Marshall Memo 927

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
March 14, 2022

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"America is a fractious, argumentative, wildly diverse nation that's constantly reinventing itself through conflict and debate. When we give in to our inner censors, we betray our founding premise."

William Falk in his editor's letter in *The Week,* February 11, 2022

"First, you have to embrace the fact that there is no such thing as time management. We all have the same 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 52 weeks in a year to get things done. Time is fixed. Time is not malleable. Time is not manageable. But you are. So, you have to think of it not as time management, but as self-management. As humans, we control our behavior and choices when it comes to work completion, prioritization, and efficiency."

P.J. Caposey, quoted in "Finding Community Amidst Change" by Jeri Ogden in *Educational Leadership*, March 2022 (Vol. 79, #6, pp. 42-47)

"You want to be pretty forthright and just say, 'Here's what I have noticed about you over the last couple of days. I'm wondering if everything is OK, or if there's something you would like to talk about.' You try not to make assumptions. As an adult, whether you're a teacher or a school psychologist or a parent, you want to give the kid space to talk with you, and to let them know that you are interested in what they have to say."

Kathleen Minke (National Association of School Psychologists) in an interview with Sarah Schwartz, "How to Help Students Cultivate Hope When Worrisome News Is Stressing Them Out" in *Education Week*, March 9, 2022 (Vol. 41, #25, p. 13)

"Too much praise for success, especially at easy tasks, can signal to the student something like: 'My teacher is praising me because I tried so hard on this easy test; she must not think I have much ability.' Similarly, unsolicited offers of help ('Why didn't the teacher let me try to solve this problem by myself?') or too much sympathetic affect following failure ('I think she feels sorry for me') can signal to students that their teacher does not believe they have the ability to succeed on their own."

Sandra Graham and April Taylor (see item #2)

"How can I say that my mission is to inspire my students to grow and embrace diversity when they don't have access to books that tell the stories of people who come from different backgrounds? How will my students develop empathy when I've never challenged them to step outside of their comfort zones?"

Casey Grenier and Lauren Lynn (see item #5)

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1. Smart Leadership in the Wake of the Pandemic

(Originally titled "Different Leadership for a Different Time")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, former superintendent Nate Levenson (New Solutions K12) says it will take several years to heal the emotional wounds of the last two years and catch students up academically. He suggests these key areas:

• *Doing what works for students who are behind* – "It might seem reasonable that 8th graders who missed much of 7th grade should be retaught 7th grade content," says Levenson. But this "just keeps kids below grade level." Based on his work closing achievement gaps in several districts, he advocates:

- High-quality grade-level reading and math instruction for all students, with scaffolding of missing skills and knowledge;
- All students are there for core instruction; no pullouts for interventions, speech and language, and other support.
- Providing extra time during the school day for students to learn what they didn't master in previous years – 30 minutes a day in elementary schools, 45 minutes a day in middle and high schools;
- To make room for this extra time, Levenson suggests embedding elementary social studies within ELA lessons, delaying middle-school world language instruction for a year, and delaying for one year a high-school subject that has a three-year graduation requirement.
- Making sure that core and extra-time instruction is delivered by teachers who have a deep understanding of the subject so they can quickly identify learning problems and customize on the fly. Many special education teachers don't meet this standard, says Levenson; neither do most paraprofessionals.

• *Providing strategic social-emotional support* – "SEL is hard to do well because it's such a big topic," he says, "encompassing grit, empathy, compassion, self-awareness,

cooperation, relationship skills, and a dozen other desirable traits." Rather than adopting programs, many of which he believes are getting mixed results, Levenson recommends:

- Significantly increasing mental health counseling, which may mean doubling or tripling services for students; two possible strategies: where appropriate, shift students from one-on-one counseling to small groups, and coordinate more effectively with community resources.
- Ensuring that every student is known and "seen" by at least one caring adult in the school; it's not enough to offer morning meetings, advisory periods, and restorative circles, says Levenson; a more-systematic effort is needed, which might include pairing students with adults who have similar interests, getting to know students' non-academic interests, and carving out time for casual small-group conversations at lunch or other times.

• *Hiring in new ways* – The strategies Levenson recommends will require more math and reading teachers, instructional coaches, and mental health professionals – folks who are in short supply. He suggests:

- Hiring retired teachers who are willing to work part-time;
- Creating job-sharing arrangements;
- Extra pay for educators who are willing to teach more sections or larger classes;
- Enlisting college students and recent graduates for math and science tutoring;
- Welcoming career changers;
- Partnering with fee-for-service insurance-funded mental health agencies;
- Resisting the temptation to hire lower-skilled staff.

Finding, hiring, and onboarding nontraditional people will require HR directors and principals to be flexible and go the extra mile, says Levenson.

• *Scheduling strategically* – He mentions several areas where principals and their scheduling experts need to pay particular attention:

- Scheduling related services so students won't be pulled out of core instruction;
- In middle and high schools, scheduling a double dose of math instruction for students who are behind;
- Ensuring that instructional coaches spend about three-quarters of each day with teachers and join weekly PLC meetings;
- Making sure math teachers are building in enough scaffolding time in each math lesson, and that K-2 teachers include significant phonics instruction every day.

"Different Leadership for a Different Time" by Nate Levenson in *Educational Leadership*, March 2022 (Vol. 79, #6, pp. 42-47); Levenson is at nlevenson@newsolutionsk12.com.

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2. Helping Students Think Productively About School Failures

In this article in *Theory Into Practice*, Sandra Graham (UCLA) and April Taylor (California State University/Northbridge) explore what's going on in students' minds when

they do poorly in school. What students blame might depend on their track record in that subject (*I've never done well on math tests*), their level of effort (*I haven't been doing my homework*), strategy (*I didn't use the retrieval method my teacher taught me*), the difficulty of the task (*That test had really hard questions*), luck (*Dang, some questions on the test were the ones I didn't study*), unfairness (*The teacher is mean*), and social norms (*Girls aren't as smart at math*).

Graham and Taylor explain attribution theory, which includes four ways we explain a failure (or a success):

- Attribution – Is my failure due to my ability or effort?
- Locus – Is the cause internal or external to me?
- Stability – Is it always the same or does it vary over time?
- Controllability – Do I have power over this, or is it out of my hands?

"From an attributional perspective," say the authors, "ability is typically perceived as internal, stable, and uncontrollable. When we attribute failure to low ability, we tend to see this as a personal characteristic, enduring over time, and beyond our control." If we attribute a failure to lack of effort, on the other hand, that may be inside us but it's under our control and can be changed.

Students who attribute a failure to lack of ability, say Graham and Taylor, may feel *shame*. When that's accompanied by public embarrassment, it leads to "withdrawal, disengagement, and the desire to be invisible." But when they attribute failure to lack of effort, they feel an emotion akin to *guilt*. This "evokes notions of 'ought' and 'should,' as when students lament that they should have tried harder or they ought to study more. Thus, guilt is hypothesized to be a motivator of achievement strivings, propelled by the desire to do the right thing."

The practical application of this research is *attribution training* – teaching students who have been blaming failures on lack of *ability* to see the cause as insufficient *effort*. Carol Dweck conducted one of the first experiments on this in 1975; she and her colleagues urged low-achieving students to focus on effort versus ability and got remarkable results. Since then researchers have conducted scores of studies on attribution, some encouraging students to use better strategies (also internal and controllable). A strategy-focused approach is especially helpful for students who think they're already trying as hard as they can.

Graham and Taylor describe ten studies in K-12 schools and eleven in colleges, all showing the power of getting students to think in terms of effort and strategy rather than ability. They go on to suggest applications of attribution theory, not all of which have been fully explored in previous research:

• Help students view poor performance on a test not as a failure but as information about what needs to be improved. "Teachers' ongoing use of formative assessment that emphasizes mistakes as opportunities to learn, accompanied by instructional adjustments, may be particularly effective in helping students reconceptualize an outcome," say Graham and Taylor. Sometimes it's helpful to show students that other students also had difficulty, leading to the realization, "It's not just me."

• Be patient. Students' emotions are sometimes nudged slowly by well-framed messages about failure (and success). It can be hard to see these changes in the classroom as new attributions gradually replace maladaptive ones.

• When students excel academically, teachers' choice of words – and students' self-talk – can be unhelpful. "Success attributed to good luck or unusual help from others might be maladaptive," say Graham and Taylor, "because success is external (thus mitigating feelings of pride) and unstable (thus lowering one's expectations for future success). There is evidence that members of stigmatized groups who question their abilities are sometimes reluctant to take credit for success."

• Well-intentioned teachers can inadvertently convey negative attribution messages to students. "Too much praise for success," say the authors, "especially at easy tasks, can signal to the student something like: 'My teacher is praising me because I tried so hard on this easy test; she must not think I have much ability.' Similarly, unsolicited offers of help ('Why didn't the teacher let me try to solve this problem by myself?') or too much sympathetic affect following failure ('I think she feels sorry for me') can signal to students that their teacher does not believe they have the ability to succeed on their own…. Unbuffered praise or criticism by itself is rarely effective at warding off maladaptive attributions."

• Some white teachers fall into the trap of "positive feedback bias" with students of color, providing less-critical comments in an attempt to protect the self-esteem of students they see as vulnerable. Teachers need to provide honest feedback, belief in students' capability, and specific suggestions on what needs to improve. One study showed that the best combination is critical feedback accompanied by a clear statement that the teacher believes the student is capable of reaching their high expectations, along with strategies for reaching them.

• Teachers need to be careful not to overemphasize effort, especially if students are already exerting maximum effort. In these cases, talking about effective strategies is the best approach.

• Students in lower elementary grades may be too young for attribution messages. Graham and Taylor believe that by 9 or 10, "children have the cognitive prerequisites to understand the conceptual differences between ability and effort attributions." That's also when schools do more testing, academic tracking, and public displays of achievement. "All these practices," say the authors, "may exacerbate the perception that being smart means being smarter than others, but having to try less hard."

Graham and Taylor note two missing pieces in attribution research. First, almost all studies have been done in laboratory and experimental settings, and an unanswered question is whether giving attribution messages to an entire class (versus a subgroup) will benefit all students. Second, attribution researchers haven't yet addressed the issue of racial discrimination as an external and uncontrollable factor in students' view of success and failure. "It is likely," they say, "that attributional thinking, feeling, and acting will be influenced by important context factors such as racial/ethnic identity, parental socialization about race, immigrant history, or the racial/ethnic composition of classrooms and schools."

"The Power of Asking Why?: Attribution Retraining Programs for the Classroom Teacher" by Sandra Graham and April Taylor in *Theory Into Practice*, Winter 2022 (Vol. 61, #1, pp. 5-22); the authors can be reached at shgraham@ucla.edu and ataylor@csun.edu.

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3. Should High Schools Have Remedial Reading Classes?

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Maneka Deanna Brooks (Texas State University), Katherine Frankel (Boston University), and Julie Learned (SUNY Albany) say their research has identified three problems with standalone high-school reading classes:

- *Confusion* – The criteria for being placed in a reading class are often unclear to students, resulting in their being surprised when they are assigned to one.
- *Stigmatization* – Students report being embarrassed, angry, and resentful, some believing their abilities were not recognized by a process that focuses on addressing deficits rather than helping them grow as readers.
- *Fewer learning opportunities* – Students assigned to reading classes often have less access to new literacy experiences and electives because of scheduling conflicts.
- *Equity* – Remedial reading classes disproportionately enroll students of color for a variety of reasons, including behavior being a factor in placement, and white students having better access to relationships and networks that keep them out of reading classes.

To avoid these pitfalls, say Brooks, Frankel, and Learned, schools should form a literacy council (with an administrator, instructional specialists, relevant department heads, a counselor, and educators who teach reading classes) and follow these steps:

• *Get an accurate picture*. This involves gathering information on the criteria for placing students in and exiting them from reading classes, how the process is implemented, and its impact on students' other learning opportunities. A thorough report should include details on how long students are in reading classes, the racial/ethnic composition, and students' ideas for change.

• *Analyze the data*. The literacy council looks at the report and asks the following questions:

- Does the school have a clear definition of what it means to be a successful reader?
- Do the entry/exit criteria provide an accurate picture of students as readers?
- Are policies clearly communicated to students and families?
- Do students know how they can meet those expectations?
- Is student behavior separated from the entry/exit criteria?
- Is there more than one pathway for a student to succeed in reading classes?
- Are students asked for their input, especially when they are struggling?
- Are there differences in how student subgroups are placed in reading classes?

• *Plan for change*. Brooks, Frankel, and Learned recommend that the literacy council hold an additional meeting to make sense of the information that's been gathered, consult with

stakeholders, think through the changes that need to be made, and make recommendations to the principal.

• *Do quality control*. After new policies have been implemented, the literacy council meets every semester to look for racial/ethnic disproportionality in reading groups, check in with students, watch for unintended consequences, and suggest needed modifications.

The authors believe these steps are just the beginning. "In the longer term," they say, "the council should contribute to schoolwide efforts to move away from standalone reading classes and toward robust, authentic, and embedded literacy learning within content-area classes. We encourage education leaders who are ready for this next step to work alongside their literacy councils to support teachers in creating these opportunities."

"Placement Matters: Is Your Reading Intervention Effective?" by Maneka Deanna Brooks, Katherine Frankel, and Julie Learned in *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2022 (Vol. 103, #6, pp. 41-45); the authors can be reached at maneka@txstate.edu, kfrankel@bu.edu, and jlearned@albany.edu.

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4. Studies on the Efficacy of Small-Group Instruction in Reading

In this article in *Education Week*, Sarah Sparks summarizes findings from recent studies on classroom reading groups (see the link below for citations):

• A 2019 NAEP report (just before the pandemic) showed that teachers who used heterogeneous and student-chosen reading groups had, on average, fewer students performing below basic proficiency.

• A K-8 study by Anthony Buttaro Jr. and Sophia Catsambis (Queens College CUNY) reached four conclusions:

- Achievement grouping concentrated and worsened the gaps between higher-performing and lower-performing students over time.
- Once students were in an upper or lower track, that's where they stayed from grade to grade, belying the promise that students move up when they achieve mastery.
- Schools with higher concentrations of low-income students and students of color were more likely to group students by reading level.
- Boys and students with behavior issues were more likely to be in low reading groups, regardless of their academic ability.

• Matthew Hall and Matthew Burns (University of Minnesota) found that small reading groups that targeted a specific skill were almost twice as effective as groups that focused more broadly on comprehension or a variety of skills. Hall and Burns also found that small groups were more effective in elementary than in middle and high schools.

• Andrea Johnson (Winona State University) had three findings: All students in small groups improved their vocabulary – except groups composed only of low-performing students. Students who were grouped with others of similar achievement were more engaged. And when heterogeneous groups were given a group grade for a task, one or two students often did most of the work (as compared to homogeneous groups).

• Deirdre McGillicuddy (University College Dublin) studied friendships, help-seeking behavior, and social status in elementary reading and math groups. She found that achievement grouping reinforced social hierarchies: students in upper groups became less likely to sit next to, ask for help from, and become friends with those in low groups, and vice versa. When boys, members of ethnic minorities, and migrant children were in low groups, they were more likely to be socially isolated. "They call you dopey," said one boy, "cos they say, 'oh yeah look at ya… you can't read.'" Another student said being in the low groups made students feel stupid and subjected them to teasing.

• Vikki Boliver (Durham University) and Queralt Capsada-Munsech (University of Glasgow) looked at longitudinal data on U.K. children born in 2000 and 2002. They found that students who had been in lower reading and math groups at age 7 were less likely to come to enjoy or continue to enjoy those subjects by age 11. Factoring in students' gender and social class, the researchers found that groupings had a significant effect only on enjoyment in math.

• Researchers from Vanderbilt University and the University of Texas/Austin found that for students who needed intensive reading support, one-on-one interventions were almost twice as effective as groups of 3-5 students. However, the researchers also found that in kindergarten through third grade, even more effective than group size was the quality of instruction, including: well-prescribed lessons for modeling and guiding students; content that addressed phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency; and educators who made connections with students.

"Classroom Reading Groups: Five Lessons from Recent Studies" by Sarah Sparks in *Education Week*, March 9, 2022 (Vol. 41, #25, p. 5)

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5. The Importance of Weeding a School Library

In this *Knowledge Quest* article, Maryland librarians Casey Grenier and Lauren Lynn say that in light of the number of challenges these days, it's important to heed the American Library Association's 2014 Library Bill of Rights:

> "Resources in school library collections are an integral component of the curriculum and represent diverse points of view on both current and historical issues. These resources include materials that support the intellectual growth, personal development, individual interests, and recreational needs of students."

The needs of *all* students, say Grenier and Lynn, "not just the needs of a few or a vocal majority." And that involves continuously adding to the collection, evaluating what's on library shelves, and tossing out what doesn't belong. It's an excellent idea, they say, to get student input on specific books, and types of books, they'd like to see in the library.

Students can also be involved in culling books that need to be taken out for a variety of reasons. Grenier and Lynn have used two acronyms for making decisions. The first is MUSTIE, which was developed by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (building on the work of Joseph Segal and Belinda Boon):

- **M**isleading or factually inaccurate;

- **U**gly – worn beyond mending or rebinding;
- **S**uperseded by a new edition or a much better book on the subject;
- **T**rivial – of no discernible literary or scientific value;
- **I**rrelevant to the needs and interests of students and educators;
- **E**lsewhere – the material is easily available in another library or database.

There's also the FRESH acronym coined by Jennifer LaGarde:

- **F**osters a love of reading;
- **R**eflects a diverse population;
- **E**quitable global view;
- **S**upports the curriculum;
- **H**igh quality.

On the key issue of a diverse collection, Grenier and Lynn believe these questions should shape purchases and a systematic look at what's in the collection (quoted directly):

- How can I expect students to feel welcome and appreciated in my school library and school if they don't see anyone who looks like them in our books?
- How can I expect my students to feel that they are part of a community when they don't see a family like theirs or anyone dealing with their struggles?
- How can I say that my mission is to inspire my students to grow and embrace diversity when they don't have access to books that tell the stories of people who come from different backgrounds?
- How will my students develop empathy when I've never challenged them to step outside of their comfort zones?

There's one more reason to be continuously weeding the collection, say Grenier and Lynn: a principal who sees all the shelves full of books might conclude that the library doesn't need a budget for new books!

"Reflecting Our Students and Our World in Our School Library Collections" by Casey Grenier and Lauren Lynn in *Knowledge Quest*, March/April 2022 (Vol. 50, #4, pp. 14-21); the authors can be reached at grenierc@calvertnet.k12.md.us and LynnL@calvertnet.K12.md.us.

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6. Recommended Graphic Novels Featuring Women

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Brigid Alverson recommends twelve graphic novels that she believes are "a powerful tool for restoring women to their rightful place in history and uplifting the voices and deeds of women who have been forgotten, ignored, or deliberately suppressed." (See the link below for cover images and a brief description of each book.)

- *Wonderful Women of the World* edited by Laurie Halse Anderson, various illustrators, grade 7 and up
- *Catherine's War* by Julia Billet, illustrated by Claire Fauvel, grade 3-7
- *We Served the People* by Emei Burrell, grade 9 and up

- *Why She Wrote: A Graphic History of the Lives, Inspiration, and Influence Behind the Pens of Classic Women Writers* by Hannah Chapman and Laurel Burke, grade 9 and up
- *Almost American Girl: An Illustrated Memoir* by Robin Ha, grade 8 and up
- *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts* by Rebecca Hall, illustrated by Hugo Martinez, grade 8 and up
- *Amazons, Abolitionists, and Activists: A Graphic History of Women's Fight for Their Rights* by Mikki Kendall, illustrated by A. D'Amico, grade 7 and up
- *Good Girls Don't Make History* by Elizabeth Kiehner and Kara Coyle, illustrated by Micaela Dawn, grade 6-9
- *Corpse Talk: Groundbreaking Women* by Adam Murphy and Lisa Murphy, illustrated by Adam Murphy, grade 4-7
- *Astronauts: Women on the Final Frontier* by Jim Ottaviani, illustrated by Maris Wicks, grade 4-7
- *Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story* by David Robertson, illustrated by Scott Henderson and Donovan Yaciuk, grade 9 and up
- *Banned Books Club* by Ki Hyun Sook and Ryan Estrada, illustrated by Hyung-Ju Ko, grade 7 and up

"A Woman's Place Is in a Graphic Novel" by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, March 2022 (Vol. 68, #3, pp. 28-31)

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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 52 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 150 articles each week, and selects 8-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD Express
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education