

Marshall Memo 790

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

June 10, 2019

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Quotes of the Week

“The problem we’re trying to solve in public education today is to graduate all children with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to embrace an increasingly complex world on their own terms.”

Joshua Starr “One Parent’s Paradox: Pushing Academics or Personal Competencies?” in *School Administrator*, June 2019 (Vol. 76, #6, p. 21-22), <https://bit.ly/2wFSkd9>; Starr can be reached at jstarr@pdkintl.org.

“The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
Scott Mautz (see item #2)

“It’s become clear that ‘fake news’ – the heralding of misinformation as verified fact or the dismissal of verified fact as misinformation – affects the way adolescents relate to one another and their understanding of the world around them, and thus could have serious negative effects on society in the future.”

Mike Stone in “Parents and Teachers Must Team Up Against ‘Fake News’” in *Education Week*, June 5, 2019 (Vol. 38, #34, p. 26), <https://bit.ly/2ZnMcTh>

“Kids are born with brains ready to be wired by thousands of experiences, including some scrapes, confusion, betrayal, frustration, and fear. But when they don’t get a healthy dose of these, thanks to a sort of bubble-wrapped childhood, they don’t get the chance to become anti-fragile. They remain fragile.”

Lenore Skenazy in “Lost Learning: the Age of Bubble-Wrapped Kids” in *School Administrator*, June 2019 (Vol. 76, #6, p. 25-26), <https://bit.ly/2KBCcS4>; Skenazy can be reached at Lenore@LetGrow.org.

1. A School Reform Agenda

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Michael Petrilli lists the “universal aspirations” he believes Americans across the political spectrum embrace (quoted verbatim):

- Every child deserves a good school, and it’s unfair that not everyone gets to attend one.
- A strong education system is key if the American dream, and a healthy democracy, is going to be enjoyed by future generations.
- Educators deserve our appreciation and greater status than many enjoy now.
- Not everyone needs to go to college, though some sort of postsecondary training – on top of a first-rate K-12 education – is almost always necessary to support a family in today’s (and tomorrow’s) economy.

Petrilli goes on to describe what “reformers” believe about the current status of U.S. schools:

- Good schools deliver strong results for students – and all schools should be held to account for their results.
- Our schools as a whole could be delivering much stronger results for all their students, but especially for disadvantaged students.
- One size does not fit all, so we should embrace a pluralistic school system.

He then lists the state policy levers that reformers say are essential to improving schools:

- Academic standards that aim for readiness in college, career, and citizenship;
- Regular, high-quality aligned assessments;
- School ratings focused primarily – but not exclusively – on academic progress and outcomes;
- Strategies for intervening in, and/or replacing, chronically low-performing schools;
- High standards for entry into the teaching profession, combined with flexible pathways by which to enter;
- Feedback mechanisms to help teachers improve;
- Compensation systems that recruit and retain strong teachers.

“What Education Reformers Believe” by Michael Petrilli in *The Education Gadfly*, March 3, 2019 (Vol. 19, #23), <https://bit.ly/2HjbDAb>

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2. Google's Updated List of Managerial Desiderata

In this article in *Inc.*, author/speaker Scott Mautz reports Google's findings about what their best managers have in common; the company's 2010 list of eight attributes was recently supplemented with two more:

- Be a good coach. Care about your employees, invest time and energy in helping them get better, and be a facilitator, not a fixer.
- Empower teams and don't micromanage. Research shows that employees perform better, have higher job satisfaction, and are less likely to leave when managers lead with a light touch.
- Create an inclusive team environment, showing concern for people's success and well-being. Esprit de corps and interdependence boost performance and individuals' sense of fulfillment.
- Be productive and results-oriented. This includes walking the talk and making sure employees have the tools to do their work well.
- Be a good communicator; listen and share information. "The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place," says Mautz. Managers need to tune in to what their colleagues say.
- Have a clear vision/strategy for the team. Ideally colleagues help develop this, and then it's revisited frequently.
- Support career development and discuss performance. "People crave feedback," says Mautz. "And you owe it to them... People work to bring meaning to their lives, and meaning comes from personal growth and development."
- Have expertise to advise the team. Employees want to know that their manager has "been there, done that," but it's also important for leaders to read a lot and stay on top of recent developments in the field.
- Collaborate. This is an essential component of effective work; the absence of collaboration, says Mautz, "kills culture, productivity, and results."
- Be a strong, self-confident decision maker. Indecision leads to doubt, uncertainty, lack of focus, resentment, and paralysis.

"Google Tried to Prove Managers Don't Matter. Instead, They Discovered 10 Traits of the Very Best Ones" by Scott Mautz in *Inc.*, June 9, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2XnS7XO> (See Memo 515 for an earlier *Harvard Business Review* article about Google's internal debate on this.)

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3. How Lower-Track Students Are Taught Differently

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Emily Hodge (Montclair State University) says the Common Core initiative is meant to bring "fewer, clearer, higher" standards to all students, pushing schools toward more-equitable outcomes across the board. She was interested in how this would play out as middle-school literacy teachers in a large, diverse metropolitan school district taught the standards to their lower-track classes (students were grouped by their state test scores).

This district advocated “rigor for all” and mandated the same literacy curriculum package for all tracks. The school’s hierarchical structure, says Hodge, served “as a powerful signal to teachers about what types of curriculum and instruction are appropriate for those different groups.” She noticed two different “logics” as teachers modified the curriculum for lower-track students:

- The logic of tracking, which invokes a taken-for-granted, hierarchical, fixed view of student ability;
- The logic of differentiation, which involves a more mutable view of ability, leading teachers to provide additional scaffolding for students as they read challenging texts.

To understand teachers’ decision making, Hodge observed classes in different tracks and interviewed teachers, instructional coaches, and district staff responsible for middle-school literacy instruction.

Analyzing her data, Hodge concluded that teachers’ modifications of the curriculum for lower-track students were driven by the logic of tracking about half the time, by the logic of differentiation about 20 percent of the time, and by a mix of the two about 30 percent of the time. As a result, lower-track students mostly experienced watered-down instruction – specifically:

- Instruction proceeding at a slower pace;
- Reduced cognitive demand;
- Materials geared down to lower reading levels;
- More teacher-centered instruction;
- Fewer opportunities for students to work in groups;
- Sequential instruction – students needed to master A before learning B;
- More emphasis on comprehension before engaging with complex ideas;
- In grading, not holding lower-track students to the same standards as those in higher tracks;
- External locus of control – responsibility for student learning was with the student;
- Lower behavioral expectations – for example, one teacher allowed honors students to sit on top of their desks during a discussion, but kept lower-track students in their seats; when asked about this, the teacher revealed negative expectations for lower-track students’ ability to handle this loosening-up of classroom routines.

Hodge stresses that she is not criticizing the teachers she observed and interviewed; she found them to be experienced and “deeply caring and hardworking.” What she’s concerned about is the way the school grouped students. “Given the durability of tracking as an organizational structure,” she concludes, “these findings raise questions about the potential of common standards and a common, college preparatory curriculum to result in high-quality learning experiences in lower-track classes.”

“‘Common’ Instruction? Logics of Ability and Teacher Decision Making Across Tracks in the Era of Common Standards” by Emily Hodge in *American Educational Research Journal*, June 2019 (Vol. 56, #3, p. 638-675), <https://bit.ly/2K85to2>; Hodge is at hodgee@montclair.edu.

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4. The Experience of Latina/o Students in AP and Honors Classes

In this *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* article, Peter Bjorklund Jr. (University of California/San Diego) reports on his study of Latina/o students in AP and honors classes in a diverse 1,600-student suburban high school. Nationwide, the number of Latina/o students taking AP courses has increased in recent decades, giving them access to higher expectations and more-rigorous instruction. But their passing rate (scores of 3 and better) is only 42 percent, compared to 64 percent for white and 70 percent for Asian students.

Bjorklund looked for possible explanations by observing classes, interviewing ten Latina/o students, and having them engage in guided journaling several times during the year. He was a teacher at the school at the time of the study, knew almost all of the students, and was able to get candid, detailed insights from them. Bjorklund was particularly interested in three dimensions of students' experience in the advanced classes: their sense of social belonging, teacher-student relationships, and academic belonging. Drawing on previous research, he used these detailed definitions:

- *Social belonging* – The sense of “fitting in” increases students' motivation and how much they value their schoolwork, says Bjorklund: “Students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to think that school is useful and enjoyable, even when they are struggling academically... [It can also] energize students' enthusiasm, interest, and willingness to participate in classroom activities... As such, it is imperative that teachers work to foster a classroom environment where all students feel that they belong.”

- *Teacher-student relationships* – An important variable in students' achievement is their sense that teachers genuinely care about them personally and academically and are supportive of their efforts.

- *Academic belonging* – This is students' sense that they “are among intellectual peers, are able to meet high academic standards, and share academic interest with others,” says Bjorklund (quoting Green et al., 2016).

What were the findings? “Overall,” Bjorklund says, “students in this study expressed and exhibited a lack of social belonging, a lack of positive authentic teacher-student relationships, and a lack of academic belonging in their AP and honors classes. Generally, they felt that they were not accepted by their peers and that they did not fit in these classes, which diminished their sense of belonging. They felt like they had little in common with their peers and felt like the other students did not value their opinions; and this was inimical to their sense of belonging and made them less willing to participate in class.”

However, the students in the study pushed back on this negative dynamic, determined to prove that they *did* belong and *could* achieve. “Everything they say about Latinos is pretty much bad,” said one student, “and I try to show them that it's not like that.” An important support for students' “transformational resistance” was participation in the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program. These daily classes gave them a sense of community and academic and social support, which fueled their resilience and determination to persevere in challenging environments.

Bjorklund acknowledges that AP courses, with their large class size, focus on coverage,

and breakneck pace, aren't an ideal venue for teachers to get acquainted with individual students. Still, in this high school, there was one English teacher whom students credited with developing authentic, caring relationships with Latina/o students. That, and the ongoing support of the AVID program and students' determination to succeed, made a big difference.

“Whoa. You Speak Mexican?": Latina/o High-School Students' Sense of Belonging in Advanced Placement and Honors Classes” by Peter Bjorklund Jr. in *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, April-June 2019 (Vol. 24, #2, p. 109-131), <https://bit.ly/2WV566e>; Bjorklund can be reached at pbjorklund@ucsd.edu.

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5. Should Students' Smartphones Be Sequestered During the School Day?

In this article in *School Administrator*, Jean Twenge (San Diego State University) quotes a high-school junior she interviewed recently: “My generation has lost interest in socializing in person – they don't have physical get-togethers, they just text together and they can just stay at home.” Studies bear out this boy's perception: middle-schoolers get together with friends much less frequently than they did twenty years ago, high-school seniors go out on fewer dates, and teens are spending an average of six hours a day texting and on social media. In schools that allow phones, fewer students have in-person conversations. One student said, “I found myself finishing my lunch and sitting there in utter silence wondering what to do.” Another student said her friends seemed like they were “addicted” to their phones.

Twenge believes the surge in digital communication among young people is a serious problem. It's showing up in complaints from employers about the poor social skills of the young people they interview – lack of eye contact and unease with face-to-face conversations. There's also evidence that increased time on devices is linked to higher rates of loneliness, unhappiness, depression, self-harm, and suicide among adolescents.

Twenge has a radical suggestion: students should not have access to their smartphones during the school day; devices should be deposited in lockers or other secure locations from the opening to the closing bell. “The halfway position of allowing phones in classrooms for ‘instructional purposes’ tends not to work,” she says, “– it's too difficult to enforce and too tempting for students to grab their phones during class or stare at them for the entire lunch period.” Liberated from the need to be in constant digital touch with their peers and the world, says Twenge, “Students learn to concentrate without ruminating over what they'll find on their phones at the end of the period and might even hold a conversation over lunch. This is a better formula for learning and a better formula for mental health.”

“The Unhealthy State of the Smartphone Age” by Jean Twenge in *School Administrator*, June 2019 (Vol. 76, #6, p. 22-23), <https://bit.ly/2WqCUnl>; Twenge is at jeantwenge@gmail.com.

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6. Advice for Districts Considering Later High-School Start Times

In this article in *Education Next*, writer Danielle Dreilinger reports that despite the strong research and medical consensus that adolescents shouldn't start school before 8:30 a.m., only 13 percent of U.S. public high schools are following that recommendation. "The crux of the matter," says Dreilinger, "is that schools are a collection of moving parts, from predawn janitorial and food-service prep to busing and afterschool activities. Family work routines are often organized around school rhythms. Shifting secondary-school start times sends shock waves through those systems."

Dreilinger took a close look at three districts that decided to shift high-school opening times (St. Paul, Minnesota; Kanawha County, West Virginia; and Fort Wayne, Indiana), and offers these strategic recommendations for those considering a similar change:

- *Expect an uproar.* Pushback from all the constituencies affected by a change is made more intense when districts flip elementary and secondary bus schedules: twice as many families have to change child care schedules. When Boston Public Schools rolled out a new schedule in 2017, there was such an uproar that the superintendent backed down (and shortly afterward was no longer running the district).

- *Anticipate and address likely problems.* That means working with families to manage child care, transportation, sports teams, and concerns about safety when young children are out waiting for buses in the dark. It's important for districts to be sensitive to the fact that schedule changes may have a disproportionate impact on lower-income parents, who are more dependent on public transportation and are given less flexibility by their employers.

- *Gather evidence and present it clearly to families.* Data on teens' biological clocks and their need for 7-8 hours of sleep can convince skeptics that the change will benefit students, even if it involves adult inconvenience. Boston's mistakes included not presenting the scientific evidence up front and blindsiding families with unexpected changes in an already confusing student-assignment process. It's appealing if schedule changes can be coupled with more cost-effective use of buses and facilities.

- *Give advance warning.* St. Paul started discussing new start times in 2010 and had several false starts, giving district leaders time to convince opponents. When one high school had positive results from a later opening time, the word got out that the idea wasn't as crazy and disruptive as many had feared, and the district is now about to change start times for almost all high schools.

- *Take decisive action and don't expect 100 percent agreement.* Waiting for even 80 percent agreement may mean never making the change, says Dreilinger. With good information, careful planning, and efficient rollout, many opponents will be persuaded by the positive outcomes – more students arriving on time, more attentiveness in morning classes, improved test scores, and less risky behavior in the afternoon.

"How to Make School Start Later" by Danielle Dreilinger in *Education Next*, Summer 2019 (Vol. 19, #3, p. 46-52), <https://bit.ly/2ZlkxSV>

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7. The Art of the One-Pager

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article with lots of illustrations (see the link below), Betsy Potash shares pointers for getting students to create effective “one-pagers,” in which they share their most important takeaways on a subject – a historical figure, a novel, a poem, a podcast, a guest speaker – and display quotations, ideas, images, icons, analysis, key names, dates, and more on a single sheet of blank paper. “As students create one-pagers,” says Potash, “the information they put down becomes more memorable to them as they mix images and information... Students tend to surprise themselves with what they come up with, and their work makes for powerful displays of learning. Plus, they’re fun to make.”

But some examples that are popping up on Instagram can be intimidating, leading to the conclusion that only super-artistic students can do one-pagers well. The key, says Potash, is how teachers structure them. Her suggestions:

- Spell out the elements you want students to include in their one-pagers – quotations, key themes, literary elements, important characters and dates, and connections to other disciplines, students’ lives, and contemporary culture.
- Create a layout template using the shapes tool in PowerPoint or something similar.
- Connect your instructions to the layout, making clear which elements should go in which area of the template.
- Construct a simple rubric with assessment criteria – textual analysis, required elements, thoroughness, etc.
- Show students some examples of one-pagers that other students have created.
- Provide art materials, give students time to work on their products in class, and circulate answering questions.
- Do a gallery walk of the one-pagers before they’re collected, or have students present them in small groups; they’ll get lots of ideas from classmates.
- Create a display after the one-pagers are rubric-scored.

“A Simple Trick for Success with One-Pagers” by Betsy Potash in *The Cult of Pedagogy*, May 26, 2019, <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/one-pagers/>

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8. Four Ways for Educators to Recharge Over the Summer

“Teachers are notorious for taking care of everyone but ourselves,” says Arkansas grade 1-2 teacher Justin Minkel in this article in *Education Week Teacher*. “The coming summer provides a perfect chance to change that.” He believes it’s time to answer the question, “Who are we when we’re not teaching?” Minkel has four suggestions:

- *Become the learner instead of the teacher.* Learn Arabic, kickboxing, pottery, bicycle repair. “It takes curiosity, perseverance, and humility to learn a new skill,” he says. “The struggle and excitement of being a novice can deepen our empathy for our students, who are asked every day to attempt new and difficult things.” One lesson he learned from kickboxing classes was that general exhortations – “Keep it up! Nice going!” – are unhelpful. What novices need is coaching and guidance on the specifics.

- *Hyphenate yourself.* Minkel sees himself as a teacher-dad, a teacher-writer, and teacher-hiker, among other identities. Strong outside-of-school interests make teachers more interesting and effective with their students.

- *Be your full self with your loved ones.* Those closest to us “often get a depleted version of us during the school week and year,” says Minkel. “It’s harder to be patient, present, and playful with our own children when you have exhausted those reserves with your students over the past seven hours.” Hence the importance of the summer months.

- *Join a new tribe or two.* While there’s an instant bond when teachers meet teachers, wherever they meet, Minkel says it’s good to hang out with people who have radically different professional lives and experience a different kind of camaraderie.

Minkel loves teaching, but acknowledges that it’s hard. “We need deep rest and renewal if we’re going to keep doing it well.”

“We’ve Said Goodbye to This Year’s Students. Now It’s Time to Take Care of Ourselves” by Justin Minkel in *Education Week Teacher*, June 5, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Iv3WoR>

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9. Teaching the Equal Sign Correctly to Second Graders

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Jason Chow (Virginia Commonwealth University) and Joseph Wehby (Vanderbilt University) report the results of their study of teaching second graders the correct meaning of the equal sign in mathematical computations. The intervention consisted of three 20-minute lessons that explicitly taught students that the equal sign means that the quantities on either side of a number sentence are the same and interchangeable. The lessons were designed to overcome the common misconception that the equal sign is a signal for students to *do something*: solve, add, subtract, find the answer (e.g., $3 + 4 = \underline{\quad}$). Because of the way most American textbooks present the equal sign, about 70 percent of fourth and fifth graders harbor this misconception and have difficulty solving nonstandard problems like $\underline{\quad} = 3 + 4$.

Why is this important? “An early and accurate understanding of the equal sign,” say Chow and Wehby, “is essential because it is associated with improved algebraic performance; conversely, a misunderstanding of the equal sign negatively predicts early algebraic performance, and misunderstanding is more counterproductive as students become older.”

What did the researchers find? That students who received explicit instruction on the correct meaning of the equal sign, whether it was presented verbally or nonverbally (with diagrams), performed much better than the control group. And these students’ gains in understanding persisted when they were retested a month later. The conclusion: common misconceptions about the equal sign can be counteracted in a relatively short period of time – provided the lessons include explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

“Effects of Symbolic and Nonsymbolic Equal-Sign Intervention in Second-Grade Classrooms” by Jason Chow and Joseph Wehby in *Elementary School Journal*, June 2019 (Vol. 119, #4, p.

677-702), <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/703086>; Chow can be reached at jcchow@vcu.edu, Wehby at joseph.wehby@vanderbilt.edu.

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10. Short Item:

An app for dealing with microaggressions – Upstander is a free app (easy to download) designed to help educators build a repertoire of responses to annoying and offensive remarks.

Spotted in “Be the Upstander” by Andrew Bauld in *Ed. Magazine*, Summer 2019 (Issue 163), <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/19/05/be-upstander>

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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 48 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