

Marshall Memo 743

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

July 2, 2018

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Quotes of the Week

“What are you doing for others?”

Martin Luther King, Jr. (quoted in item #4)

“We can be the designers of moments that deliver elevation and insight and pride and connection. These exceptional minutes and hours and days – they are what make life meaningful. And they are ours to create.”

Chip Heath and Dan Heath (see item #2)

“In science, when human behavior enters the equation, things go nonlinear. That’s why physics is easy and sociology is hard.”

Neil DeGrasse Tyson on Twitter, February 5, 2016

“I love that once you’ve memorized a poem you can carry it in your body; you don’t need any other materials or equipment to bring forth empowering words or a moving story, because you are already harboring everything you need.”

Elizabeth Acevedo (see item #8)

“Intense parental involvement in schools is not always helpful to children...”

Annette Lareau, Elliot Weininger, and Amanda Barrett Cox (see item #3)

“Advanced Placement is about as close as American K-12 education has today to a gold standard – and as close as we come to a quality national curriculum at the intersection of high school and college.”

Chester Finn, Jr. (see item #1)

1. Are Schools Right to Stop Offering AP Courses?

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Chester Finn, Jr. comments on the recent decision by eight D.C.-area private schools to stop teaching Advanced Placement courses. The schools' rationale for replacing them with home-grown courses is that AP courses "emphasize breadth over depth" and the schools want to "allow for authentic engagement with the world and demonstrate respect for students' intellectual curiosity and interests."

This reasoning is faulty, says Finn, because the College Board is almost finished with revamping its 38 Advanced Placement frameworks and exams, putting more emphasis on concepts, "big ideas," and "essential knowledge." The real reason behind the private schools' decision, Finn suspects, is that more and more U.S. high schools now offer AP courses (3 million students sat for 5 million exams this spring), and private schools need to find a way to make their schools distinctive – and worth the hefty tuition. Finn also notes that these private schools will continue to administer AP exams each May, thousands of students will take them, and there will be close attention to the number of 4s and 5s.

Finn concedes that AP scores have become less important for college admission for students from established private schools. Admissions officers "have a fair sense of what's in those schools' courses, what the transcript grades and class ranks signify, and how seriously to take their teacher recommendations. They can easily couple that information with scores on other tests and predict how a given applicant will fare on their campuses." AP results are more important for students from less-known high schools around the U.S. Another reason some schools are dropping AP courses is that colleges are less willing to allow students to use AP results to comp out of certain requirements; in fact, the Harvard College faculty has voted to stop offering students the opportunity to enter as sophomores.

But Finn still believes schools shunning the AP are making a mistake: they're losing "the opportunity for their students' work – and ultimately their teachers' effectiveness and their own institutional value-add – to be judged impartially on a national metric that's retained its rigor in a time of grade inflation and that's scored anonymously by veteran high-school teachers and college professors," he says. "Advanced Placement is about as close as American K-12 education has today to a gold standard – and as close as we come to a quality national curriculum at the intersection of high school and college. While independent schools are of course free to shun all such forms of standardization, the thousands of public and private schools that have embraced AP are enhancing their students' access to assured educational quality and academic rigor."

“Dubious Move to Reject Advanced Placement” by Chester Finn, Jr. in *The Education Gadfly*, June 27, 2018 (Vol. 18, #26), <https://edexcellence.net/articles/dubious-move-to-reject-advanced-placement>

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2. Home Visits Spark Change in a D.C. Elementary School

In this article in *Fast Company*, Chip Heath (Stanford University) and Dan Heath (Duke University) share a story from their book, *The Power of Moments* (Simon and Schuster, 2017): the turnaround of Stanton Elementary School in Washington, D.C. During the 2010-11 school year, a new principal, Carlie John Fisherow, grappled unsuccessfully with rampant discipline problems and low achievement. She recalls that “the school went from ‘really bad’ to ‘worse,’” and midway through the year she fell down a flight of stairs in the school and broke her leg. “By the spring, we were ready to do anything,” she says.

Meeting with staffers from the Flamboyan Foundation, Fisherow and her colleagues zeroed in on family engagement, a chronic weakness in many D.C. schools. All too often, two belief systems fed off each other: parents thought teachers didn’t care about their children and were just in it for the paycheck, while teachers took low attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other school events as evidence that parents didn’t value education.

Stanton School decided to address this self-reinforcing dynamic by having teachers do home visits before the 2011-12 school year began. Fifteen teachers volunteered to make visits. They didn’t bring checklists, school brochures, or paper of any kind; instead, they spent about an hour in each home listening to parents’ responses to these questions:

- *Tell me about your child’s experiences in school. Tell me about yours.*
- *Tell me your hopes and dreams for your child’s future.*
- *What do you want your child to be someday?*
- *What do I need to do to help your child learn more effectively?*

As the visits began, many parents were skeptical, but then a positive buzz began to spread in the community. “Parents were wanting visits,” said 4th-grade teacher Melissa Bryant. “You’d hear them saying, ‘Did you get a home visit? I got a home visit.’”

As school opened in the fall, “Our school felt like a school instantaneously,” said Fisherow. “I could not believe that it had worked so fast.” Improvements in discipline and school climate were the direct result of teachers sitting in families’ living rooms talking to parents. A month later, more than 200 parents showed up for back-to-school night, compared to 25 the year before. “We felt like we were in the Twilight Zone,” said Bryant. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences made a similar jump, from 12 percent to 73 percent. Truancy dropped from 28 to 11 percent, suspensions dropped from 321 to 24, and academic performance improved steadily over the next few years.

“How could such a small intervention have such a big effect?” ask Heath and Heath. “We are accustomed to thinking about relationships in terms of time: the longer the relationship endures, the closer it must grow. But relationships don’t proceed in steady, predictable increments. If we can create the right kind of moment, relationships can change in an instant. That’s what happened at Stanton – the teachers and parents shared a brief but

intense moment of insight and connection. That moment wasn't responsible for the turnaround at Stanton – that would shortchange the thousands of hours invested by students, teachers, and parents. But certainly it was the catalyst for the change.

“We can be the designers of moments that deliver elevation and insight and pride and connection,” the authors conclude. “These exceptional minutes and hours and days – they are what make life meaningful. And they are ours to create.”

“The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact” by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Fast Company*, November 3, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2yFeICt>

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3. Another Side of Parent Involvement

“Intense parental involvement in schools is not always helpful to children...” say Annette Lareau and Amanda Barrett Cox (University of Pennsylvania) and Elliot Weininger (SUNY College at Brockport) in this *New York Times* article. “In certain situations, it can lead to higher levels of stress among children and intrafamilial conflict.” The authors tell the story of an affluent, suburban school district in which intense parent resistance to the redistricting of two high schools tied up administrators for hundreds of hours and created so much anger that law enforcement had to be present at school board meetings. This was out of all proportion because the two high schools had equal levels of academic achievement and the worst consequence of the proposed changes was an additional ten minutes of time on buses for some students.

As sociologist William Waller wrote in 1932, parents and educators are “natural enemies” in the sense that parents are concerned about their own children, while educators aim for the success of all students. “This is an inherent tension,” say Lareau, Cox, and Weininger, “and one that parents and school administrators should understand better. Controversies can escalate quickly, and unprepared educators sometimes make things worse... Affluent parents bring powerful resources to schools. They should also model thoughtful civic engagement that considers collective, rather than simply individual, benefits.”

“How Entitled Parents Hurt Schools” by Annette Lareau, Elliot Weininger, and Amanda Barrett Cox in *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/2lvKAEM>

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4. Can Nurturing Altruism Prevent Teen Suicides?

In this *Education Week* article, Arina Bokas (*Kids' Standard Magazine* and Mott Community College) and Robert Ward (Los Angeles teacher/writer) note the alarming rise of suicides among U.S. teens and some attempts to stem the tide. “Medical treatment for mental-health issues, morning meetings with students, peer mediation, and restorative circles are all steps in the right direction,” say Bokas and Ward, but they wonder if there's a deeper cause that's not being addressed.

“Our country in general – and education, in particular – seem to be shifting away from an emphasis on the common good and toward the needs of the self,” they say. “Currently, we invest in teens’ well-being by boosting their confidence, determination, and work ethic – all with an emphasis on self-improvement... Consequently, children define success by their grades, garb, and gadgets.” Martin Luther King Jr.’s question – *What are you doing for others?* – is rarely asked; children are not being expected to intentionally give back or pay forward.

Perhaps one solution to suicide is inspiring students “to attend to the needs of others,” suggest Bokas and Ward – and redefining success from being the best in the world to being the best *for* the world: “Instead of using individual gain as motivation, students can find value in being helpful to themselves, to others, to nature, and to the future.”

“When we begin to value process, progress, and philanthropy just as much as product and performance,” Bokas and Ward conclude, “we will nurture teens and future adults who cherish life, overcome personal challenges, and give back in meaningful ways.”

“Could Altruism Curb Teen Suicide?” by Arina Bokas and Robert Ward in *Education Week*, June 20, 2018 (Vol. 37, #36, p. 22), <https://bit.ly/2tXKZ70>

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5. A Chicago Teacher Uses Ancient Teaching on Tranquility and Rationality

In this *Harvard Educational Review* article, Chicago middle-school ELA teacher Leah Guenther says she’s been in the classroom for nine years and hopes to teach for at least twenty more. “I adore this job,” she says. “There is nothing else I would rather do. It is challenging, however, so I am always looking for practical ways to ensure my longevity in this fulfilling but increasingly chaotic profession.”

Guenther recently came across the writings of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE), who reflected on Stoicism in his diary, *The Meditations*. Stoicism helped Aurelius stay calm, treat people well, and run the Roman empire at the apex of its power. This philosophy has four claims:

- Control – Much of our unhappiness is caused by an inability to distinguish between things that we can and cannot control.
- Emotions – Negative emotions are a result of mistaken value judgments.
- Value – The main goal of a virtuous life is a calm mental state.
- Nature – We ought to embrace our role in the universe.

Guenther spent the first half of a school year applying Stoicism to her work as a teacher, the second half teaching it to her students, “testing whether an Ancient Roman philosophy could offer useful advice to middle schoolers more than two thousand years later.” Here’s what she learned in the first four months of the year:

- *September: The dichotomy of control* – “We control our opinions, the things we desire and avoid, and our own acts,” says Guenther. “Anything else – including our body, our job, our reputation, our home – can be snatched away from us in an instant.” She realized that she was spending an inordinate amount of time stressing out over things she couldn’t control. She

quotes the modern Stoic Matt van Natta: “I can, perhaps, rage against injustice, but I run the risk of believing my emotions are actions. They are not.” This led her to compile three lists:

- Not under her control: Federal education policies, district policies, testing, her class roster, students’ homes;
- Partially under her control: Students’ behavior, students’ abilities, students’ reactions, homework, attendance;
- Under her control: Setting high standards; classroom rules; her reactions; student seating; curriculum selection; her enthusiasm; being fair and impartial.

Teachers can’t control how they are received, says Guenther; they can only control how they teach. She resolved to focus on the things she could control, work on the areas of partial control, and bring her passion, enthusiasm, and knowledge every day. She was inspired by Aurelius’s words: “Whatever any one does or says, I must be emerald and keep my color.”

• *October: Objective noticings* – “Stoicism recognizes that we cannot get our passions under control until we become more aware of our personal challenges,” says Guenther. She tracked her negative emotions for each Monday of the month during two back-to-back 2-hour classes. On the very first Monday, she fell victim to anger 17 times, judgment 12 times, fear 8 times, and desire for revenge 3 times. That’s a total of 40 passionate moments in four hours, or one every six minutes. “If we accept the Stoic’s view that passions are a suspension of rational thinking,” she says, “this is an unacceptable amount of time for anyone, let alone a teacher, to be out of her right mind.”

The trick, she learned from her reading, was to prevent negative emotions from ever taking hold, which meant objectively, calmly analyzing a situation as it arose and writing it down, and asking: *What were the triggers? What was in front of me? What was forcing itself upon my notice?* Students noticed her pausing to write things down mid-class, and it became an unwitting tool of classroom management: “You’re going in the notebook, bro.” Mid-month, Guenther transitioned from writing things down to saying them out loud: “I notice that two students who should be writing are talking.” There was a steady improvement: In the five Mondays of October, her anger incidents went from 17 to 5 to 7 to 5 to 2; her judgment incidents from 12 to 7 to 9 to 5 to 2; her fear incidents from 8 to 2 to 4 to 2 to 2; and her revenge incidents from 3 to 2 to 2 to 0 to 0.

• *November: Morning meditations* – Aurelius advised reflecting first thing in the morning on all the “meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly” people you will encounter that day. This seems negative, but it’s realistic and prepares for the worst. For teachers, there will be students who will try their patience and continue to perform below their potential. Guenther started practicing Stoic premeditations, reminding herself of the irritations she would encounter, right down to each individual student on her seating chart. She was surprised by how easy it was to name positive traits and predict the annoyances of each day. “Indeed,” she says, “a fig tree will produce the fruit it was designed to bear; a doctor will have patients who are ill. And a middle-school teacher will encounter students who behave like middle-school students. Understanding this, I have no excuse for being surprised when my students’ age-appropriate behaviors, however annoying, manifested themselves each day.” She

took this a step further and identified the virtue she would need to cultivate in herself to address each student's positive and negative traits. Some examples:

- Student 1: Positive: independent. Negative: ignores directions. Virtue needed: patience.
- Student 2: Positive: quick learner. Negative: hateful glare. Virtue needed: amusement.
- Student 3: Positive: deep thinker. Negative: fits of rage. Virtue needed: curiosity.

"This act of preparing for the day's challenging interactions allowed me to see unproductive patterns and begin moving past them," says Guenther. "As November came to a close, I realized that even though my fellow human being might be having a bad day, I did not have to join her."

• *December: End-of-day reflections* – Guenther followed the Stoic advice to debrief each day in courtroom style, with her as the lawyer and witness: Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better? Here are her logs from two days:

- Dec. 17 – Ailment corrected: Resisted bait of student provocation. Vice resisted: Withheld rude words. Area for improvement: Need to be more helpful during writing workshop.
- Dec. 18 – Ailment corrected: Spent whole writing workshop with struggling students. Vice resisted: Didn't panic about schedule change; just came up with a plan. Area for improvement: Need to not complain to fellow teachers.

As the month wore on, Guenther noticed herself focusing more on instruction and her moral character and spending less time controlling her irritation.

• *Introducing Stoicism to students* – Guenther began the new year by giving students a survey on emotions and self-control. Some results:

- 60 percent said negative emotions often got in the way of their goals.
- 67 percent said they had seen someone ruin their life by not having control of emotions.
- 65 percent said their classmates had anger problems.
- 58 percent admitted to having anger problems themselves.

These results made it very clear that negative emotions were having a detrimental effect on students' lives.

Guenther also asked, with some trepidation, about how students perceived her negative emotions. She was surprised that they described her as calm. "Don't you see me getting irritated?" she asked in a follow-up session. "You don't think I'm impatient?" "Well," one student said, "you do have 'the death stare,'" and the class erupted in laughter. They described some other quirks: "You usually just get quiet when you're mad." "Sometimes you get a little red." "You walk around the classroom real fast when you're ticked." Guenther was pleased: "Something shifted in the classroom that day," she says; "a barrier was removed. The territory we were entering was definitely uncharted, and I was intrigued."

The next step was sharing a list of "red" emotion words – exasperation, affected, antagonize, perturb, chagrin, seethe, indignant, irk, indifferent, infuriate, vengeance, disgruntled, resentment, inflame, rancor, wrath, peeve – and "blue" words – mirth, jocular, complacent, appease, fulfilled, content, rapture, convivial, jubilant, blithe, hedonism, euphoria,

ecstatic, tranquil. The idea was to help students get past *happy* and *mad* when they talked about their emotions.

Guenther and her students then dove into reading the Stoics: Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus. One theme was the idea that our worldviews are based on our interpretation of evidence, so we need to analyze what's going on. What's making me angry? Can I control what's making me angry? Students began to see that it wasn't the external event that was sparking anger, but their reaction to it. They discussed virtues – wisdom, justice, courage, temperance – where they saw people exercising those virtues, where they appeared in literature, and what the antonyms were. Guenther and her co-teacher shared the work they had done on their own emotions over the fall, and students began to talk about ways they had (and hadn't) exemplified virtues in class.

In March, Guenther's classes practiced morning premeditations and a seven-day self-monitoring activity. "Each day we discussed the previous day's challenges and victories," she says. "We never spent more than five minutes on these share sessions, but in doing so we came to know quite a bit about each other's strengths and weaknesses." One hundred percent of students filled out and turned in their charts, revealing that they were all incorporating Stoic language into their reflections. Even when things didn't go well, students talked the talk: "We're having a hard time breaking the habit of immediately responding in anger," said one. "My tranquility bubble was so good until I went on Facebook!" said another.

At the end of the Stoic unit, Guenther had students choose a project to showcase their knowledge: a product for the commercial marketplace, a board game, or an infomercial. Students rose to the challenge and then rotated around the room playing each other's games and viewing the products. As a finale, students applied their knowledge to a close reading of *Othello*, and then continued to read about Stoicism in book clubs and literature circles. An anonymous end-of-course evaluation showed that 100 percent of students had found Stoicism helpful and 85 percent said they had applied the lessons outside the classroom. "The reason why the Stoics' advice is so useful," wrote one, "is because we can still use their tools for staying peaceful in modern times."

"Even more important than the verbalized and quantified results from students was the change in our classroom culture," Guenther concludes. "Most of the things that get in the way of learning in the classroom are behavior issues – and with the Stoicism focus, our behavior issues (theirs and mine) were all out in the open. Moreover, we had a language that we had all learned together and bought into." When a student was misbehaving, Guenther would ask what Aurelius would think of it, and when students saw their teacher getting irritated, they would call out, "Be the emerald!" or "Stay green!"

The only sour note in this remarkable year, says Guenther, was colleagues who misunderstood the Stoic message and thought she was teaching students to bottle up their emotions in unhealthy ways. Quite the contrary, she argued: it was about examining the causes of harmful emotions before they took root, and learning a whole new language of expression, calmness, and collaboration.

“I Must Be Emerald and Keep My Color’: Ancient Roman Stoicism in the Middle-School Classroom” by Leah Guenther in *Harvard Educational Review*, Summer 2018 (Vol. 88, #2, p. 209-226), <http://hepgjournals.org/doi/abs/10.17763/1943-5045-88.2.209?code=hepg-site>

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6. Attitudes About Student Agency in Texas First-Grade Classrooms

“Early-childhood education in the United States is currently suspended between two epistemological understandings of young children,” say Jennifer Keys Adair and Molly McManus (University of Texas/Austin) and Kiyomi Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove (Texas State University) in this *Teachers College Record* article. “The first is that young children learn through dynamic experiences in which they are able to create and experiment. The second is that young children’s emerging literacy and math skills require formal instruction and assessments to ensure future academic success.” Both approaches are legitimate, say the authors, but it’s very difficult for primary-grade teachers to respond to children’s creativity, ideas, initiative, and urge to discover while engaging in direct instruction and assessment. The key difference between the two approaches is the degree of *agency* children have in the classroom.

Adair, McManus, and Colegrove studied a predominantly immigrant, Latinx, low-income Texas school district to see which approach educators and children thought was best. The researchers asked district administrators, school-based administrators, teachers, and students about the community and had them watch a series of short videos of a progressive classroom with a lot of student agency, including centers, lots of activity choices, and collaboration. Behind this study were: (a) the researchers’ belief that children learn best when they have agency, (b) the fear that teachers tend to give lower-income children of color less agency, and (c) the concern that in tightly controlled classrooms, some children use their agency to resist adult control, reinforcing adults’ desire to restrict students’ freedom and choices.

After viewing the videos, district administrators had the most positive reactions. They said agency was important because students need to develop leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, initiative, resourcefulness, and collaboration and communication skills. The superintendent said, “You have to culture this kind of creativity in the students and this kind of risk-taking so they can go out there and be the free thinkers and creators that we are going to need. A lot of these kids are going to have jobs that don’t exist. If they can’t go into a job that does exist then they are going to have to go and create a job and make something to be successful at. They are totally capable.”

School-based administrators were a little less enthusiastic about the classroom in the videos, saying they were in favor of student choice in classrooms as long as options were controlled by teachers or the lesson. Teachers also thought there should be less choice for younger than for older elementary students.

Teachers agreed that the ultimate goal is for students to be independent, but most thought the teacher in the videos was disorganized and did not have enough control of her classroom. Teachers were bothered by the fact that the teacher didn’t insist on getting every

student's attention before beginning an activity, having a discussion, or doing a read-aloud. Teachers said incoming first graders needed to be trained before they can be trusted with choices, and even then, options should be limited. Choices and freedom, teachers said, "were only appropriate when children had proven their ability to be obedient and were ready academically to meet the requirements of the school."

When the researchers interviewed educators about their attitudes toward the immigrant families served by the schools, the district administrators were the most positive. Students shouldn't be denied anything, they said, based on who they were or what financial or cultural struggles their families faced. School-based administrators voiced similar ideals but doubted the capacity of many children to handle much freedom in the classroom, based on undeveloped vocabulary and lack of knowledgeable parent support. Teachers expressed more concern about low literacy levels at home, families' lack of support for education, and students' poor preparation for school (especially vocabulary development). Teachers said students needed lots of classroom structure if they were going to be ready for the standardized tests they would be taking in the upper-elementary grades.

Adair, McManus, and Colegrove found that educators in the district were split on their support of student agency and their views on students and their families. Central-office administrators were more positive, while school-based educators were more negative. Significantly, the closer educators were to children (teachers and school-based administrators), the more negative their views became, creating a perverse dynamic. "When students are not provided the opportunity to show what they are able to do," say the researchers, "teacher and administrator deficit beliefs about students seem justified. These beliefs and practices create a cycle in which deficit thinking limits student agency, and then children cannot demonstrate what they know and can do, which in turn perpetuates more deficit thinking."

The most striking part of this study was what first graders said after viewing the videos. They recognized many of the same books, magnet letters, wall calendars, and other materials from their own classrooms, but they were unanimous in saying that the classroom in the videos was totally different – and bad for learning. How so? "Because we're so much quieter," said one girl. Other comments: "They are so loud!" "They are not following the rules." "Oh no, they are not raising their hands." In response to a video scene in which a boy was lying on the floor with a book during choice time, one of the students yelled out, "That boy needs to sit down!" Reacting to a part of the video where students were talking among themselves about a math activity, students said they were not following the rules. When the researchers pointed out that they were talking about math, students were not swayed and insisted that the kids in the video were loud and disobedient, contrasting it to the procedure in their own classrooms, with teachers assigning work and students doing it quietly at their desks. "If you talk," said one boy, "your thoughts will leave your brain."

"The first graders saw the children using a lot of agency in their learning as terrible examples of learning," say the researchers, "because they did not wait for instruction or permission from the teacher. When children moved around the classroom to help someone or when they were in a section of the room without the teacher, these children were labeled as

‘bad.’” The students mentioned that there were a few times in their own class when they had some choice: Fun Friday, when they got to play ABC bingo and hopscotch, and “muscle math” when they stood up and moved their bodies to depict different math concepts or problems (that was a favorite). But the overwhelming sentiment among students was that learning was about quietly doing tasks and obeying the teacher.

“Children’s ideas about learning are not biological or natural...” say the researchers. “Rather, they are the result of powerful, socio-cultural constructions that many young children cannot influence except through their resistance. When children perceive school learning as a process controlled by adults who primarily require their obedience, this can and does significantly impact their identities as learners. And it can increase the perceived necessity for oppositional behavior in the early grades or later in schooling.”

Some children around the U.S. get a very different message about learning, say Adair, McManus, and Colegrove: “They may attend project-based, Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and other agency-supportive early childhood and elementary programs where they experience learning as something they navigate, influence, and make decisions about along with the educators. Other children, including many Latinx children of immigrants, are often given schooling experiences that produce an understanding of learning as rote. Too often, they, like the children in our study, receive messages that learning is passive and obedient rather than a process that requires them to use their agency as a means to expand their capabilities.

“Our study also offers evidence that teachers’ stated reluctance to support children’s use of agency in their learning may be connected to their views and assumptions about children’s families... Addressing shifts in both pedagogy and deficit thinking requires undaunted teachers and administrators who (1) see young children from all families as needing to use their agency in order to learn and expand their capabilities, and (2) are willing to provide everyday routine opportunities for children to influence and make decisions about their learning.”

An overemphasis on test scores may be another factor driving this emphasis on rote learning, say the Adair, McManus, and Colegrove. “Emphasizing testing as a sign of learning success,” they say, “means that teachers are rewarded for a score, not their treatment of children or what kinds of messages about learning children receive at school. Using the single-indicator system of testing may be limiting children’s experiences in early schooling when they are in a critical developmental period in need of multiple types of learning experiences. A single-indicator system without attention to agency in learning may also be sending troubling, hard-to-reverse messages about what it means to be a good learner; namely, that learning requires children’s obedience rather than their thoughtfulness, and their submission rather than their leadership.”

“Troubling Messages: Agency and Learning in the Early Schooling Experiences of Children of Latinx Immigrants” by Jennifer Keys Adair, Kiyomi Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove, and Molly McManus in *Teachers College Record*, June 2018 (Vol. 120, #6, p. 1-40), <http://www.tcrecord.org/library/Abstract.asp?ContentId=22155>; Adair can be reached at jenniferadair@utexas.edu, Colegrove at kc1183@txstate.edu.

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7. Combining the Literary Canon with Contemporary Texts

In this article in *Council Chronicle*, teacher/writer Paul Barnwell explores the perennial challenge of helping high-school students “access, appreciate, and better comprehend” the traditional literary canon. These time-honored books “address essential human questions and themes,” says Barnwell, yet many students find them dated and irrelevant. He advocates a two-part solution. First, orchestrating collaborative, social, student-centered classrooms like those described in *Workshopping the Canon* by Mary Styslinger (NCTE, 2017), with mini-lessons, read-alouds, book clubs, and Socratic circles. Second, teaching literary classics in tandem with contemporary texts that have similar themes – for example:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* with Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* (social justice);
- *1984* with Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (dystopia/utopia);
- *1984* with poems by Langston Hughes and Stephen Crane, Beyoncé’s “Freedom,” and articles about national anthem protests and pictures of graffiti street art (political expression);
- *Romeo and Juliet* with Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* and lyrics by Taylor Swift and James Blunt (the nature of love).

Of course for this kind of interaction to be successful, students need preparation. “[T]hey really need to learn how to listen to each other,” says Styslinger. “That’s key. Before we dive into these structures and strategies, especially for new teachers, we have to take some time to front-load how to do these things.” Once the ball is rolling in classrooms, students should be encouraged to contribute their own ideas about using song lyrics, poems, and other texts that connect traditional literature to 21st-century life.

“Rethinking the Canon: Fresh Looks at Teaching Texts” by Paul Barnwell in *Council Chronicle*, June 2018 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 6-9), available to NCTE members at <https://bit.ly/2MDRXpo>; Barnwell can be reached at psbarnwell@gmail.com.

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8. Advice to Teachers and Writers

In this interview in *Council Chronicle*, teacher/poet/spoken-word performer Elizabeth Acevedo (author of *The Poet X*, HarperTeen 2018) shares her passion:

- “I love that once you’ve memorized a poem you can carry it in your body; you don’t need any other materials or equipment to bring forth empowering words or a moving story, because you are already harboring everything you need.”
- For teachers who want to inspire their students to write: “Give your students multiple examples of what effective writing looks like. Just like the right book can make a student a reader, the right poem or essay can make a student a writer; it’s about showing them that there are funny poems and heavy poems and list poems and response poems, and that whatever they want to write is welcome to be written.”
- Advice for aspiring young poets: “Keep writing. Keep reading... Find readers of your work whose feedback you trust to make your work clearer and more precise. Don’t worry

about sounding like anyone else; pursue your singular voice. That unique voice is what will connect most with an audience once you begin putting your work into the world.”

- YouTube clips from several of Acevedo’s spoken-word performances:
 - <http://bit.ly/Acevedo-Hair>
 - <http://bit.ly/Acevedo-Beloved>
 - <http://bit.ly/Acevedo-Bittersweet>

“Elizabeth Acevedo Shares Her Heart, Teacher to Teacher,” an interview in *Council Chronicle*, June 2018 (Vol. 27, #4, p. 12-14), <https://bit.ly/2KpnHSC>

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9. Short Item:

Grade 5-8 curriculum materials – Success Academy Charter Schools just made their middle-school curriculum materials available free online. Educators can access them by registering at <https://successacademies.org/edinstitute/>.

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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 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

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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 14+ 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
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
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