll help students discover and develop passions and talents they can take with them well beyond your class." Here are some of Gibson's job suggestions (see the full article for more):

- Podcaster – Produces a monthly 3-minute podcast on a topic of interest to students, using apps like Soundtrap or GarageBand.
- Athletic trainer – In the middle of a class meeting, this student leads the class (virtual and in-person) in a movement activity.
- DJ – Plays music for five minutes before class (via videoconferencing platform for remote classmates).
- Motivational speaker – Records a one-minute Loom video each week sharing an idea or quote.
- Visual display artist – Creates posters for in-person classmates or graphics for online learning.
- Zoologist – Takes care of the class pet, or their own at home, and lets classmates check in once a week to see how the creature is doing.
- Tech guru – Sets up the teacher's classroom technology and helps classmates with in-person or online troubleshooting.
- Marie Kondo organizing specialist – Keeps classroom supplies organized and does online decluttering.
- Assistant grader – Helps the teacher with assessments, highlighting mistakes for the teacher to look at later and letting students know about missing assignments.
- Tutorial creator – Makes YouTube tutorials for tasks that other students need in the classroom.

Gibson has the following tips for organizing and maintaining classroom jobs:

- Post a list of job descriptions ahead of time, linked to different personality types.
- Have students apply, which increases buy-in.
- Provide students with job checklists.
- Teach the jobs like any other part of the curriculum and have students practice.
- Appoint a Type-A student as teacher's assistant to remind everyone to do their job.

Adding classroom jobs "could be the breath of fresh air we need for our schools," says Gonzalez. "They will give students a new reason to show up, to participate, and to stick around, because in a meaningful way, the classroom will become theirs again."

"It's Time to Give Classroom Jobs Another Try" by Jennifer Gonzalez and Thom Gibson in *Cult of Pedagogy*, February 7, 2021

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6. The Difference That Principals Make

In this *Education Week* article, Denisa Superville reports on an extensive Wallace Foundation study of the impact of principal leadership. The most striking finding: if a principal

whose leadership is rated at the 25th percentile improves to the 75th percentile (or is replaced by a leader performing at that level), students in the school will gain 2.9 months of learning in math and 2.7 months in reading during a single school year. Similar studies of teachers' impact have found that improving the performance of a 25th-percentile teacher to the 75th percentile (or replacing the lower-performing teacher with one performing at the higher level) results in gains of 3.7 months in math and 3.8 months in reading.

An important point: principals have a schoolwide impact, so their work affects a much larger group of students than that of individual teachers. But it's not either-or, said the Wallace researchers: principals affect student learning through the work of individual teachers, as well as through their effect on teacher teamwork, morale, and turnover, student attendance, relationships with the community, and overall school culture. In other words, it's a team effort.

The full Wallace study, "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research" by Jason Grissom, Anna Egalite, and Constance Lindsay, is available here.

"Top-Tier Principals Spark Big Gains in Student Learning. A New Study Shows How Much" by Denisa Superville in *Education Week*, February 24, 2021

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7. Desirable Difficulty – with Support

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell remembers being asked by his young daughter to call the library for her. Rockwell told her to make the call herself and she was not happy, having never phoned a stranger before, and fretting about what she would say if the librarian asked her a question. Rockwell wondered if he was asking too much of his daughter, and imagined some steps to make a challenge both manageable and instructive (these could also be helpful for adults):

- Remind the person of current skills that apply. *You know how to make a phone call.*
- Express confidence. *I've seen you talk on the phone with friends many times*.
- Play what-if: *What will you say if the librarian asks you what your card number is?*
- Role-play. *Let's practice the call.*
- Be present. *I'll be right here if you need some help.*
- Lower expectations. *It's okay to make a mistake*.
- Encourage authenticity. *Tell the librarian this is the first time you called the library yourself.*

"7 Ways to Give Support Without Prolonging Incompetence" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, February 24, 2021; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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8. Exit Interviews 101

This online article from the Altius Group in Australia says that conducting regular anonymous staff surveys is helpful, but current employees may hold back for fear that their

responses will be traced to them. Exit interviews with those who have decided to leave often provide better insights; an employee on the way out is more likely to be candid. One-on-one exit interviews should be framed as an opportunity to speak the truth about the person's time in the organization, workplace culture and morale, and leadership. Some possible questions:

- Why are you leaving?
- What attracted you to the job you've decided to take?
- Did we help you accomplish your professional development and career goals?
- What did you like and dislike about your role?
- What would you change about your role?
- How did you find the leadership style?
- How would you rate staff morale? The workplace culture?
- How could we improve?

To get the most honest responses, it's best that exit interviews are conducted by a colleague or middle manager, not the organization's leader. It can be difficult to hear criticism, but exit interviews, followed by a careful analysis by the leadership team, are important to solving hidden problems and continuously improving.

"What Is an Exit Interview? Why You Need One and What to Ask" by the Altius Group, 2021

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9. Short Items:

a. Webinars on Remote and Hybrid Teaching – Doug Lemov, Hilary Lewis, and Wendy Amato are conducting two online workshops:

- Checking for Understanding in a Virtual World – March 9 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern
- Hybrid Best Practices – March 30 at 4:00 p.m. Eastern

To register, click here.

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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
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