

Marshall Memo 694

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

July 10, 2017

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Quotes of the Week

“For better or worse, many of us never forget high school: The unrequited romantic crushes, chronic embarrassment, desperate struggles for popularity, sexual awakening, parental pressure and, above all else, competition – social, athletic, academic.”

Frank McAndrew (see item #1)

“How might we...?”

Leah Fessler in “The Three Words That Make Brainstorming Sessions at Google, Facebook, and IDEO More Productive” in *Quark*, <http://bit.ly/2mAoofv> (scroll down)

“Lesson closure provides space for students to digest and assimilate their learning and to realize why it all matters.”

Kathy Ganske (see item #4)

“Student engagement is a significant predictor of student learning and achievement. If classroom engagement is the golden eagle, then its counterpart, silence, is the miner’s canary and lifts its voice in resistance to the seen and unseen lurking ahead.”

Yolanda Majors in “Silence as Indicator of Engagement” in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, July/August 2017 (Vol. 61, #1, p. 91-93), <http://bit.ly/2u13BER>; Majors can be reached at ymajors@umn.edu.

“Making a daily practice of visiting classrooms, observing briefly, and talking with teachers has the greatest potential to improve student learning, help professionals grow, and help schools become more effective learning organizations.”

Justin Baeder (see item #3)

“[Teaching with film] can be an amazing resource for promoting student engagement and critical thinking, or it can be a complete waste of valuable instructional time...”

Stewart Waters (see item #8)

1. The Evolutionary Origins of High-School Social Drama

“For better or worse, many of us never forget high school,” says Frank McAndrew (Knox College) in this *Quartz* article: “The unrequited romantic crushes, chronic embarrassment, desperate struggles for popularity, sexual awakening, parental pressure and, above all else, competition – social, athletic, academic.” Hollywood has captured a lot of this – *The Breakfast Club, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Mean Girls, Heathers*. So why are the high-school years so embedded in memory?

McAndrew, an evolutionary psychologist, believes it’s because the “odd social bubble” of high school poses “an unprecedented challenge” to the way the human brain evolved over millions of years. “In other words,” he says, “the world that we evolved to be successful in (a small, stable group of interrelated people of various ages) is very different from the holding pen full of teenagers brimming with hormones that populate our world during the high-school years.” Our evolutionary hard wiring sees adolescence as a make-or-break time of life: in hunter-gatherer days, you literally made your bones as a teenager.

Perhaps that’s where modern teens’ intense focus on not straying far from the peer group’s values comes from, along with their intense loyalty to friends and the need to forge an alliance with one of several competing social cliques. Teens may know intellectually that in today’s world a person branded as a “loser” in high school might be a Nobel Prize winner twenty years later, but that’s no consolation when they’re caught up in the adolescent world. All this creates ongoing conflict with parents, who have the long view: prepare for a career, develop important life skills, you’re going out in that? *Mom, stop bugging me!*

“Emotions signal the brain that important events are happening,” McAndrew continues, “and the teen years are chock full of important social feedback about one’s skills, attractiveness, status, and desirability as a mate. This is precisely the stuff we need to pay attention to in order to successfully play the cards we have been dealt and to become socially and reproductively successful.” Hormones fuel actions that would have increased status and success in prehistoric times, and there are plenty of echoes today. “In young men,” says McAndrew, “we still reward, to some extent, the things that would have been essential for success in hunting and combat thousands of years ago: the willingness to take risks, fighting ability, speed, and the ability to throw with velocity and accuracy. Young women will showcase their youth and fertility. Beauty, unfortunately, continues to be a significant criterion by which they are judged.”

Thousands of years ago, people had a personal connection with nearly everyone in their

village or tribe, and it was important to remember details about temperament, predictability, and how people had acted in the past. In a modern high school, there are hundreds of strangers, sometimes thousands, and the task of knowing whom to trust and whom to ignore is significantly more challenging. “It’s a task many of us find difficult because our brains weren’t really wired to do this,” says McAndrew, “and we fall back on cognitive shortcuts, such as stereotyping, as a way to cope.”

We also remember slights and betrayals – emotional events that lodge in the primitive areas of our brains. “It’s tough to forget when the person you thought of as a close friend publicly snubbed you,” he says, “or the time that you caught another trusted friend flirting with your boyfriend or girlfriend. The result is a strong propensity for holding grudges. It protect us from being taken advantage of again, but can also make for some uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing moments at high-school reunions.”

There’s an additional reason that high school has such a powerful hold on us through life: it’s the last time we are thrown together with a fairly heterogeneous group of peers just by virtue of living in the same community and being the same age. After graduation, there’s an increasing tendency for people to sort themselves out by income, political values, occupational interests, and other social screening criteria. But because our high-school classmates will always be the same age as us, and because many of us go to reunions, there’s strong interest in finding out what happened to them later in life, says McAndrew, “if for no other reason than to see how your own life stacks up.”

“An Evolutionary Psychologist Explains Why You Will Always Be Haunted by High School” by Frank McAndrew in *Quartz*, March 3, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2mAoofv>; this article originally appeared at *The Conversation*; McAndrew can be reached at fmcandre@knox.edu.

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2. The Ultimate Power Standard – What Kids Will Remember in 40 Years

In this article in *TeachThought*, Terry Heick suggests a way to prioritize curriculum content: Ask whether this is something we want students to remember and understand...

- For the next 40 days?
- The next 40 months?
- The next 40 years?

“As you can see,” says Heick, “this is a powerful way to think about academic content... It occurred to me that it was more about contextualizing the child in the midst of the content, rather than simply unpacking and arranging the standards.” It’s about enduring value beyond the classroom – one of the criteria for framing an Understanding by Design Big Idea – the kind of lifelong learning teachers dream about instilling in their students. Here are Heick’s suggestions for implementing the 40/40/40 rule:

- *Work solo at first.* Before discussing the layers with colleagues, she believes it’s wise to analyze standards by yourself, “rather than simply being polite and nodding your head a lot.”
- *Discuss with colleagues.* Share your take on the 40/40/40 layers and debate different opinions.

- *Keep it simple.* Heick suggests using concentric circles or a simple three-column chart to start separating the wheat from the chaff.

- *Be flexible.* “You’re going to have a different sense of priority about the standards than your colleagues,” she says. “These are different personal philosophies about life, teaching, and your content area emerging. As long as these differences aren’t drastic, this is normal.”

- *Know that children aren’t little adults.* What’s the focus now, and how will it play out in the future? “Rarely is a child going to be able to survey an array of media, synthesize themes, and create new experiences for readers without being able to use a verb correctly,” says Heick.

- *Tackle the big ideas first.* Address up front, “If they learn nothing else this year, they’re going to know *this* and *that*.” You can’t control everything kids will know and be able to do down the pike, “no matter how great the lesson, assessment design, use of data, pacing guide, or curriculum map,” says Heick. “But if you can accept that – and start backwards” from the down-the-road big picture, you’ll have a good road map for 40 years and beyond.

“Which Content Is Most Important? The 40/40/40 Rule” by Terry Heick in *TeachThought*, March 17, 2016, <http://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/applying-the-404040-rule-in-your-classroom/>
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3. Short, Frequent Classroom Visits Followed by Face-to-Face Chats

(Originally titled “Go and See: The Key to Improving Teaching and Leading”)

“Making a daily practice of visiting classrooms, observing briefly, and talking with teachers has the greatest potential to improve student learning, help professionals grow, and help schools become more effective learning organizations,” says Justin Baeder (The Principal Center) in this article in *ASCD Express*. Baeder reached this conclusion after studying Toyota’s “go and see” management: supervisors are expected to talk frequently with workers on the factory floor and forbidden from making decisions from afar based on data and reports.

This is quite different from standard U.S. teacher evaluation, in which teachers set annual goals and administrators conduct formal observations and give directive feedback and ratings. Administrators may tour their schools showing the flag and keeping teachers on their toes, but without more focused classroom observations and authentic conversations, there’s little benefit to teaching and learning.

Baeder is especially critical of directive feedback – administrators telling a teacher to do something differently and checking back to make sure it’s been done. This might improve ineffective teaching, but it’s unlikely to move a teacher from good to great. “Achieving excellence in teaching requires that teachers themselves take professional responsibility for their teaching decisions and their growth,” says Baeder. “Treating individual teachers as problems to be fixed with corrective feedback robs our schools of the improvement potential of conversation-based learning.” Toyota’s “go and see” approach engages employees in inquiry conversations in which they articulate the issue and together craft a solution.

Making a point of always talking with teachers after observations can also prevent an administrator from getting it wrong – for example, criticizing a teacher because students seemed confused as she posed a new math problem without finding out that she *intended* for students to engage in productive struggle. Better for the administrator to say, “It seemed to me, from the looks on their faces, that students were pretty confused while you were demonstrating how to solve the new type of problem. What was your take, and how did that compare with your expectations when you planned the lesson?” This gets the teacher’s perspective, allows her to correct any misperceptions, and gets the teacher thinking through any possible changes.

The administrator might also learn something: How the teacher felt about the lesson; a teaching strategy that might be worth sharing with other teachers; school-level issues that need to be addressed (for example, students being pulled out of classes); and PD that might benefit the teacher.

Frequent, short, informal classroom visits (two or three a day) are crucial to building trust and improving instruction, says Baeder. “As outside observers, instructional leaders often lack the context they need to make meaning of what they see. Teachers have deep knowledge about what and how their students have been learning, but they may miss many nuances of student interaction that an outside observer may notice. Conversation can bridge these gaps in knowledge and lead to deeper understanding – and, ultimately, better decisions that result in improvement.”

“Go and See: The Key to Improving Teaching and Leading” by Justin Baeder in *ASCD Express*, May 25, 2017 (Vol. 12, #18), <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol12/1218-baeder.aspx>

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4. Getting Students Actively Involved in Consolidating Their Learning

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Kathy Ganske (Vanderbilt University) recalls that when she was in elementary school, her father would ask almost every evening what she’d learned in school that day. Knowing the question was coming, she recalls, “I kept my eyes and ears open throughout the day for potential candidates for demonstrating understanding...”

When she became a teacher, Ganske began to ask her students as they waited for their afternoon buses what new ideas, concepts, facts, or processes they would share with someone at home. “At first, students were slow to generate responses,” she says, “but that gradually changed. In anticipation of the talk, they sifted through our day’s journey, as evidenced by the occasional announcement of ‘I’m going to hang on to that one!’ that punctuated our classroom learning. The end-of-day wrap-up provided a satisfying sense of closure, and the recap of learning made students aware of what they’d accomplished.”

A few years later, Ganske took this a step further: her second graders began to publish a Friday parent newsletter of the week’s learning dubbed *The Koko Report* (in honor of the class’s bake sale support of Koko the gorilla and the Gorilla Foundation). It emerged from a meeting on the carpet in which Ganske jotted key content areas on chart paper, had students suggest other events – field trips, visitors, special projects, birthdays – and together they

constructed a web of the week's learning. Initially students had difficulty remembering what had happened during the week, but the routine improved their ability to retrieve information from several days ago. "[U]nless we make a conscious effort to help them solidify their learning," says Ganske, "they may lose a great deal of it."

Next, students signed up as "reporters" to write brief articles, working in groups of two or three or occasionally solo. "The talk and recording of information jump-started and deepened students' recollections of our week," says Ganske, "and the web provided support for their beginning writing skills, as did the discussion and feedback that took place in the small groups." Students brought their reports to Ganske, who typed them on a blank newsletter template. After a group edit and the addition of a few teacher comments for parents and guardians, the Koko Report was photocopied and sent home. The whole workshop took 45-60 minutes.

Convinced of the value of daily or weekly closure/remembering/consolidating, Ganske researched the topic and was surprised to find that very few studies had been done to document its impact. "We need to be sure we plan time to cycle back to the what, why, and how of students' learning to help them actively synthesize the parts into a whole," she concludes. "Lesson closure provides space for students to digest and assimilate their learning and to realize why it all matters."

"Lesson Closure: An Important Piece of the Student Learning Puzzle" by Kathy Ganske in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2017 (Vol. 71, #1, p. 95-100), <http://bit.ly/2tWPI06>; Ganske can be reached at kathy.ganske@vanderbilt.edu.

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5. Helping Students Fix Common Errors in Text-Based Writing

"Supporting upper-elementary students' higher-level thinking about text in their writing is difficult," say Elaine Wang (RAND Corporation) and Lindsay Clare Matsumura and Richard Correnti (University of Pittsburgh) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "It requires teachers to have a clear understanding of the thinking demands of the writing assignment and to pay close attention to the quality of students' thinking." The authors identify some common missteps that students make as they respond to texts and suggest how teachers might respond:

- *Analysis of literary elements* – The goal is for students to construct new ideas about setting, character, etc. that aren't explicitly stated in the text:
 - Misstep: Students summarize individual elements without showing how they relate.
 - Feedback: Press students to explicitly articulate cause-and-effect relationships.
 - Feedback: Remind students to use linking words and phrases – *because, makes, affects*.
 - Misstep: Students get sidetracked by alluring details and don't focus on a larger idea.
 - Feedback: Redirect students to consider bigger ideas and messages in the text.
 - Feedback: Encourage students to consider how elements change and develop and how this affects the text.
- *Comparing and contrasting* – The goal is to break down a subject into its constituent parts and show how they relate to each other.

- Misstep: Students focus on superficial rather than nuanced similarities and differences.
- Feedback: Direct students to consider larger ideas in the text or the discipline.
- Feedback: Help students recognize similarities within apparent differences and distinguish differences among seemingly similar things.
- Misstep: Students treat topics of comparison separately.
- Feedback: Suggest that students reorganize their writing by “slicing” rather than “chunking” points of comparison in order to highlight similarities and differences.
- *Interpreting theme* – The goal is to synthesize discrete events or details into a coherent, generally applicable (and often abstract) statement about life.
 - Misstep: Identifying the topic rather than articulating a full statement of theme.
 - Feedback: Ask questions that prompt students to make an observation or claim about the topic – “What is the author saying about courage?”
 - Misstep: Summarizing the text rather than discussing theme.
 - Feedback: Provide a series of questions that guide students to identify a theme statement, which unpacks the statement in a logical way.
 - Misstep: Using clichés.
 - Feedback: Encourage students to be more specific.
 - Feedback: Guide students to delineate the big concept more by thinking of specific subtypes or contexts – for example, with a clichéd description of love, ask whether it’s romantic love, sibling love, parent-child love, or friendship.

“Written Feedback to Support Students’ Higher-Level Thinking About Texts in Writing” by Elaine Wang, Lindsay Clare Matsumura, and Richard Correnti in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2017 (Vol. 71, #1, p. 101-107), <http://bit.ly/2uZnKs8>; the authors can be reached at ewang@rand.org, lclare@pitt.edu, and rcorrent@pitt.edu.

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6. The Hapless School Counselor in the TV Series “13 Reasons Why”

In this article in *ASCA School Counselor*, Carolyn Stone (University of North Florida) registers her dismay that the 13th episode of the Netflix program “13 Reasons Why” portrayed such a totally inadequate response from Mr. Porter, the fictitious school counselor, when confronted with clear evidence that Hannah, a high-school student, was suicidal. The girl described herself as lost, empty, and unable to care about anything and said she needed “everything to stop... people... life...”, giving the counselor all he needed to raise serious concerns with her family – but he failed to do so.

“Suicide reporting, as in the case of child abuse, does not hinge on whether or not the school counselor is absolutely positive that a student or someone else is in danger,” says Stone. “It’s not a matter of using one’s discretion. Reporting is imperative. The only knowledge the school counselor needs to meaningfully act is an expressed, implied, veiled, or rumored suicide.” Subsequent denials by the student (Hannah later said, “Oh, I am sorry, I didn’t mean that, I guess”) should not stop a counselor or other educators from reporting and urging the family to seek a full assessment by a mental health professional.

In addition to his failure to raise the alarm about suicidal ideation, the “13 Reasons Why” counselor failed to report that she had been the victim of date rape. “Porter stepped far outside the standard of care for the profession,” says Stone, “when he set himself up as the investigator and declared to Hannah that she must provide him information about the perpetrator, press charges and confront the perpetrator – or just move on. Porter had all the information he needed to report to administration a Title IX violation when Hannah said she didn’t consent.” Stone cites research evidence that 81 percent of school counselors say they don’t have a protocol for responding to dating violence, with most saying they’d had no training in that area. This is most unfortunate since a 2011 study found that sexual harassment is a part of everyday life in middle and high schools: 48 percent of students reported some form of sexual harassment, and 87 percent said it had a negative effect on them.

“13 Minutes of ‘13 Reasons Why’” by Carolyn Stone in *ASCA School Counselor*, July-August 2017 (Vol. 54, #6, p. 8-12), no e-link available; ASCA has resources for addressing issues from “13 Reasons Why” at www.schoolcounselor.org/13reasons; Stone can be reached at cstone@unf.edu.

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7. Math Homework Crafted by Students

In this *Edutopia* article, math coach/author Margie Pearse tees off on standard math homework that gets students doing the same type of problem 20 times. It’s repetitive for those who have already mastered the skill or concept and a frustrating turn-off for those who haven’t. “Worse still,” says Pearse, “students begin to believe math is boring, irrelevant, a set of mundane rules, and maybe even a waste of time.”

But what if homework could be reengineered to promote efficacy, agency, and motivation? What if students came to see it as a way to pursue knowledge and a pathway to success? Pearse suggests a strategy for making that happen, based on the idea that learning requires a personal commitment, in class and at home, and the ability to self-reflect and identify what’s clear and what’s confusing. “Because knowledge is not static,” says Pearse, “it is vital for learners to be able to pinpoint how and when understanding happens for them and when it doesn’t.” It’s also important to recognize when something sparks genuine interest and use those moments to fuel a passion for math.

The idea is simple: Students design their own homework, deciding whether to focus on an area they don’t fully understand or, alternatively, something they found interesting and engaging. “They get to practice self-motivation, preparation and persistence by making daily decisions on their own behalf,” says Pearse. “To top it off, the focus is on evaluating personal learning and growth. What better way for students to discover their identities as capable mathematicians than to be in control of monitoring their progress and investigations?” She suggests several steps to launch the idea:

- Infuse questions in math lessons that encourage reflection and help students identify *Aha!* moments. “Recognizing clarity and confusion are pivotal to learning,” she says.

- Provide questions or sentence stems that encourage self-monitoring, slowing down the learning process so students see how they're doing, track progress, and make a plan to improve.
- Do a trial run in class so students get the idea of choosing an area for their customized homework.
- Get parents on board by explaining how this type of homework will be much better for student learning and enthusiasm. Parents might also benefit from a brief explanation of the fixed and growth mindset.

“What Would Happen If Students Assigned Their Own Math Homework?” by Margie Pearse in *Edutopia*, May 2, 2017, <http://edut.to/2uN1UrN>

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8. Short Item:

Video production apps – In this article in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Stewart Waters (University of Tennessee/Knoxville) says that teaching with film “can be an amazing resource for promoting student engagement and critical thinking, or it can be a complete waste of valuable instructional time, depending on how and why the teacher uses film.” Beyond viewing films, technology now makes it easier than ever to create films in the classroom. Waters has found three apps particularly useful for promoting students’ media literacy through video production:

- Magisto <https://www.magisto.com> can create custom videos from an iPhone or iPad; the basic app is free.
- Animoto <https://animoto.com> is also free for basic video creation and editing on Apple and Android devices. (If this link doesn’t work, Google Animoto.)
- Spice <http://splice.gopro.com> is free for iPhones and iPads.

“Movie-Making Apps and Media Literacy” by Stewart Waters in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, July-August 2017 (Vol. 61, #1, p. 109-111), <http://bit.ly/2uZLmwP>; Waters can be reached at kwaters2@utk.edu.

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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 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, consultant, and writer, 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).

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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
ASCD SmartBrief
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
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
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
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