Marshall Memo 848

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 3, 2020

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Quotes of the Week

"Accept your imperfections."
Dave Stuart Jr. (see item #1)

"Reading tests are really knowledge tests in disguise."
Daniel Willingham quoted in "Is It Time to Drop 'Finding the Main Idea' and Teach Reading in a New Way?" by Holly Korbey in *Edutopia*, July 28, 2020

"Rather than thinking for teachers, successful literacy coaches are adept at asking open-ended questions, which allow space for teachers to talk through ideas and encourage deep thinking about their own literacy practice."
Alida Hudson and Bethanie Pletcher (see item #6)

"When young children have rich, back-and-forth conversations with a caregiver or teacher, their language abilities blossom."
Elizabeth Burke Hadley, Katherine Newman, and Jin-Sil Mock (see item #4)

"At-home learning gives parents a daily window into the classroom that they don't have when students are in school buildings. That means some will gain a new appreciation for the hard work teachers do, while others will find more opportunities to be critical of their kids' teachers and schools."
Mark Lieberman in "The Pivot Back to Remote Learning: Checklists for Teachers, Principals, and Ed-Tech Leaders" in *Education Week*, July 22, 2020

"There are no adolescents on the planet who will be emotionally healthy if they feel incompetent."
Douglas Reeves in "Don't Forget the 'L' in SEL," August 2, 2020

1. Principles and Practices for Successful Online Learning

In this online article, Michigan teacher/writer Dave Stuart Jr. says he sorely misses the "human-ness" of his in-person high-school classes and suggests ways that educators can humanize schools and classrooms conducted at a distance. First, Stuart offers some observations about making a human connection with students in any instructional setting:

• Human beings are mostly hidden. It's impossible to see most of the "invisible thoughts and feelings and intentions and social relationships" that exist within each person's physical body.

• In a humane environment, we feel safe, less of us is hidden, and we don't need to hide. Students in a humane classroom "feel warmly seen," says Stuart, "like they are known, valued, respected… In such an environment, our students are far more likely to be eager to learn and to persist in learning."

• It's tricky to humanize a school because there's a lot that educators don't control. For example, some students who walk into a classroom may have been insulted by a classmate in the previous class period, may have had negative experiences or been put off the subject by a previous teacher, may feel stereotype threat because of perceived beliefs about their race or gender, may not live in an emotionally or physically safe home, or may not have had a good meal recently.

• In addition, there's wide variation in what makes people feel valued, known, respected, and safe. "Some are introverted and prefer less personal attention from the instructor," says Stuart; "others are extroverted and would take 100 percent of the instructor's attention if they could get it… Some like to be called on; others are terrified by it…"

Considering these four truths about human connections, it's challenging to humanize instruction when students are physically present. What about online schooling, which is going to be the reality for many schools this fall? Humanizing instruction is "completely possible," says Stuart, and teachers don't have to work 22 hours a day and go crazy. Here's some advice from Michelle Pacansky-Brock, who works with community college instructors to humanize online learning and reach all students:

• *Tell your story.* Make a brief, friendly introductory video telling how you became a teacher, where you grew up, what college was like, and what you love about your job (see the link below for a few samples).

• *Use brief instructional videos featuring you as the teacher*. These don't have to be polished and professional – in fact, somewhat amateurish videos help humanize the teacher. "Accept your imperfections," advises Stuart (see samples in the article link).

• *Send "video postcards" to students*. These might be a sunset filmed on your phone while taking a walk or something that made you think of your students. These show your non-academic side and make you a real person.

• *When possible, provide voice or video feedback on students' work*. Researchers have found that students far preferred audio and video feedback and were more likely to follow up on it. This can be done in learning platforms like Canvas, Google Classroom, D2L/ Brightspace, and Schoology.

• *Identify high-opportunity students*. Time is short, so it makes sense to focus on students for whom individualized, high-touch communication will make the biggest difference. These students can be identified with a short survey at the beginning of the school year. Some possible questions:

- What name would you like me to use? Pronunciation tips?
- What is the best way to teach you? What do you know about how you learn? What has worked in the past? What hasn't?
- Will you mainly use your phone, a laptop, a computer, or something else?
- How long have you attended this school?
- I may leave you voice or video feedback on your work. Does that work for you, or would you prefer written feedback?
- In one word, describe how you are feeling about this class right now.
- Please share one thing that may interfere with your success in this course.
- Is there anything else you'd like to share at this point?

Students should have the option to respond via audio or video.

• *Be a warm demander*. The basic idea of this time-honored approach is high challenge and high support – push students to push themselves and grow from dependent to independent learners. Here's a message Stuart sent to one of his students during the Covid shutdown: "Anita, are you all right? I noticed you haven't completed the last two assignments. How are things with your living situation? Are you still watching your siblings for six hours a day? Please reply with an update so that I can help you get back on track with the course. I know you can do this! I believe in you and want to see you succeed."

"How to Humanize Your Classroom or School When You're Teaching from a Distance: Principles and Practices" by Dave Stuart Jr., July 29, 2020; Stuart can be reached at dave@davestuartjr.com.

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2. African-American Students Talk About Their Schools

In this article in *Education Week Teacher*, Catherine Gewertz, Sarah Schwartz, and Madeline Will report on their interviews with black students about their experiences in school, including class discussions about race and racism (see the article link for videos). Some excerpts:

• A Kentucky student commended her AP government teacher for providing plenty of factual information and context in a lesson on affirmative action and the Supreme Court. When

a few students made inappropriate generalizations, the teacher "was really good about correcting them," said this student, "but in a way that wasn't calling them out, but just kind of like a group learning moment like, 'Hey, you know, I know you probably didn't mean it this way. But let's make sure we use this kind of language when trying to talk about a very diverse group of people.'" The student commented that it helped that there were four or five black students in the class so that individual students didn't feel called upon to speak for their race.

• By contrast, the same student described an AP English class where she was the only African-American student. After students read *Between the World and Me*, watched the music video "This is America" and then saw *13 th*, a documentary about race and incarceration, a white student said that when "the blacks" got their freedom after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, they didn't know what to do with themselves and the crack epidemic ensued. The teacher didn't say anything and the black student felt awkward when a classmate urged her to call out the offensive comments. What was missing, besides the teacher not stepping up, she said, was more context and some clear classroom norms.

• A Seattle high-school junior described an incident in which one black student used the n-word in a casual conversation with a black classmate. The teacher, who was white, said, "No, you're not allowed to say that in my classroom." When students pushed back, saying that in this context the word was "kind of like a term of endearment," the teacher said, "I don't care. I'm going to police you on this word." A two-day discussion ensued and the school used restorative justice to try to resolve the strong feelings that were aroused, but this student didn't feel the black students' point of view was heard. "A lot of students I talked to ended up like damaged from that conversation," she said. She and others felt the classroom wasn't inclusive or safe.

• A high-school senior in New Mexico said classroom conversations about race centered on stories of oppression rather than the broader sweep of the African-American experience, including her people's triumphs. She said the curriculum "is so centered on whiteness" and avoided controversial books on race. She was critical of the fact that several books about race, including *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Black Like Me*, were by white authors and not told from the black perspective. In her spare time, this student was reading books by Elaine Brown and Malcolm X and wished those and others were part of the curriculum.

• A recent graduate of an Ohio high school was grateful that a history teacher was honest and direct about the horrors of slavery. Other teachers, however, shied away from hard truths. This student said she understood teachers' discomfort discussing painful periods in history, "but it's still part of your job. You still have to be willing to go out of your way and teach it." But she described how one teacher caused an uproar when he showed a video of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that focused on the misery and helplessness of the black community in New Orleans. The point of the lesson was to describe the government's response to the hurricane, but students were up in arms at the images they saw.

• A Colorado high-school senior said there were discussions after major incidents like the killing of George Floyd, but not on a regular basis. "Race shouldn't, in my opinion, just be talked about when there's a huge problem that has come up in our society," she said. "There

are more people coming out and talking about racial injustice and the injustices that are in our country, but only for a small amount of time, and then it blows over. I didn't think that's right. You know, this is not something I have to deal with one day, or one week – this is my everyday thing. It's part of everyday life, and schools – especially my school – hold a lot of diverse students, and it's the perfect place for us to hold those discussions… It shouldn't have to be us seeing a person getting killed for us to talk about it."

"Classroom Discussions on Race: Hear What 5 Black Students Say They Need" by Catherine Gewertz, Sarah Schwartz, and Madeline Will in *Education Week Teacher*, July 31, 2020

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3. Texts That Get Parents Involved in Children's Vocabulary Development

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Emily Snell, Barbara Wasik, and Annemarie Hindman (Temple University) summarize research on four factors that help young children acquire new vocabulary:

- They understand the meaning of the word.
- They are given opportunities to make connections to their existing knowledge.
- They have multiple exposures to the word.
- They have a chance to use the word and get feedback in conversation.

Snell, Wasik, and Hindman believe that texting children's parents with suggested words is an excellent way to touch all these bases – plus, it involves family members as important teachers. Virtually all parents have access to text messaging, the researchers found, and are open to teachers communicating through this channel. Teachers' texts can be very simple, for example:

- Ms. P: Our new words are tunnel, bridge, track, and gaining. Click here to see kid-friendly definitions.
- Ms. P: Please help your child look for tunnels, bridges, or tracks. Play a game in the car or on the bus, looking for vehicles that are gaining on you.

The researchers suggest several ways for teachers to use texts for vocabulary building at home:

• *To support learning word meanings* – Words from a book the class is reading or the current unit of study, along with simple definitions, are texted, and parents are encouraged to ask children if they know what the word means. If the child doesn't, the parent can help explain the meaning from their own knowledge of using the definition.

• *To provide increased exposure to new words* – Teachers can ask parents to remind children of words recently taught in class. "Texting can make this process easier for teachers," say Snell, Wasik, and Hindman, "and more likely that students will learn new words."

• *To support practicing new words* – Teachers can text suggested open-ended questions to get students practicing target vocabulary in context.

• *To connect words to existing knowledge* – Parents know their children's life histories and are well situated to make connections.

• *To support parents' confidence and engagement* – Parents who feel personally invited to take part in their children's school experience, and who feel their actions will make a difference, will follow up on teachers' texts.

"Using Texting to Help Families Build Their Children's Vocabularies at Home" by Emily Snell, Barbara Wasik, and Annemarie Hindman in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2020 (Vol. 74, #1, pp. 49-57); the authors can be reached at emily.snell@temple.edu, barbara.wasik@temple.edu, and annemarie.hindman@temple.edu.

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4. Improving the Quality of Preschoolers' Conversations

"When young children have rich, back-and-forth conversations with a caregiver or teacher, their language abilities blossom," say Elizabeth Burke Hadley (University of South Florida/Tampa), Katherine Newman (Vanderbilt University), and Jin-Sil Mock (California Baptist University) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "Unfortunately," they continue, "teacher-student conversations in preschool, particularly for students living in poverty, are relatively rare." They urge teachers to carve out the time for conversation and suggest the TALK acronym for maximizing the impact on students:

• **T**ake turns talking. The trick is moving beyond the all-too-common IRE dynamic (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) to create genuine back-and-forth exchanges, for example:

- Teacher: What do you think the caterpillar will do next?
- Student: Take a nap.
- Teacher: I wonder why he needs to take a nap.
- Student: He's sleepy because he ate all that food.
- Teacher: He did eat a lot. I think he might use that food for energy to turn into a butterfly.

Students can also be prompted to have conversations with their peers, using "talking chips" to pass back and forth to reinforce the reciprocal dynamic.

• **A**sk open-ended questions. It's helpful to have a poster with examples of questions that open up discussion, for example:

- Why do you think that happened?
- How do you know?
- Can you tell me more?
- What do you think will happen next?

Questions like these work best when they're applied to topics being discussed in the moment. It's helpful for teachers to know details about students' communities, interests, families, and home lives so they can ask good follow-up questions.

• **L**isten to students' responses and extend them. Tuning in to what the other person is talking about, and helping students be better listeners, is the key to two-way conversations. "A general principle to follow," say Hadley, Newman, and Mock, "is to meet students where they are in their language development, then nudge them into slightly more complex language practices."

• **K**eep track of conversations. It's easy for quiet students to go for days without engaging in a rich conversation. That's why it's a good idea for teachers to use a simple checklist of verbal interactions in class meetings, centers, small groups, and turn-and-talks so no students will miss out.

"Setting the Stage for TALK: Strategies for Encouraging Language-Building Conversations" by Elizabeth Burke Hadley, Katherine Newman, and Jin-Sil Mock in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2020 (Vol. 74, #1, pp. 39-48); the authors can be reached at hadleye@usf.edu, katherine.newman@vanderbilt.edu, and jmock@calbaptist.edu.

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5. Why Do So Many Young Women See Advanced Physics as "Not for Me"?

In this *Journal of the Learning Sciences* article, Louise Archer, Julie Moote, and Emily McLeod (University College London Institute of Education) report on their ten-year study of middle- and high-school U.K. girls' career aspirations and attitudes toward science. The researchers found that even high-achieving girls who were keenly interested in physics turned away from continuing with the subject. Here's why:

• Advanced science was seen as exceptionally difficult, requiring "cleverness" – a British word for natural brainpower. This belief among the 17-year-old girls contrasts to their beliefs ten years earlier, when one said, "You don't have to be clever to do science."

• Advanced physics was seen as an elite, masculine subject, something many boys were naturally good at; they could effortlessly excel and "breeze through" the subject. Students who were good at physics were often "odd, geeky, and male."

• The girls tended to blame themselves for not being good at the subject (one said it was "quite hard, so maybe not for me"), comparing themselves unfavorably to students who did well.

• The most "interesting bits" of physics were deferred until the most advanced level, with a lot of the intermediate material striking many girls as technical and "dull."

The result was that few of the young women in the study pursued physics beyond what was required in their schools' curriculum.

How could this be changed? Archer, Moote, and McLeod believe that jazzing up physics classes is not enough; schools need to address the gendered, elite way physics is seen, open up advanced courses to more students, and start when students are younger to prevent the science-isn't-for-me attitude from developing.

"Learning That Physics Is 'Not for Me': Pedagogic Work and the Cultivation of Habitus Among Advanced Level Physics Students" by Louise Archer, Julie Moote, and Emily McLeod in *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, July-August 2020 (Vol. 29, #3, pp. 347-384); Archer can be reached at l.archer@ucl.ac.uk.

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6. Questions for Instructional Coaches to Ask Their Coachees

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Alida Hudson and Bethanie Pletcher (Texas A&M University/College Station) say that successful literacy coaches, "rather than thinking for teachers… are adept at asking open-ended questions, which allow space for teachers to talk through ideas and encourage deep thinking about their own literacy practice." They suggest some open-ended, positive, and tentative questions:

- Was that how you envisioned the lesson unfolding?
- Were there any surprises for you?
- What is your thinking about…?
- What might be indicators that you are successful?
- What were the students able to do in this lesson?
- What did you do to help the students succeed?
- What else might you have students do?
- So, maybe try…
- What are some things that you could have students do differently the next time you teach this lesson?

Following up after a lesson that incorporated coaching suggestions, a literacy coach might ask:

- Do you think it was successful? If so, what made the difference?
- What would you change if you taught this lesson again?
- What can we do differently that might help students get there?
- What is getting in the way of the teaching you want to do, and your students' learning?
- What might it look like if this problem were solved?
- Talk to me more about how you…
- So, moving forward, what do you want to focus on?

"The Art of Asking Questions: Unlocking the Power of a Coach's Language" by Alida Hudson and Bethanie Pletcher in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2020 (Vol. 74, #1, pp. 96-100); Pletcher can be reached at bethanie.pletcher@tamucc.edu.

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7. Math Apps and Online Tools

In this *Edutopia* article, Emelina Minero recommends eleven math apps and online tools, some of which teachers have discovered during the pandemic (click the article link below for URLs of the apps):

Math skills and practice:

- *Moose Math* – This free app helps younger students practice counting, addition, and subtraction; students play math games to earn points to build a town.
- *Happy Numbers*, preK-5 – This subscription-based website breaks down math equations and helps students understand higher-order concepts; students become dinosaurs and hatch eggs when they solve problems.
- *Prodigy*, grades 1-8 – This free game-based website targets student weaknesses identified in its preassessment and tracks students' progress on them.
- *Zearn*, grades 1-5 – A free, self-paced program aligned with Eureka Math starts with fun warm-up activities, then has timed arithmetic problems with videos on new concepts.

Open-ended math tasks:

- *Open Middle*, preK-12 – This program leaves parts of an equation blank and asks students to make them true.

- *Would You Rather Math*, preK-12 – This site has students choose between two real-life examples and make a mathematical argument for their choice.
- *Which One Doesn't Belong*, PreK-12 – This site shows four shapes, numbers, or graphs and asks students to tell which one doesn't belong, using math vocabulary.

Rich math tasks:

- *Fraction Talks*, grades 1-12 – A website that encourages student observation and math discussions.
- *Visual Patterns*, K-12 – Shows the beginning of a pattern and asks students to figure out the equation to fit the pattern.

Simulation tools:

- *Applets* – These are a simple code with a specific objective – for example, statistics students manipulating and identifying sampling distribution patterns in graphs.
- *Desmos*, grades 6-12 – A website and app with interactive math activities and a graphic calculator; some teachers have been able to integrate social-emotional learning into Demos.

"11 Teacher-Recommended Math Apps and Online Tools" by Emelina Minero in *Edutopia*, July 27, 2020

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8. Preschool Books About Diverse Families

In this *Edutopia* article, Gerard Visco suggests nine preschool-level picture books that celebrate diverse families (fuller details on each book at the link below):

- *Let's Eat!* by Ana Zamorano and Julie Vivas
- *Bintou's Braids* by Sylviane Diouf
- *Chester Bear, Where Are You?* by Peter Eyvindson and Wendy Wolsak-Frith
- *Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love
- *Mommy's Khimar* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and Ebony Glenn
- *The Different Dragon* by Jennifer Bryan and Danamarie Hosler
- *It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity* by Theresa Thorn and Noah Grigni
- *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan and Sophie Blackall
- *Yo Soy Muslim: A Father's Letter to His Daughter* by Mark Gonzales and Mehrdokht Amini

"9 Picture Books for Preschoolers That Celebrate Diversity" by Gerard Visco in *Edutopia*, July 28, 2020

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9. Short Items:

a. Back-to-School Surveys – Panorama Education has released a series of free surveys for students, families, and staff. These can be helpful getting data on where people are "at" on important social-emotional dimensions as schools start up for 2020-21.

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b. Backwards Brain Bicycle – This fascinating video by Destin Sandlin demonstrates the difficulty of altering a learned skill like riding a bicycle – but shows that skills can be developed through lots of practice – especially by a child.

"The Backwards Brain Bicycle – Smarter Every Day 133" by Destin Sandlin, April 24, 2015

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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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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