Marshall Memo 903

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 20, 2021

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Here, in America, I'm a brown woman and an immigrant, but in my private high school in India, I was part of the privileged group. Indian casteism and colorism were as present in my high school as racism is here."

Eesha Pendharkar (see item #2)

"In out-of-school suspension you are removing kids from the socialization of the school and… you're placing them potentially in a different environment at home alone or even out on the street with their friends."

David Osher (quoted in item #3)

"In leadership, it doesn't matter what you say – only what they hear."

Leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith, quoted in "The Better Boss" by Larissa MacFarquhar in *The New Yorker*, April 22/29, 2002

"He [leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith] always tells his clients that he doesn't care about their past, doesn't care how they feel, doesn't care about their inner psyche – all he cares about is their future behavior."

Larissa MacFarquhar (*ibid.*)

"Never start a sentence with the word 'No,' 'But,' or 'However.'"

Marshall Goldsmith (*ibid.*)

"The teaching of mathematics has always been individualized. In its simplest and unfortunately most common form, this individualization consisted of lectures by the instructor, which were individually 'turned off' or ignored by the students whenever they got the urge."

Stephen Willoughby in "Individualization" in *Mathematics Teacher*, May 1976

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1. Can Racial Inequities Be Healed?

In this article in *Education Week*, Eesha Pendharkar says that when she was a reporter for a local newspaper in Bangor, Maine, she wrote a story about public complaints by three African-American students about racist actions in their high school. In a school that was 96 percent white, these included frequent use of the N-word by white students, black students being told to "go back where you come from," and in classroom discussions, justification of slavery and inferior status for black people.

When Pendharkar's article was published in May 2020, in the midst of a national awakening on race after the murder of George Floyd, there was a swift reaction. The district launched an independent investigation of the students' claims, conducted diversity training for educators, and overhauled the high school's history and English curriculum. It also hired an affirmative action coordinator and set up channels for middle- and high-school students to report troubling incidents. A new superintendent pledged to continue the focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and plans were made to conduct an equity audit to assess culture and opportunity gaps.

Bangor's efforts are impressive, says Pendharkar, better than those of many other school districts around the U.S. But checking in with Bangor students and city officials in recent months, in the midst of noisy backlash on Black Lives Matter and Critical Race Theory, she says progress is mixed. Students are stepping up and the curriculum changes are helping teachers and students "understand the history of how and why people of color were treated as they were in the past and why that needs to change with the investment of a lot of time, money, and commitment." But it's an uphill battle, she says, especially getting some people to change their deeply held beliefs on race and hierarchy.

All this has led Pendharkar to reflect on her childhood in India before coming to the U.S. Growing up as a member of a dominant caste, she had all the privileges of her family's social and economic position. "Here, in America," she says "I'm a brown woman and an immigrant, but in my private high school in India, I was part of the privileged group. Indian casteism and colorism were as present in my high school as racism is here. No curriculum change or affirmative action coordinator could have prevented all of the discrimination students faced. That would have required all of us in the dominant caste to get on the same page about the origins and history of the caste system, how it's present in the modern day and why it's morally wrong. And because our teachers and administrators and our families could

not identify the ways in which the school system was inherently casteist – we perpetuated it. Collectively."

"I don't know that schools can fundamentally change the mindset of teachers, administrators, parents, and students," she concludes, "perhaps because I come from a culture where racism, too, is so deeply embedded. The answer might be that it can't. Because unless you acknowledge that systemic racism is ingrained in schools, pledge to identify how, and work constantly to make changes, the education system will not get better. I stand on more than 3,500 years of Indian history to prove it."

"What the Indian Caste System Taught Me About Racism" by Eesha Pendharkar "What the Indian Caste System Taught Me About Racism" by Eesha Pendharkar in *Education Week*, September 15, 2021 (Vol. 41, # 5, pp. 10-12)

Back to page one

2. Is It Helpful for Social Justice Educators to Talk About White Privilege?

In this *Harvard Educational Review* article, Nicolas Tanchuk (Iowa State University), Tomas Rocha (University of Washington), and Marc Kruse (University of Winnipeg) critique the common understanding of privilege as "unearned advantages accrued by members of dominant groups through the oppression of subordinate groups." Social justice educators typically argue that teaching about how privilege benefits whites, males, heterosexuals, and other groups equips students "to combat dominating and oppressive relationships." But Tanchuk, Rocha, and Kruse believe this approach actually supports inequity among groups. They suggest that oppression works to the disadvantage of all groups and that social justice education needs to be reframed.

Their argument starts with a white student's reaction when Beverly Tatum described white privilege in her university class: greater access to jobs, housing, and education, the ability to shop in department stores without being followed by suspicious salespeople, not having to worry about police harassment and misconduct, and the expectation of better health and longevity. Absorbing all this, the student didn't deny that he had those benefits, that they were undeserved, and that they were not the result of innate superiority. He acknowledged that his white privilege stemmed from centuries of oppressive harm to others in which he was complicit. But why, he asked, should he give up those advantages?

Such a question is not unique to this student, say Tanchuk, Rocha, and Kruse, "but has been asked by other students in dominant groups in classes seeking to educate toward social justice." The key characteristic of this student's reaction to the idea of white privilege is that it is *atomistic* – he sees his ethical responsibilities in purely selfish terms, separated from responsibilities to others and his community. Atomistic thinking, say Tanchuk, Rocha, and Kruse, is very much part of modern capitalism, which frames "*civilization, progress,* and *advantage* in individualistic acquisitive terms," as distinct from cultures that emphasize communal responsibilities. They add that colonial-era Indian Affairs Commissioner John Oberly had in mind that distinction between European and Native American cultures when he

said that Indian children needed to be taught the "exalting egotism of American civilization, so that he will say 'I' instead of 'We,' and 'This is mine' instead of 'This is ours.'"

The reaction of Tatum's student is troubling, and raises the question of how social justice educators should approach the idea of privilege. "Is this atomistic conception, rooted in an Enlightenment colonial project, the best we can do?" ask Tanchuk, Rocha, and Kruse. They believe the way white privilege is being discussed in many schools "gives rise to a serious structural problem for social justice educators seeking to combat oppression between dominant majority groups and subordinated minority groups in democracies. Namely, where dominant majority groups embrace and effectively pursue an atomistic conception of advantage, inequality can be expected to persist and expand." Given that white Americans are a majority, and that a significant number are unlikely to give up their advantages, the authors believe schools should take a different approach to teaching about privilege.

"To mitigate this problem," the authors continue, "we advocate for a shift in the way we teach individual advantage, particularly to those in dominant groups, toward a relational responsibility view so that the oppression of any is consistently framed as disadvantageous to all." Drawing on Native American, African-American feminist, and other philosophical traditions, they suggest framing social justice education as *mutual aid* – a "commitment to relational responsibilities forged through solidarity in joint problem solving, inquiry, and learning." Viewed through this approach, Tatum's student engaged in "an irrational confusion that reinforces inequality and oppression by making injustice seem beneficial to those in power – the problem of privilege." The student needs to see that he is living ethically "only to the extent that he uses the instruments at his disposal – power, comfort, or wealth – to fulfill joint responsibilities with others to combat oppression and forge liberation."

Tatum has described the experiences of black students on predominantly white university campuses – racist graffiti on dormitory room doors, racist jokes circulated through campus e-mail, racial epithets and sometimes beer bottles hurled from a passing car. Tatum says the strength and resilience of black students who survive experiences like these is a higher form of relational excellence than the selfish reaction of her atomistic student. With a "transformed view of advantage," say Tanchuk, Rocha, and Kruse, he might see "these acts and the resulting pain of black students as a moral and political disaster because these conditions block the growth of joint flourishing through learning relationships."

The ultimate goal of social justice educators, conclude the authors, is to convince advantaged students to take responsibility for antiracist and ecologically just action "in proportion to their often greater institutional power and culpability… to work to transfer resources and create material conditions for leaders from subordinated groups to guide and inform the direction that we collectively take on this path."

"Is Complicity in Oppression a Privilege? Toward Social Justice Education as Mutual Aid" by Nicolas Tanchuk, Tomas Rocha, and Marc Kruse in *Harvard Educational Review*, Fall 2021 (Vol. 91, #3, pp. 341-361); Rocha can be reached at trocha@uw.edu, Kruse at marc.kruse@umanitoba.ca.

Back to page one

3. Correcting Misconceptions About Suspensions

In this article in *Education Week*, Sarah Sparks draws on recent studies of exclusionary discipline by the American Institutes of Research (AIR), the Civil Rights Project, and others to push back on four common myths:

• *Myth #1: Suspensions improve student behavior*. The AIR researchers found that students who were given out-of-school suspensions behaved more poorly afterwards than students who got in-school suspensions. And the longer suspensions lasted, the worse students' behavior was going forward. Why? "In out-of-school suspension," says David Osher of AIR, "you are removing kids from the socialization of the school and… you're placing them potentially in a different environment at home alone or even out on the street with their friends."

• *Myth #2: Suspensions help get at-risk students back on track*. Like other absences from class, disciplinary exclusion sets students back academically. This is most pronounced with out-of-school and longer suspensions.

• *Myth #3: Excluding a troublemaker improves learning for the rest of the class*. Researchers found there was no benefit for classmates when the "bad apples" weren't there. And exclusion may backfire if peers see it as unjust. "When students feel that discipline is inconsistent or unfair," says Christina LiCalsi of AIR, "it gives them a negative view of the schooling environment… It's having a negative effect on their feelings of connection and belonging, fairness and justice within their school, that might be having some negative impacts on their behavior."

• *Myth #4: The severity of a student's behavior drives suspensions*. "Suspensions continue to disproportionately affect students of color and those with disabilities or trauma," reports Sparks, "even when they engage in the same misbehaviors as their peers." Students with multiple adverse experiences outside school – neglect and abuse, a parent's death, incarceration, mental illness, or substance abuse – have four times the likelihood of being suspended compared to a student without a history of trauma.

"4 Myths About Suspensions That Could Hurt Students in the Long Term" by Sarah Sparks in *Education Week*, September 8, 2021 (Vol. 41, #4, p. 7)

Back to page one

4. Charter Schools Work on Improving Students' College Graduation Rates

In this article in *Education Next*, Jon Marcus reports on how several charter networks are supporting their college-going graduates, many of whom are the first in their families to attend postsecondary institutions. Marcus focuses on the Achievement First, Bright Star, KIPP, Summit, and Uncommon networks. A high rate of college success is central to their mission and to attracting students and financial support; KIPP, for example, publicly commits to "preparing students for economically self-sufficient, choice-filled lives," which in most cases involves earning a bachelor's or associate's degree.

One helpful development has been the availability of data on where students enroll, attend, and graduate provided by the National Student Clearinghouse's StudentTracker and other organizations. Nationwide, the percent of high-school graduates going on to four-year colleges has risen to 70 percent, but there are demographic differences: 64 percent of white students earn a four-year degree within six years compared to 54 percent of Hispanic and 40 percent of African-American students. There's also a strong correlation between college graduation rates and family income, ranging from 64 percent for the highest economic quartile to 16 percent for the lowest.

The charter networks' efforts address the multiple challenges faced by graduates as they head for college. Some of the initiatives:

• *Preparing students for college admission and success* – This includes building academic skills, interviewing students about their goals and college choices, nudging them to apply to higher-ranked colleges than they might otherwise consider, counseling on financial aid and applications, establishing a relationship with their high school's college and career specialist, and preparing for a "warm handoff" from high school to college.

• *Steering students toward supportive colleges* – and advising them to avoid colleges that have a poor track record for graduating students of color. In addition, the charter networks are pushing colleges to do a better job supporting their students. "The potential pool of applicants coming out of charter schools is especially attractive to colleges and universities amid enrollment declines and new calls for diversity and inclusion," says Marcus. This is been accentuated by the pandemic, which has resulted in a sharp drop in college enrollment and in applications from first-generation students. Some colleges have resisted working with high schools, while others have embraced the common mission of supporting high-need students' success. One college has agreed to split the cost of a full-time advisor for KIPP students on campus.

• *Dealing with "summer melt"* – Between 10 and 40 percent of students who achieve college admission don't show up in the fall. Through a combination of text nudges, artificial intelligence, and human interaction, the charter networks remind students of upcoming deadlines, encourage them, and keep them on track for college enrollment. One bot says, "I think you're amazing. Just popping in to tell you you've got this."

• *Supporting students after they enroll* – This includes help with finding housing, attending orientations, registering for classes, being sure to meet core requirements (versus taking only fun electives), buying books and supplies, adjusting to campus life, dealing with homesickness and family responsibilities, understanding "imposter syndrome," picking majors, budgeting money, not missing meals, dealing with campus jobs, work study, and internships, not hesitating to take advantage of professors' office hours, cutting through red tape, keeping financial aid flowing, connecting with adult advocates and a "posse" of fellow students for support, reaching out for mental health support when needed, improving study skills, and managing time. Being on call is a vital part of the charter networks' support people. "I don't have to be their therapist," says Onjheney Warren, a college transition specialist at a KIPP

school in Houston. “I don’t have to be their mom. I don’t have to be their best friend. But I want them to be able to text us when they need some help.”

• *Using data to improve high-school programs* – Many high schools aspire to graduate students who are “college ready,” but downstream data have led some to rethink what they’re doing. For example, the Summit network boasted a 98 percent high-school graduation rate, but found that just 49.9 percent of graduates earned a college degree within six years. This was well above national statistics for their students’ demographic, but network leaders were not satisfied. The same is true of other networks; here are stats on several of their six-year postsecondary graduation rates:

- Uncommon – 58 percent;
- Achievement First – 53 percent;
- KIPP – 43 percent bachelor’s, plus 6 percent earning an associate’s degree;
- Bright Star – 37 percent, plus 8 percent earning an associate’s degree.

Network leaders realized that students who received intensive support and handholding throughout high school – for example, small classes, highly structured discipline, being able to retake tests and submit do-overs of papers – were not prepared to be self-sufficient in an unstructured, less-supportive college environment. This has led to revised policies and explicit efforts to improve students’ ability to work independently, handle multi-step projects, and manage their time.

“Charter Schools Go to College” by Jon Marcus in *Education Next*, Fall 2021 (Vol. 21, #4, pp. 8-16; Marcus can be reached at jmarcus@hechingerreport.org.

Back to page one

5. Using Quick Surveys to Check in with Students

In this *Edutopia* article, Sarah Gonser reports how some teachers at the university and K-12 levels get “early-term feedback” by asking students to answer a few anonymous questions (on paper or online), leading discussions on the results the next day, and following up (except where requests are unreasonable, such as having no deadlines for assignments). Surveys can reveal all kinds of helpful information, including a teacher’s blind spots, problems with classroom logistics, and what students are finding confusing or inefficient. Gathering and incorporating feedback can improve teaching in real time and also change the culture of a classroom, showing students that their opinions are respected. Questions like *What helps you learn?* are especially useful.

Here are some sample questions from a University of Minnesota class taught by journalism professor Gayle Golden:

- What should be happening in this class?
- What should we start doing in this class?
- What should we stop doing in this class?

And here are some questions suggested by Harvard’s Making Caring Common Project, EduCause, and the Hawaii Department of Education:

- Are assignments clear? Are you able to access them?

- Do you feel like your voice is heard?
- Do you feel like you belong in this classroom?
- What can I do to improve our classroom?

"Regardless of how carefully you position the survey and explain its purpose to students," Gonser concludes, "be prepared, as well, to hear negative feedback." With especially harsh criticism, ask yourself, *What's up?*, don't take it personally, and focus on actionable steps you can take.

"Continuously Refine Your Practice with Student Feedback" by Sarah Gonser in *Edutopia*, August 6, 2021

Back to page one

6. Ideas for Quieting a Noisy Middle-School Class

In this *Education Week* article, Catherine Gewertz passes along suggestions from readers in response to this prompt: "If middle schoolers are incessantly talking and I need their attention, I _____." A number of teachers suggested counting backwards from five, flipping the lights off and on, and hand claps. Here are some others (click the link to see photos and short videos):

- *Scream FORTNITE*
- *I say "Hairspray" and students shhhhhh each other. It's hilarious and effective.*
- *Wireless doorbell (purchased from Amazon). Mine currently meows when I ring it.*
- *My phone or tablet is connected via Bluetooth to a speaker, allowing me to play sound effects from the free app, 100s of Buttons and Sounds. When my students hear the "gong" sound, they know it's time to quiet down and listen up.*
- *Sing "Red Robin" and they will reply, "Yum." They can't help themselves.*
- *If you really want to mess them up, do the elementary clapping thing. They will start clapping back without even thinking, and it weirds them out.*
- *I give them one of my crazy facial expressions they all say I have.*
- *Stare. I heard that it doesn't work for all teachers but my stare is amazing, I've been working on it since birth so it's who I am lol. If your stare isn't alarming then don't even bother and listen to someone else's advice.*
- *Stand silently at the front of the room and wait. After 34 years, my wait time is on point. If that doesn't work, I dim the lights. I will not yell over them.*
- *I've always randomly said "nose goes" and touch my nose! They'll quickly touch their nose and then get quiet to see what the heck they are touching their nose for!*

"How Do You Get Middle-School Students to Stop Talking? Creative Tips from Teachers" by Catherine Gewertz in *Education Week*, August 7, 2021

Back to page one

7. Phi Delta Kappa Poll Results

This year's Phi Delta Kappa Poll had fewer questions because of the drastically different situation in U.S. schools during the pandemic. It focused on how schools did during Covid-time and public attitudes about the 2021-22 school year. The big takeaways: the majority of Americans gave high marks to their community's public schools and teachers for handling the pandemic, and the public is broadly confident about the ability of schools to reopen safely and handle the 2021-22 school year well. Some details (click the link below for full results):

- 63 percent of public school parents gave their local public schools an A or B.
- 67 percent of public school parents gave their local teachers an A or B.
- 54 percent of all adults gave their local public schools an A or B.
- As has been the case in previous PDK polls, fewer people gave the nation's schools an A or B: 43 percent of public school parents and 39 percent of all adults.
- Asked about priorities for the current school year, respondents most frequently mentioned students catching up academically, readjusting to school schedules, and addressing kids' social-emotional needs.

"Positive Marks, High Hopes for Local Schools' Pandemic Response" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2021 (Vol. 103, #1, pp. 34-37)

Back to page one

8. Adaptations of Best-Selling Books for Young Readers

In this *School Library Journal* article, Kelly Jensen recommends several adaptations of popular trade books for middle-and high-school students (see the link below for cover images and short descriptions). "These books," says Jensen, "are outstanding tools for classroom incorporation, reader's advisory, and helping young people dream big, all with the inspiration from their favorite leaders."

- *Chasing the Truth: A Young Journalist's Guide to Investigative Reporting* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, adapted by Ruby Shamir
- *The Disappearing Spoon and Other True Tales of Rivalry, Adventure, and the History of the World from the Periodic Table of the Elements, Young Readers Edition* by Sam Kean
- *The Burning (Young Reader's Edition): Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921* by Tim Madigan, adapted by Hilary Beard
- *Chasing Space, Young Readers Edition* by Leland Melvin
- *One Life, Young Readers Edition* by Megan Rapinoe
- *Mighty Justice: The Untold Story of Civil Rights Trailblazer Dovey Johnson Roundtree* by Dovey Johnson Roundtree and Katie McCabe, adapted by Jabari Asim

"Remixes for Young Readers" by Kelly Jensen in *School Library Journal*, September 2021 (Vol. 67, #9, pp. 30-33)

Back to page one

9. Short Item:

Challenging Math Problems – Thanks to Dan Jubert, head of the American International School of Cape Town, South Africa, here are several websites with a wide range of interesting and challenging math problems:

- Bongard problems: http://www.foundalis.com/res/bps/bpidx.htm
- Unique math lessons: http://robertkaplinsky.com/lessons/
- Bowlands Math: https://www.bowlandmaths.org.uk/assessment/
- When Math Happens: https://whenmathhappens.com/3-act-math/

And if you haven't had a chance to check it out, here's the link to Stella's Stunners, Rudd Crawford's collection of non-routine math problems.

Back to page one

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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Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 16+ years

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 Gadfly
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
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
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
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
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