

Marshall Memo 620

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

January 18, 2016

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Quotes of the Week

“Stop crying. You’re not a baby anymore.”

Teacher to an elementary school boy during class (see item #1)

“Teaching is a vulnerable system with many moving parts, and a crying child could represent a system in collapse.”

Diana Rivera (*ibid.*)

“It is not reasonable or fair to expect small boys to sit for long stretches of time doing desk work, following adult directions, being physically still and mentally focused on academics. The boys use so much energy keeping their energy contained.”

Wendy Mogel in *Independent School* (see item #2)

“Good writing is not a gift. It is forged by desire, practice, and assistance from others.”

Steve Graham and Karen Harris (see item #3)

1. Dealing with Tears in the Classroom

In this *Edutopia* article, Diana Rivera recalls hearing an elementary teacher firmly telling a boy to stop crying. “You’re not a baby anymore,” said the teacher. “The little boy was struggling to hold in his tears because there was no safe space for the acceptance of those tears,” says Rivera, “nor inquiry as to what prompted them and their importance.” This teacher’s approach, says Rivera, is “damaging” and she hopes that this crying-only-for-babies idea is on the way out.

So how do tears function for emotional and mental well-being throughout life? Some research insights:

- Tears are a primary, authentic way for people to express and regulate primary emotions like sadness, anger, frustration, and joy.
- Tears may reflect attachment styles, with some people comfortable expressing emotions and crying at appropriate times and others insecurely attached and having issues with tears.
- Tears are an important communication tool (think of President Obama’s recent and very public tears).
- Tears are an exocrine process and they may relieve stress by expelling potentially harmful stress-induced chemicals from the body.

This is all very interesting, but tears can cause complicated moments in classrooms. Tears can bring up other people’s core emotions – sadness, frustration. “Teaching is a vulnerable system with many moving parts,” says Rivera, “and a crying child could represent a system in collapse.”

Rivera’s advice: First, let the crying happen. “Allowing someone to cry without quieting him or her down supports the expression of that person’s emotional response,” she says. “The emotion is able to move through its natural cycle. This has value for the individual, the classroom dynamic, and society at large because it honors emotions of all kinds.”

Second, block out time for students to finish with the emotions that came out in the tears.

Third, give the message that crying is okay and natural. Colleagues who tell students they shouldn’t cry need reeducation!

Fourth, be compassionate and open. “The crying child may want to share the reasons for those tears and, in some cases, may not be completely able to, as the emotion from one experience can lend itself to crying about an associated experience moments later.”

Finally, work continuously to create an emotionally safe classroom through discussion and brainstorming.

“Let the Child Cry: How Tears Support Social and Emotional Development” by Diana Rivera in *Edutopia*, October 28, 2015,

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/tears-support-social-emotional-development-diana-rivera>

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2. Working with Boys

In this article in *Independent School*, Wendy Mogel shares stories of boys having difficulty getting ready for school – but mostly behaving responsibly. After meeting with a particularly sensitive Chicago Public School nurse, she had in mind some of the issues a nurse deals with in the course of a day, including some boys who are there all the time.

- Splinters
- Tummy aches
- Heartaches
- Perhaps a concussion?

Nurses are the perfect people to decode adolescent behavior and teach it to students. Michael Tomasello of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (Germany) has developed a curriculum to help educators do a better job with adolescent boys.

Mogel says adults have to be on their toes at all times. “Why are our big boys in a panic over a loose tooth?” she asks. “The next crisis could be a hangnail. Because the whole way schools treat young boys is ineffective. But there’s always the deeper stuff, and the nurse’s office is the perfect place to monitor it. It is not reasonable or fair to expect small boys to sit for long stretches of time doing desk work, following adult directions, being physically still and mentally focused on academics. The boys use so much energy keeping their energy contained.” The best schools have figured out this dynamic. Ice cream socials can pave the way for conversations. Head-aches can be symptoms of a number of issues. Teachers and counselors need to dive in!

“Is Anxiety in Young Boys the New Normal?” by Wendy Mogel in *Independent School*, Winter 2016 (Vol. 75, #2, p. 94-101),

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3. Research Synthesis on What Makes Effective Writing Instruction

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Steve Graham and Karen Harris (Arizona State University) pull together evidence-based practices for improving students’ writing, with research citations for each one’s impact on students’ writing. “Good writing is not a gift,” they say. “It is forged by desire, practice, and assistance from others.” The bottom line? “Devote time to the teaching of writing, and use this time wisely.” The details:

- *Students write at least 30 minutes a day.* (The average student writes only about 45 minutes a week.) Regular writing for real-world purposes is very helpful, but Graham and

Murphy strike a cautionary note: “Writing is a necessary but insufficient condition for enhancing students’ journey to greater writing competence.” Writing has to be accompanied by slowing down and learning the new vocabulary that’s cropping up.

- *Write to comprehend and learn.* The simple act of note-taking enhances students’ skills in four ways: it asks them to decide what’s most important; they have a record of the important stuff for further reflection; they have their notes to refer to later; and they can begin to make the material their own.

- *Create a pleasant, well-run, and motivating learning environment.* There’s a positive mindset about writing; students have the “space” to plan, draft, revise, and edit their work; drafts are often displayed for comment; and there’s always help available.

- *Support students as they compose, and give them feedback.* Students need close direction around setting goals for their writing, gathering resources, and group composing. It turns out the process of collaborative writing is a real booster for writing quality, but it needs to be orchestrated and monitored.

- *Teach critical skills, processes, and knowledge.* Research has shown the power of explicitly teaching spelling, handwriting, and typing; sentence construction skills; strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing a text; and the ability to tell one genre of writing from another.

- *Use 21st-century writing tools.* Word processing is a must – and students can branch out with Google Docs and other tools for creating, co-creating, and sharing.

“A Path to Better Writing: Evidence-Based Practices in the Classroom” by Steve Graham and Karen Harris in *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 69, #4, p. 359-365), available for purchase at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1432/abstract>; the authors can be reached at steve.graham@asu.edu and karen.r.harris@asu.edu.

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4. Ways That Technology Can Help Humanities Teachers Differentiate

In this *Education Week* article, Benjamin Herold features a number of ed-tech innovations that have made it easier for teachers to personalize reading matter for students (his list was curated by Graphite, a Consumer Reports-type website with ratings and recommendations of ed-tech tools):

- *Customize texts to each student’s reading level.* NewsELA was the pioneer of writing a single passage at five different levels of reading difficulty, available with the click of a mouse. Some e-books have taken a similar approach, writing a book “up” or “down.” Products like Raz-Kids offer a variety of e-books written across the full range of reading levels. The bottom line: it’s possible for each student in a class with a wide range of reading proficiency levels to be reading material at the “just right” level – which is where the best learning takes place.

- *Allow teachers to target specific reading skills.* Teachers have many apps to choose from – the trick is finding the right one and making sure it follows solid research and practice and doesn’t have distracting bells and whistles. Among the resources are: SpellingCity (for

early learners); Lexia Reading Core5 (the full range of foundational skills); and ThinkCERCA (close reading).

- *Diagnose and respond to individual students' strengths and weaknesses.* The READ 180 program gets students going with material at their comfort zone, monitors their errors and the time they take on portions of the curriculum, and uses the data to bring certain words back and make other adjustments to keep students progressing and experiencing the maximum possible words. Two similar programs: Achieve 3000 and i-Ready.

- *Encourage teachers to offer customized supports.* Benchmark Universe allows a teacher to draw on its collection of 2,500 e-books, insert “sticky notes” for individual students or groups, and modify the text by including a video. Similar products are Actively Learning Curriculet, and Subtext. The downside: they can be time-consuming for teachers.

- *Have students show what they have learned in different ways.* This can be everything from students recording themselves so the teacher can check on fluency, to students engaging in multimedia creation and storytelling and collaborative writing. Tools like BookBuilder take student ownership to a whole new level: students compose, edit, and share their own e-books.

“Literacy Gets a Personalized Makeover” by Benjamin Herold in *Education Week*, January 13, 2015 (Vol. 35, #17, p. S10-11), www.edweek.org

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5. A Keyboarding Bill of Rights?

In this Hechinger paper, Jill Barshay presents findings from a recent study showing that some fourth graders produced better essays writing by hand than using a computer. But on closer analysis, the biggest barrier to those who were less successful using computers was most students' extremely slow typing speed – students hunting and pecking as slowly as four words a minute. The average fourth grader was writing 12 words a minute. At these speeds, working memory is overtaxed and the quality of the writing is going to suffer.

The study did find that some high-poverty students produced better essays working by hand. But most U.S. schools are not moving in that direction – and word processing has tremendous advantages for every writer. Steve Graham of Arizona State University has an idea: Every school should devote a chunk of time (probably at middle school) to teaching keyboarding and basic word-processing, perhaps motivating all middle-school students to work toward a specific per-minute typing speed, and giving students constant practice composing and editing on a computer. Getting students proficient with the mundane, non-sexy business of keyboarding and word processing is one of the best ways to liberate the higher-order thinking and creativity of all students.

“Using Computers Widens the Achievement Gap in Writing, a Federal Study Finds” by Jill Barshay in *Hechinger Report*, January 11, 2016,

<http://hechingerreport.org/online-writing-tests-widen-achievement-gap/>

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6. Collaboration: Are Businesses Over-Doing It? Schools?

“Too much teamwork exhausts employees and saps productivity,” say Rob Cross, Reb Rebele, and Adam Grant in this *Harvard Business Review* article. Say what?! Collaboration isn’t a good thing? Here’s their story.

Over the last two decades, the amount of time most businesses devoted to collaboration has increased by 50 percent or more, say the authors, but without bosses paying close attention to the quality of collaborative meetings. Most of the valuable contributions in groups – ideas, encouragement, follow-up – are made by a very small minority of group members – and those competent, good-hearted employees (mostly women) get a reputation as go-to people. Everyone else is tied up in the meetings with fewer important gains for anyone, making it stressful to try to get their real work done during the rest of the work day.

Getting teams to cut back on the collaborative binge is a major management challenge, say Cross, Rebele, and Grant. Managers must be careful not to lose the institutional information these employees have in their heads, as well as their knowledge of where the bodies are buried. One cannot help thinking of *Downtown Abbey and Upstairs Downstairs* – the personal and political insights of those working in the basement.

Does this ring true in schools you’re working in? Are we over-doing collaborative meetings? Is this report nothing earth-shaking, or is it a conversation-starter?

“Collaboration Overload” by Rob Cross, Reb Rebele, and Adam Grant in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2016 (Vol. 94, #1/2), <https://hbr.org/2016/01/collaborative-overload>; Cross can be reached at robcross@virginia.edu.

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7. The Difference That Standards-Based Grading Can Make

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Marty Pollio (Jeffersontown High School) and Craig Hochbein (Lehigh University) report on their study of eleven urban high schools switching to standards-based grading in advanced math courses. The bottom line: the number of students earning an A or B in a course and passing the state test *doubled*.

The introduction of standards-based grading didn’t miraculously improve instruction – rather, new grading practices brought greater clarity to curriculum planning, classroom pedagogy, on-the-spot assessments, students’ self-studying techniques, parental help, and more. In addition, say Pollio and Hochbein, teachers found the new grades easier to interpret, particularly when working with at-risk students.

“The Association Between Standards-Based Grading and Standardized Test Scores As An Element of a High-School Reform Model” by Marty Pollio and Craig Hochbein in *Teachers College Record*, November 2015, available for purchase at <https://www.tcrecord.org/Signin.asp?cc=1&r=2>

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest