Marshall Memo 873

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 8, 2021

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Let us walk with these warriors,
Charge on with these champions,
And carry forth the call of our captains!
We celebrate them by acting
With courage and compassion,
By doing what is right and just.
For while we honor them today,
It is them who every day honor us."

> Amanda Gorman in her Super Bowl poem, *Chorus of the Captains*, honoring educator Trimaine David, nurse manager Suzie Dorner, and Marine veteran James Martin, in "Amanda Gorman, in a First, Brings Poetry to Super Bowl" as reported in *PBS NewsHour*, February 7, 2021

"Teaching is professional work – not the kind we can manage by giving orders. It requires professional judgment under conditions of uncertainty… The work of improvement is mainly about improving teachers' professional judgment – so it involves getting into classrooms, having conversations with teachers to make sense of practice, and getting teachers to identify changes to make to their practice."

> Justin Baeder in "What Is Instructional Leadership" February 5, 2021

"Being curious about your friend's experience is more important than being right."

> Lisa Feldman Barrett (quoted in item #5)

"Every day she and I sit at home in an uncanny mirrored panopticon: She learns through her screen, and I sit across the table and give her the stinkeye."

> Lydia Kiesling in "Recommendation: *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*" in *The New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 2021, describing her interactions with her kindergarten daughter, recommending the 1980 Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish book.

1. Teacher Teamwork That Gets Results

(Originally titled "Beyond Collaboration: The Power of Joint Work")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, author/consultant Jenni Donohoo and Ann Mausbach (Creighton University) say that when teacher teams work together in specific ways, their "everyday work becomes the source for professional learning," and that has a remarkable effect on classroom practice. The key is *interdependence*, so the success of each teacher is linked to the success of the entire team – and vice versa.

This kind of teamwork won't happen by accident. In team meetings, teachers typically share ideas, methods, and opinions, tell stories, help each other out, and take care of routine tasks like planning a community math night. Goals and tasks are often individual – *I will improve my use of questioning and wait time in my classroom* and *You'll take care of the refreshments*. Unfortunately, that kind of teacher teamwork has a weak track record for improving student learning. Donohoo and Mausbach describe how school leaders can foster what they call "joint work." Of course, there's more to it than scheduling regular meeting times and providing logistical support. Key leadership actions:

• *Setting interdependent goals* – Principals move teachers to a higher level of collaboration by encouraging student outcome goals – for example, *All second graders will be proficient at identifying math patterns by the end of the first quarter* – and process goals – *We're going to design, deliver, and debrief lessons to help students become more proficient at this skill*. When teams set specific, collective goals, they are more likely to identify and implement the most effective strategies and persist in the face of setbacks.

• *Visiting meetings* – "For the same reason that a maestro listens to the different sections of the orchestra, school leaders need to participate in team meetings," say Donohoo and Mausbach. "Their job is to support teachers (by clarifying, posing questions, and listening) as they work to improve their practice, while also learning alongside teachers about what is making a difference for students."

• *Fostering "open-to-learning" discourse* – The culture in teams has to be one of teachers listening to each other and asking probing questions to help understand different theories of action for improving student learning. *Why do you think this approach would be the most successful? Why should we adjust our teaching approach in this manner?*

• *Coordinating the use of student evidence* – Effective teacher teams are constantly looking at artifacts that make student learning visible: writing samples, reading responses, exit slips, open-ended math problems, and evidence from conversations and observations. Teachers look over students' shoulders (or drop in on Zoom breakout rooms) and ask, *What are you*

learning today? How do you know you're on track? What are your next steps? "Student evidence is the best formative data available to teachers and leaders," say Donohoo and Mausbach; "without this information, joint work falls flat."

• *Focusing on outcomes* – "Linking the work of collaborative teams to student results, both large and small, helps teachers see their direct impact, upping the value they place on this work," say the authors. "Giving teachers time to identify what they did differently and how their actions contributed to positive outcomes helps them see their place in the process." Positive student learning results spur teacher teams to continue collaborative work in the months and years ahead.

"Beyond Collaboration: The Power of Joint Work" by Jenni Donohoo and Ann Mausbach in *Educational Leadership*, February 2021 (Vol. 78, #5, pp. 22-26); Mausbach can be reached at atm92947@creighton.edu.

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2. Getting Teachers on Board with Professional Learning

(Originally titled "Moving from TALK to ACTION in Professional Learning")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Jim Knight (University of Kansas and Instructional Coaching Group) says that learning a new skill or adopting an unfamiliar program is "more complex than it first appears," and the path from non-use to proficiency can be "messy and unpredictable." Knight suggests three strategies for PD providers:

• *Addressing resistance* – For starters, it's important to understand why teachers aren't embracing a new initiative. Some common reasons:

- Cynicism about professional development initiatives based on past experience;
- Top-down leadership that doesn't listen to teachers' ideas and respect their autonomy;
- Ideological differences – e.g., a constructivist philosophy versus direct instruction;
- A belief that the innovation threatens teachers' identity;
- Skepticism that the innovation will work with their students – for example, concern that a reading program is insufficiently challenging.

"When we take the courageous step of understanding *why* teachers resist," says Knight, "we can change our approach to one that's more likely to lead to mutual understanding than to resistance."

• *Proof of concept* – Teachers are often skeptical of an initiative unless they are convinced it will work with their students, but that creates a Catch 22: they won't try it with their students until they see it work with their students. Knight quotes Joseph Grenny et al.: "The great persuader is personal experience," not verbal persuasion. The best approach, says Knight, is to focus on a specific student learning target – for example, 95 percent of students mastering sentence writing as scored by a rubric. "With this goal in place, coaches can be less directive about ensuring high-quality implementation," says Knight. "The goal takes care of that because the only way a goal will be hit is if the innovation is used effectively."

• *Dealing with fear and perfectionism* – "If you don't try something until you're sure you can do it perfectly," says Knight, "you might never try." Leaders need to create a

psychologically safe climate so teachers will be willing to step out of their comfort zone and take risks. "This often involves clear explanations, demonstration (in person, through video, or by visiting another teacher's class), and ongoing conversations about how innovations or implementation can be modified to meet individual students' needs."

"Moving from TALK to ACTION in Professional Learning" by Jim Knight in *Educational Leadership*, February 2021 (Vol. 78, #5, pp. 16-21)

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3. Douglas Reeves on How PD Must Change After the Pandemic

(Originally titled "Five Professional Learning Transformations for a Post-Covid World")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, author/consultant Douglas Reeves suggests how the current crisis should reshape teacher learning:

• *Beyond one-shot events* – Workshops and keynote addresses may be entertaining, but to change teaching and learning, says Reeves, what's required is *deliberate practice*: "practice that is motivated by a compelling desire to improve, requires extra effort, is sustained over a long period of time, and is accompanied by feedback."

• *Tailored PD* – "If we are to practice the personalization that we preach," says Reeves, "then every faculty member will have a professional learning profile that shows current knowledge and skills, immediate and long-term professional learning needs, and the ability and willingness to support colleagues in critical skill areas."

• *Less inspiration, more perspiration* – Rhetoric about racial injustice is hollow, says Reeves, without specific actions to remedy inequitable practices – for example, toxic approaches to grading. "The notion that feelings and beliefs must precede changes in actions and practices is unsupported by the evidence," he says. "On the contrary, behavior often precedes belief."

• *From evaluation to coaching* – Reeves is sharply critical of the traditional teacher evaluation process of infrequent, announced classroom visits and compliance-driven end-of-year paperwork. "As time is inherently a zero-sum gain," he says, "every hour devoted to this pointless evaluation drill is an hour that could have been devoted to coaching and supporting teachers and leaders throughout the year."

• *From fragmentation to focus* – Because of the unfinished learning experienced by so many students during the pandemic, he believes it's more important than ever to focus on the "power standards" for each grade level: those that have leverage across disciplines (e.g., writing), recur from one grade to another, and are essential for success at the next grade level. In addition, too many schools are succumbing to the Christmas-tree effect, taking on one enticing program after another. "The essential task of the leader," says Reeves, "is to say no to every temptation that fragments the time, attention, and energy of students and teachers."

"Five Professional Learning Transformations for a Post-Covid World" by Douglas Reeves in *Educational Leadership*, February 2021 (Vol. 78, #5, pp. 44-48); Reeves can be reached at douglas.reeves@creativeleadership.net.

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4. Jay McTighe on Checking for Understanding

In this *Edutopia* article, author/consultant Jay McTighe describes eight ways to check for understanding and fix teaching and learning problems during lessons (whether they're in-person, hybrid, or remote). "It's important that students understand the purposes of these techniques," says McTighe, "that mistakes are okay – even expected – and that they will not be graded on their responses." It's vital for teachers to follow up on students' misconceptions, errors and misunderstandings with reteaching, scaffolding to support confused students, and opportunities to practice to mastery. Students' errors also provide helpful insights into how teachers can improve the way they present concepts and skills.

• *Hand signals* – Students can communicate how well they understand a concept, principle, or process – for example:

- Thumbs up: I understand it and can explain in my own words.
- Hand waving: I'm not completely sure and doubt I could explain it.
- Thumbs down: I don't yet understand and cannot explain it.

Self-reports aren't always reliable, so the teacher might cold-call a thumbs-up student and ask for an explanation.

• *A quick choice* – Students give a True/False or Agree/Disagree response to a binary-choice question that taps prior knowledge or uncovers a common misconception – for example:

- When a bowling ball and a marble are dropped from the same height, the bowling ball will fall faster.
- Is this an example of alliteration? Happy hippos

In a remote environment, students can respond via a poll or write their answers in the Chat.

• *Pictures* – Students are asked to create a graphic organizer, web, or concept map to check their understanding. Examples:

- Draw a visual web of the factors affecting plant growth.
- Sketch a concept map of how a bill becomes law.

With remote instruction, students use a Google slide, Pinterest board, Nearpod, or Jamboard.

• *Troubleshooting* – Students are presented with a common misconception or procedural error and asked to identify the flaw and correct it. Examples:

- Students mark grammatical or compositional errors in an imperfect piece of writing.
- Students identify errors in a multistep mathematical solution.

With remote instruction, Jamboard may be the best medium.

• *Summarizing* – When students restate a concept or use a skill, it tells the teacher how well students understand – and also increases students' comprehension and retention. Examples:

- Explain the big idea we've just learned in a tweet of 280 characters or less.
- Record a one-minute podcast or vodcast to summarize the following key concept.

(Khan Academy has helpful videos on summarizing fiction and nonfiction texts.)

• *Applying what's been learned to a new situation* – Transfer is one of the best ways to check for deeper understanding – for example:

- Find a news article showing tension between individual rights and the common good.
- Locate examples of symmetry in the school or your neighborhood.

• *Teaching* – Being able to explain something to a classmate who missed a lesson, or to a younger student, is an excellent way to check for understanding – and also to reinforce learning. In a remote environment, students might record a lesson using a laptop, tablet, or cell phone camera.

• *Analogies and metaphors* – Generating these can demonstrate understanding - for example:

- A fraction is a part of a whole like a _____ is to a _____.

McTighe notes that some students may grasp a concept but not be able to generate an analogy or metaphor.

"8 Quick Checks for Understanding" by Jay McTighe in *Edutopia*, January 28, 2021; McTighe can be reached at jmctigh@aol.com.

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5. David Brooks on Deeper Conversations

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks suggests ways that person-to-person discourse can "build trust, the oxygen of society, exactly what we're missing right now."

• *Approach with awe*. "Every human being is a miracle, and your superior in some way," says Brooks. A good conversationalist makes you feel "the beam of their affection and respect."

• *Ask elevating questions*. For example, "Who do you feel most grateful to have in your life?" "What problem did you use to have but now have licked?" "What crossroads are you at?"

• *Ask open-ended questions*. When we ask, "Did you have a good day?" responses aren't that interesting. Better to ask, "Tell me about a time…" or "What was it like…?"

• *Make people authors, not witnesses*. "The important part of people's lives is not what happened to them, but how they experienced what happened to them," says Brooks. The best conversations lead people to zoom out and see the broader context of an event.

• *Pay total attention*. We all have divided attention, especially introverts, who have so much going on in their heads, says Brooks. The effect of really focusing on the other person, with "amens and approbations," is magnetic.

• *Don't fear the pause*. We tend to stop listening about halfway through what the other person is saying and formulate our response. Better to listen to the whole comment and pause for a few seconds before responding.

• *Keep the gem statement front and center*. In the midst of a difficult conversation, there may be an idea that keeps a relationship together. "Even when we can't agree on Dad's medical care, I've never doubted that you want the best for him."

• *Explore the disagreement under the disagreement*. Brooks quotes neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett: "Being curious about your friend's experience is more important than being right."

• *Be like a midwife*. Brooks urges us to spend time "patiently listening to the other person teach herself through her narration, bringing forth her unthought thoughts, sitting with an issue as it slowly changes under the pressure of joint attention."

"Nine Nonobvious Ways to Have Deeper Conversations" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, November 19, 2020

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6. A History Lesson on Racial Inequality – and Hope

In this *New York Times* article, Shaylyn Romney Garrett (Weave: The Social Fabric Project) and Robert Putnam (Harvard University) say they were surprised by what they found looking at a century of data on African Americans' wealth, income, education, health, and political participation. Contrary to the common belief that significant progress didn't occur until the 1960s, Garrett and Putnam found that black Americans "were moving toward parity with white Americans well *before* the victories of the civil rights era." Surprisingly, that progress "slowed, stopped, and even reversed" in the 1960s and afterward. Understanding why that happened "not only reveals why America is so fractured today," they say; "it also illuminates the path forward, toward a more perfect union." Here is a summary of their findings:

• The life expectancy gap between black and white Americans narrowed most rapidly from 1905 to 1947, after which there were only modest gains. By 1995, the ratio was the same as it was in 1961. Progress since then is partly because of the rise in premature deaths among working-class whites.

• The black/white ratio of high school completion improved dramatically from the 1940s to the early 1970s and then slowed, never reaching parity. College completion followed the same pattern until 1970, then sharply reversed.

• Racial integration in K-12 schools began much earlier than believed, and accelerated after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. But this trend stopped in the early 1970s, followed by some resegregation.

• The racial income gap narrowed from 1940 to 1970, then stagnated, then widened. "The racial wealth gap is now growing as black homeownership plummets," say Garrett and Putnam.

• The South saw a dramatic increase in black voter registration between 1940 and 1964, before the Voting Rights Act, then almost entirely stalled for the rest of the century.

The gains made by African Americans in the first two-thirds of the 20th century, say Garrett and Putnam, "were due almost entirely to their fleeing the South by the millions during the Great Migration. Starting new lives in cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia meant access to better health care, education, and economic opportunities." But there was still "exclusion, segregation, and racial violence," and it was only African Americans' "undaunted faith in the promise of the American 'we,' and their willingness to claim their place in it, against all odds, that won them progress…"

Why did that momentum come to a standstill, and even reverse, over the last 50 years? Why, "when the dam of legal exclusion finally broke, didn't those trends accelerate toward full equality?" ask Garrett and Putnam. They suggest two reasons:

First, white backlash. When push came to shove, many white Americans would not buy into the ideals embodied in civil rights legislation. Polls in the mid-1960s showed broad support for reform, but then things changed. When President Lyndon Johnson rejected the recommendations of the Kerner Commission in 1968, he was responding to a sea change in white attitudes about the drive for racial equity that he himself had supported only a few years earlier. "This was a dramatic example of deliberate acceleration followed by deliberate deceleration," say Garrett and Putnam, "a pattern that mirrored the abandonment of Reconstruction."

Second, there was a shift from a progressive social ethos in the early 20th century to a new Gilded Age of growing wealth disparities, factionalism, lack of civic engagement, and egoism in the later decades, up to the present. "The moment America took its foot off the gas in rectifying racial inequalities," say Garrett and Putnam, "largely coincides with the moment America's 'we' decades gave way to the era of 'I'… Economic inequality has skyrocketed, and along with it have come massive disparities in political influence and a growing concentration of political-economic power in the hands of a few billionaires. Polarization and social isolation have increased. Whatever sense of belonging Americans feel today is largely due to factional (and often racially defined) in-groups locked in fierce competition with one another for cultural control and perceived scarce resources."

How white backlash interacted with this souring of the national mood is unclear, say Garrett and Putnam. "Perhaps America's larger turn toward 'I' was simply a response to the challenge of sustaining a more-diverse, multiracial 'we' in an environment of deep, embedded, and unresolved racism. But it is also possible that a broader societal turn away from shared responsibilities to one another eroded the fragile national consensus around race as all Americans began to prioritize their own interests above the common good. A selfish, fragmented 'I' society is not a fertile soil for racial equality."

There is a striking parallel with the Gilded Age in the last decades of the 1800s – which was then followed by the Progressive Era, in which those trends were reversed, leading to marked improvements for African Americans. "We Americans have gotten ourselves out of a mess remarkably similar to the one we're in now," say Garrett and Putnam, "by rediscovering the spirit of community that has defined our nation from its inception. America has turned the tide from 'I' to 'we' once before and we can do it again. And, to a greater extent than heretofore recognized, we made more rapid progress toward racial parity during the communitarian epoch than during the period of increasing individualism that followed."

"But 'we' can be defined in more inclusive and exclusive terms," they conclude. "The 'we' we were constructing in the first two-thirds of the last century was highly racialized, and thus contained the seeds of its own undoing. Any attempt we make today to spark a new upswing must aim for a higher summit by being fully inclusive, fully egalitarian, and genuinely

accommodating of difference. Anything less will fall victim once again to its own internal inconsistencies."

"Why Did Racial Progress Stall in America?" by Shaylyn Romney Garrett and Robert Putnam in *The New York Times*, December 6, 2020; Putnam is at robert_putnam@hks.harvard.edu. Garrett and Putnam's new book is *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*

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7. A Framework for Relationships with Young People

The Minneapolis-based Search Institute created the Developmental Relationships Framework aimed at fostering "close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them." The Framework has five elements, each with specific actions that make relationships powerful (quoted directly):

• Express care: Show me that I matter to you:
- Be someone I can trust.
- Really pay attention when we are together.
- Make me feel known and valued.
- Show me you enjoy being with me.
- Praise me for my efforts and achievements.

• Challenge growth: Push me to keep getting better:
- Expect me to live up to my potential.
- Push me to go further.
- Insist I take responsibility for my actions.
- Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.

• Provide support: Help me complete tasks and achieve goals:
- Guide me through hard situations and systems.
- Build my confidence and take charge of my life.
- Stand up for me when I need it.
- Put limits in place that keep me on track.

• Share power: Treat me with respect and give me a say:
- Take me seriously and treat me fairly.
- Involve me in decisions that affect me.
- Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.
- Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.

• Expand possibilities: Connect me with people and places that broaden my world:
- Inspire me to see possibilities for my future.
- Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places.
- Introduce me to people who can help me grow.

The Framework linked below has a checklist of specific actions that can be helpful during the pandemic.

"The Developmental Relationships Framework" from The Search Institute, 2018

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8. How to Respond to Another Person's Self-Criticism

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell says that leaders' common response, when colleagues are hard on themselves, is to reassure and comfort them or offer quick solutions. When someone says, "I'm lousy at delegating," even if you disagree, Rockwell suggests taking the person seriously. Some possible responses (quoted directly):

- *What aspect of delegating are you thinking about?*
- *What would you like to try?*
- *What might be true of you if you improved your delegating skills?*
- *Why do you want to improve?*
- *What's the bravest thing you could try that might take your delegating skills to the next level?*

What if you think this person is actually good at delegating? Don't disagree, says Rockwell: "Never contradict someone who wants to improve, even if you think they're doing fine." A conversation about it might yield unexpected benefits.

"How to Respond When Team Members Put Themselves Down" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, February 3, 2021; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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9. Short Item:

a. This Kid Will Go Far – If you haven't already seen it, Creezy's extraordinary Rube Goldberg creation in his New Jersey backyard will make your day. And here's the 11 th grader's explanation of how he pulled it off.

"The Swish Machine: 70-Step Basketball Trick Shot (Rube Goldberg Machine)," May 15, 2020, and "How Creezy Built the Swish Machine," June 15, 2020

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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