

Marshall Memo 859

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
October 26, 2020

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Quotes of the Week

“With fear of failure, what’s the thought that flashes through our mind the moment before we’re embarrassed? I think the thought that flashes through the mind of a student is, *I’m stupid*. And I think when you’re an adolescent, feeling stupid in front of other people is something to be avoided at all costs. We have to learn to replace the thought – *I’m stupid* – with another thought, which is, *I’m learning*.”

Angela Duckworth in [“In Schools, Are We Measuring What Matters?”](#) – an interview with Stephen Merrill in *Edutopia*, October 16, 2020

“I hate it. It gets me so tired. I never really leave the screen all day except for lunch break.”

A New York high-school student (quoted in item #4)

“Compounding the public health challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic is the *infodemic* of misinformation regarding risks, prevention, and treatments, which may lead to serious and irreversible harm to individuals and communities.”

Greg Trevors and Melissa Duffy (see item #3)

“Copious amounts of homework often strip students of time to just be kids. If you believe homework is necessary, be prepared to share your rationale (and respond to student feedback).”

Christina Torres (see item #5)

“Research says that despite all the work that has been put into improving teacher observations over the last two decades, these efforts have not resulted in teaching and learning gains.”

Craig Randall (see item #2)

“If a small group of elite parents can always find a way to work around the more-challenging aspects of public education, what happens to everyone else?”

Maria Ferguson in [“Education + Money = Freedom”](#) in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2020 (Vol. 202, #2, pp. 62-63)

1. The Debate About the 1619 Project

In a *Washington Post* story, Sarah Ellison reports on the controversy following the publication of The 1619 Project in *The New York Times Magazine* last year. There was widespread acclaim for this collection of provocative articles about how slavery shaped the United States, including a Pulitzer Prize for Nikole Hannah-Jones's 10,000-word introductory essay. But there was also scholarly criticism, and most recently, an attack from President Trump and an attempt in the U.S. Senate to withhold federal funding from schools using 1619 Project curriculum materials.

The biggest point of contention has been Hannah-Jones's statement that maintaining slavery was a primary reason American colonists decided to declare their independence from Great Britain, making 1619 the true beginning of the nation. Princeton historian Sean Wilentz and four other academics wrote a letter to the *Times* arguing that ideology had led to a distortion of history – that, in fact, England was still deeply involved in the slave trade in 1776 and the abolitionist movement didn't gain traction in London until at least a decade later – inspired by anti-slavery voices among the American colonists.

The *Times* responded defensively, conceding nothing, and the debate became more heated, with African-American historian Leslie Harris (the earlier critics were white) adding her voice to the argument that preserving slavery was not a prime reason for launching the Revolutionary War. There were increasingly strident attacks on the 1619 Project, including a demand that Hannah-Jones be stripped of her Pulitzer. She mounted a spirited defense of the project, often on social media.

Buffeted by ongoing criticism, *Times* editors ran a clarification in March 2020 adding two words to the section in which slavery was described as a prime motivator for the Revolutionary War: now it reads that slavery was a motivator for “some of” the colonists. The editor of the *Times Magazine* revised his introductory essay, and Hannah-Jones deleted most of her Twitter feed.

Several months later, the *Times* published a lengthy piece by one of its columnists, Bret Stephens, in which he defended the project as a whole but said its small errors resulted from leaning too much toward seeing U.S. history through the lens of slavery. “The metaphor of 1776 is more powerful than that of 1619 because what makes America most itself isn't four centuries of racist subjugation. It's 244 years of effort by Americans – sometimes halting, but often heroic – to live up to our greatest ideals.”

Hannah-Jones and her editors continue to defend the project, but she acknowledges that in addition to the numerous experts she consulted, it would have been good to consult with

additional scholars of colonial history, the Revolutionary War, and the Civil War to better capture the nuances of those eras. Hannah-Jones says she's "tortured" by how her original description of the role of slavery in the American Revolution provided fodder for a debate that has distracted from the heart of the 1619 Project.

["How the 1619 Project Took Over 2020"](#) by Sarah Ellison in *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2020

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2. Observing Teachers in a Way That Builds Trust and Improves Practice

"The teacher-observation process is supposed to improve teaching and learning but it doesn't," says educator/author Craig Randall in this article in *Education Week*. "Research says that despite all the work that has been put into improving teacher observations over the last two decades, these efforts have not resulted in teaching and learning gains."

Why such disappointing results after so much effort and investment? Randall believes it's because of the distrustful dynamic the teacher-evaluation process often engenders.

"Though designed to promote improvement, increased accountability measures exerted on teachers through observation evaluation systems, instead evoke fear," he says. "As soon as evaluative or developmental rating enters the picture, teachers become cautious, fearful, and stop taking risks."

Randall has an idea to change this dynamic. For starters, principals need to make clear that they understand how vulnerable teachers feel when an administrator walks into their classroom. "There is no other job that I'm aware of," he says, "where the boss comes into the employee's office, as it were, sits down, and watches them work while taking graded notes on what they see. The employee then waits and worries until the boss is ready to tell them the results." It's no wonder that teachers are so sensitive to the tone and content of what principals say and do. Principals need to make sure teachers know that they appreciate how challenging it is to work with highly unpredictable young people, especially during the pandemic.

But it's what principals do that counts most. Randall suggests that they replace the current approach of infrequent, high-stakes observations with frequent, brief, unannounced observations, each followed by a face-to-face conversation with the following characteristics:

- They take place in the teacher's classroom when students aren't present.
- The principal sits beside the teacher and they look together at a nine-part template on effective instruction.
- Rather than giving their opinion, the principal asks open-ended questions that allow the teacher to provide context and perspective on what worked and what didn't.
- There's an authentic interchange about teaching and learning.
- In the first few debriefs, the administrator holds back on giving suggestions or proposing solutions to problems.
- No evaluative rating is given on pedagogy. Randall believes rating pedagogy induces fear and undermines a growth mindset in teachers.

- Principals rate teachers on their teaching mindset, planning and preparation, professionalism, collegiality, and collaboration.
- School leaders use what they observe in classrooms to shape professional learning in professional development communities (PDCs), leveraging the in-house expertise of teachers to work on action-research goals chosen by each team.

The result of this approach, says Randall, is increased trust and “empowered, risk-taking teachers demonstrating growth mindsets.” He believes teacher teamwork around data from observations would virtually guarantee a growth mindset among teachers. “Frankly,” he says, “it would take a monumentally fixed mindset not to participate in the PDC and goal-setting process.”

[Randall has thoughtful suggestions on improving the teacher-evaluation process, especially replacing traditional evaluations with much more frequent classroom visits, refraining from giving ratings after each visit, orchestrating authentic, face-to-face conversations, building trust, and empowering teacher teams to use classroom data to continuously improve teaching and learning. Some questions:

- What is an achievable number of classroom visits per teacher each year?
- Would using a template or rubric in post-observation conversations impede authentic reflection on the details of that particular lesson?
- Are risk-taking and innovation key drivers of improved teaching and learning, as he asserts?
- How can a principal evaluate a teacher’s mindset?
- Realistically, will teacher team discussions address mediocre and ineffective teaching practices?
- How will teachers who don’t improve be held accountable?
- Shouldn’t principals assess and rate teachers’ pedagogical effectiveness (based on numerous visits and conversations and with the teacher’s input), appreciating what’s working and applying leverage on what needs improvement? K.M.]

[“There’s a Better Way: Trust-Based Observations”](#) by Craig Randall in *Education Week*, October 18, 2020; Randall’s recent book is *Trust-Based Observations*.

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3. A Psychological Approach to Correcting Misconceptions About Covid-19

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Greg Trevors and Melissa Duffy (University of South Carolina/Columbia) report on their study of how people respond to arguments about what they should be doing during the pandemic (it was conducted in May 2020). Trevors and Duffy believe that disabusing people of incorrect beliefs about the coronavirus is an urgent matter. “Compounding the public health challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic,” they say, “is the *infodemic* of misinformation regarding risks, prevention, and treatments, which may lead to serious and irreversible harm to individuals and communities.”

What intrigued the researchers was how difficult it is for people to hear a rational argument when it conflicts with their moral priorities and beliefs. Trevors and Duffy started by posing the following question to a sample of 518 U.S. adults chosen from states where a majority favored immediately returning to normal economic activity: *Is it most important to provide for the vulnerable, show loyalty to one's social circle, or protect personal liberties?*

Responses allowed the researchers to group people into three moral belief systems:

- Individualizing – focused on well-being and justice for individuals;
- Group cohesion – focused on protecting their group and the social order;
- Libertarian – focused on protecting autonomous exercise of personal liberties.

The researchers then presented people with 19 misconceptions about Covid-19 (for example, *The seasonal flu is just as bad if not worse than the new coronavirus*), asked them to read information refuting the incorrect statement, asked for their emotional response, whether the counterargument conflicted with their personal views and/or the views of their community, and whether they were persuaded. The result:

- Those with an individualizing belief system were more likely to update their prior incorrect beliefs.
- Those with a group cohesion or libertarian belief system were more likely to reject the corrective information.

It appears that arguments for mask wearing, social distancing, school closures, and stay-at-home orders were seen by the second and third groups as undermining valued social ties and personal autonomy, while the same arguments were seen by the first group as supporting individual and collective well-being.

Trevors and Duffy's takeaway is that when presenting arguments to people on a contentious issue like the pandemic, it's not enough to present a logical, factual case. You have to adapt your counterargument to the person's belief system "to mitigate negative emotional and cognitive reactions." For example, to persuade people about the importance of wearing masks, an effective argument for someone with a group cohesion orientation might be to stress obeying authority, defending purity from infections, and demonstrating patriotism. For someone with libertarian beliefs, the best argument would be self-protection. And for someone oriented around individual well-being and justice, the argument should be around fairness and preventing individual suffering.

["Correcting Covid-19 Misconceptions Requires Caution"](#) by Greg Trevors and Melissa Duffy in *Educational Researcher*, October 2020 (Vol. 49, #7, pp. 538-542); the authors can be reached at trevorsg@mailbox.sc.edu and duffy3@mailbox.sc.edu and

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4. Addressing Concerns About Student Screen Time

In this *Education Week* article, Catherine Gewertz quotes a New York tenth grader on the amount of time she's spending on her laptop for her school's remote instruction: "I hate it. It gets me so tired. I never really leave the screen all day except for lunch break. I wish we had

more assignments that were off the screen.” Gewertz consulted teachers and experts around the U.S. and compiled these suggestions:

- *Not all screen time is equal.* A lively class discussion of *Song of Solomon* is much more valuable than solo computer games, the key factors being intellectual engagement and connection with peers and teachers.

- *Some technology is suboptimal.* Teachers may feel pressured to overuse screen time because colleagues are trying new things. Teachers need to be critical consumers of technology and above all be regularly “within reach” of students – perhaps by phone.

- *Start with purpose.* “Think first about your learning goal,” says a New Jersey kindergarten teacher. “What experiences do you want to provide? And then consider your options. The screen is only one option.”

- *Use choice board grids.* These lay out a menu of learning options – for example, doing math with pieces of pasta, making a comic strip based on a newspaper article, exercising for five minutes – providing structure and giving students agency for parts of their day.

- *Have chunks of non-screen time during live sessions.* A teacher might introduce a new topic, give students time to work on it away from their screens (with the teacher still online to provide support), and then regroup for questions and reflections.

- *Have students listen to audiobooks, podcasts, and recorded read-alouds.* Students can color or relax as they hear high-quality resources like “The Imagine Neighborhood,” “Tinkercast,” “Brains Out!” “Forever Ago,” “The Past and the Curious,” and a recording of Joy Hakim’s *The History of US*.

- *Go low-tech hands-on.* Students can spend time reading print books and other texts, writing in physical notebooks, and using manipulatives that are available in their homes (or can be delivered by the school).

- *Have students write the old-fashioned way.* During class presentations, demonstrations, and activities, students can take pen or pencil notes and then share them via photos. This breaks up screen time and takes advantage of the cognitive advantages of handwriting versus keyboarding.

[“Teacher Tips: How to Reduce Screen Time When School is Online”](#) by Catherine Gewertz in *Education Week*, October 21, 2020 (Vol. 40, #10, p. 13)

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5. Rethinking Homework During Remote and Hybrid Instruction

(Originally titled “What Is Homework’s Purpose in a Pandemic?”)

In this article in *Education Update*, Hawaii English teacher Christina Torres says distance learning has highlighted equity issues, especially in what students are asked to do outside of the school day. At the same time, the daily blend of synchronous and asynchronous work has blurred the distinction between in-class and out-of-class activities. Torres has these suggestions for making homework purposeful and productive:

- *Setting the table for success* – Her middle school has agreed that teachers should not assign more than 90 minutes of homework a night and should share their instructional

calendars so students don't experience a pileup of different teachers' assignments, projects, and tests.

- *Having a worthy purpose for the work students are asked to do* – “If I assign two chapters of reading with some questions, what am I hoping my students get out of it?” asks Torres. Is it mindless stamina-building, or is it to prepare for substantive discussion in class?

- *Connecting homework to students' world and to unfamiliar cultures* – During a unit on *Romeo and Juliet*, Torres's students interviewed a trusted adult on their views on love and relationships and then compared what they said with mores on romantic love in another culture.

- *Giving students voice and choice* – When her class finished *Romeo and Juliet*, students chose how to show their mastery of the play, including through writing, art, and performance. Getting students involved in creating rubrics, self-assessing, and navigating due dates prepares them to succeed on their own.

- *Using students' time well* – “Copious amounts of homework often strip students of time to just be kids,” says Torres. “If you believe homework is necessary, be prepared to share your rationale (and respond to student feedback).”

[“What Is Homework's Purpose in a Pandemic?”](#) by Christina Torres in *Education Update*, October 2020 (Vol. 62, #10, p. 1, 4)

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6. The Best Mindset for Addressing Students' Unfinished Learning

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning and Teaching PK-12*, Cathy Martin (Denver Public Schools) says many students have entered the 2020-21 school year with “unfinished learning” from interrupted instruction in the spring – “prerequisite skills and concepts that are essential for student engagement in grade-level content that students do not have yet.”

Some parts of in the previous year's curriculum are more important to success this year than others. Martin believes the best mindset for addressing the 2020-21 school year is not remediation but *accelerating unfinished learning*. There's a key difference between the two, she says: “Remediation is based on a mistaken belief that students need to master everything they missed before they are able to engage in grade-level content. Thus, remediation focuses on students' learning gaps from a deficit-based mindset and then drills students on isolated skills and topics that have little connection with current grade-level content.” This backwards-looking approach results in deceleration and widening achievement gaps.

Acceleration, by contrast, “prepares students for success in the present – *this week on this content*,” addressing incomplete understanding in the context of the current grade's standards and treating students with an asset-based mindset. The two key steps: first, selecting “just in time” skills and concepts relevant to current units, with clear connections between the previous year's curriculum and 2020-21 content and skills. Second, giving informal, teacher-created just-in-time assessment tasks that tell how far instruction has to “back up” to fill in gaps in skills and knowledge. Then teachers can launch instruction that catches students up and

prepares them for successful grade-level work.

[“Accelerating Unfinished Learning”](#) by Cathy Martin in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning and Teaching PK-12*, October 2020 (Vol. 113, #10, pp. 774-76); Martin is at cathymartin90@gmail.com.

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7. A History of Pandemics Starting with the Bubonic Plague

In this animated article, the BBC News Visual Journalism Team gives key facts on pandemics over the millennia (click on the link below for dynamic features):

- Bubonic plague
 - The earliest recorded outbreak was in 541 CE, 60 generations ago.
 - The Black Death of 1346-1353 was the deadliest outbreak.
 - The plague has killed up to 200 million people over 2,000 years.
 - It is caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis* and spread by fleas on rats and via respiratory droplets from infected people.
 - It was finally brought under control by improved understanding of how it was transmitted, strict quarantines, and improved sanitation.
 - There are still outbreaks (including in Inner Mongolia this year), but they can be treated with antibiotics and few people die of this disease today.
- Smallpox
 - It was first recorded in 1520, 20 generations ago.
 - It is caused by the virus *Variola minor* and spread via droplets from an infected person's nose or mouth or via their sores; it has no animal host.
 - It has killed at least 350 million people.
 - Thanks to a vaccine developed in 1796 by Edward Jenner, and follow-up by scientists over two centuries, smallpox has been completely eradicated – an accomplishment that one scientist compared with landing a man on the moon.
- Cholera
 - Various outbreaks, including a major pandemic in 1817, eight generations ago.
 - It is caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae* found in contaminated water or food.
 - It kills 100,000-140,000 people a year.
 - Improved hygiene and sanitation have removed the threat of cholera in developed nations, but it is endemic in poorer parts of the world.
- Influenza
 - Various pandemics from 1800 to 2010, with the 1918 Spanish flu being the deadliest, killing 50-100 million people.
 - The Hong Kong flu of 1968 killed one million people and still circulates.
 - The Swine flu infected about 21 percent of the world's population in 2009.
 - The H1N1 virus caused the Spanish flu pandemic.
 - A more-benign version of the Spanish flu still circulates every year.
 - Seasonal flus return annually, killing hundreds of thousands.

- HIV/AIDS
 - It started in 1981, three generations ago, and is still a major problem today.
 - It is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, transmitted through bodily fluids, and attacks the human immune system.
 - It's particularly insidious because people are infectious before symptoms appear.
 - It has killed more than 32 million people so far, including 690,000 in 2019.
 - Advances in diagnostic techniques, the availability of antiretroviral drugs, and changes in human behavior have mitigated the impact of the disease.
- SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) & MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)
 - 2002-2003 and 2012-present.
 - SARS killed more than 800 people in 2002-2003, but no new cases are reported.
 - MERS has killed 912 people.
 - The risk of these diseases is low in most countries.
- Covid-19
 - 2019-present.
 - SARS-Cov-2 (the novel coronavirus) is an evolved version of the 2003 SARS virus.
 - It is highly transmissible, including by people with no symptoms.
 - More than 1 million people have died so far, with the death toll likely to be much higher.
 - Vaccines are under development. The endgame of Covid-19 will come in a few years from increased knowledge about transmission, compliance with preventive measures, new treatments, and vaccines.

[“How Do Pandemics End?”](#) by the Visual Journalism Team at BBC News, October 7, 2020

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*If you have feedback or suggestions,
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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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- 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
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: Learning & Teaching PK-12
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