

Marshall Memo 945

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 18, 2022

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Quotes of the Week

“Asking teachers to fix their burnout is like asking a seed to grow better when the soil is dry and the sun is nowhere to be found.”

Chase Mielke (see item #1)

“As school leaders, we should ask ourselves, are we doing too many things with mediocrity rather than a few things with excellence?”

Chase Mielke (*ibid.*)

“Let’s be honest. Sometimes it feels like as soon as we’ve begun to master this teaching thing, another element gets thrown into the mix that has us feeling like a rookie all over again.”

Andrea Castellano in [“Words Matter: Language-Affirming Classrooms for Code-Switching Students”](#) in *Cult of Pedagogy*, July 10, 2022

“It is helpful to think of whom we serve in education. We serve the version of our students looking back on their schooling ten or fifteen years later, in light of its long-run effect on their lives. And we serve their parents, who are counting on us to push their children to create a future for themselves even in a world that surrounds them with distractions and messages that it’s OK, cool even, not to do the things now that will create opportunity later.”

Doug Lemov in *Teach Like a Champion 3.0* (p. xxxi)

“If students do not develop a valuable relationship to the things they study in school, their relationship with their teacher will not have accomplished its full purpose. This challenges us to resist the desire to be the center of the story; the goal is not to be loved and remembered forever but for students to take away a belief in their own capacity, to value the process of learning, and just possibly love or at least appreciate deeply the ideas of science, math, music, or literature.”

Doug Lemov (*ibid.* p. 103-104)

“The aim of all instruction is to alter long-term memory. If nothing has changed in long-term memory, nothing has been learned.”

Paul Kirschner, John Sweller, and Richard Clark in *Educational Psychologist*, 2006, quoted in *ibid.* p. 84)

1. A Systems Approach to Combating Teacher Burnout

(Originally titled “Educator Well-Being 2.0”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/instructional coach Chase Mielke argues that educator stress is an organizational, not an individual problem. “Asking teachers to fix their burnout,” he says, “is like asking a seed to grow better when the soil is dry and the sun is nowhere to be found.” Mielke suggests a computer analogy for addressing exhaustion and cynicism in K-12 schools:

- *The charger and battery: Self-care strategies* – Educators can do all the right things with exercise, sleep, nutrition, and meditation – be fully charged – and yet still have their energy depleted if the hardware is damaged or too much software is running at the same time. This is what’s going on when we return from a wonderful vacation and our school’s poor working conditions quickly make us feel exhausted again. To change this dynamic, says Mielke, “we have to address the systems, policies, and conditions that ‘drain batteries’ so quickly and reliably.”

- *Software: Curricula, programs, initiatives, expectations* – Running too much software on a computer or cellphone depletes the battery and degrades performance. Mielke says his wife, an elementary teacher, is being asked to implement seven scripted curriculum programs, three of them recent additions. It’s no wonder that teachers dealing with overload like this are burning out. “Too many schools try to fix problems by doing more with more,” says Mielke, “rather than more with less.”

- *Hardware: Efficacy, skills, strengths* – Schools have a lot of demands on them and often need to run more than one initiative at a time. To make that possible, says Mielke, it’s necessary to boost educators’ “hardware” – their sense of competence, mastery, and efficacy. That can happen only by devoting significant time to high-quality coaching, feedback, and support.

- *WiFi: Human relationships and connectedness* – We use technology channels to connect to the outside world. Similarly, educators need personal links with colleagues, students, parents, and the community.

Mielke believes that to have any hope of alleviating educator burnout, school leaders need to troubleshoot system failures. Continuing the computer analogy, here are his tips for addressing dysfunctional features:

- *Run systems diagnostics.* A detailed staff survey (not just asking what's stressing people out) can determine whether overload is caused by too many initiatives, skill deficits, not enough personal connections, or other causes.

- *Prioritize the CPU.* By this Mielke means candid communication about school security and other possible stressors, ensuring safety from verbal abuse by parents and others, and giving plenty of personalized appreciation and compassion (a hand-written thank-you note goes a long way).

- *Close out software.* "As school leaders," says Mielke, "we should ask ourselves, are we doing too many things with mediocrity rather than a few things with excellence?" He suggests taking inventory of programs and initiatives with an eye to desired outcomes, evidence of impact, and the effect on educators' sense of efficacy.

- *Invest in new hardware.* Introducing new skills and practices takes time and support, and that means additional (non-evaluative) coaching, informal peer coaching opportunities, and maximizing the benefits of teacher teamwork.

["Educator Well-Being 2.0"](#) by Chase Mielke in *Educational Leadership*, July 2022 (Vol. 79, #9, online only); Mielke can be reached at chase.affectiveliving@gmail.com.

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2. The Importance of Classroom Humor

In this online article, John Spencer describes five ways that humor – expressed in a variety of ways depending on teachers' personalities – improves students' creativity and problem-solving:

- *Encouraging creative risk-taking* – When Spencer wrote an absurd checklist on the board (it included doing light-saber practice and picking up dry cleaning), some of his students rolled their eyes, but "something else happened," he says. "It gave students permission to be goofy and nerdy and whimsical. And in the process, it gave people permission to have their own unique creative voice."

- *Developing divergent thinking* – Most humor "is a chance to see things from a new perspective," he says. Prop humor involves using an item the wrong way. Puns play with language to get a laugh. Humor often uses common ideas in non-linear, free-flowing, divergent ways.

- *Modeling curiosity and playfulness* – A teacher Spencer admired used her wittiness (never sarcastic) to create a classroom climate that was relaxed and non-threatening and helped students become more inquisitive. "In a way," says Spencer, "it was like the comic relief that allows an epic story to be even more epic." In the younger grades, humor (dressing up funny, using a silly voice) can make students laugh out loud and show that teachers aren't taking themselves too seriously.

- *Boosting creative problem-solving* – One study that found people who watched comedy videos did better at problem-solving tasks, word associations, and brainstorming. “Humor creates a lightened mood and a mental spaciousness,” says Spencer, “that makes it easier to engage in connective thinking.”

- *Supporting creative fluency* – “I love this idea that if we choose to be creative in the small things – if we embrace the goofy and silly and ridiculous and humorous – we have embraced that mindset that allows us to be creative in the big things.”

[“Five Ways Humor Boosts Creative Thinking and Problem-Solving in the Classroom”](#) by John Spencer, September 16, 2019 on his website

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3. What Works When Texting Parents on Their Kids’ Summer Reading

In this *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* article, Catherine Armstrong Asher (University of Michigan) and Ethan Scherer and James Kim (Harvard University) report on their study of a personalized summer text messaging program (which cost less than \$4 per student) aimed at increasing parents’ involvement in their children’s reading. The researchers found that texting any of these messages by itself had little impact:

- encourage reading for enjoyment;
- encourage reading to improve skills;
- have students set goals for summer reading.

But texting about the importance of reading for enjoyment *and* to build skills had a significant impact on parents’ involvement and students’ academic outcomes in the fall.

[“Using a Factorial Design to Maximize the Effectiveness of a Parental Text Messaging Intervention”](#) by Catherine Armstrong Asher, Ethan Scherer, and James Kim in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, July-September 2022 (Vol. 15, #3, pp. 532-557); Scherer can be reached at ethan_scherer@gse.harvard.edu.

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4. Can Teachers Be Compared Based on Their Performance Evaluations?

In this article in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, and Roddy Theobald (American Institutes for Research) report on their study of teachers’ evaluation ratings in Massachusetts schools. Although most teachers were rated Proficient (level 3 on a 4-point scale), the researchers found significant variation in the percent of teachers receiving higher or lower ratings within and between schools and districts. These differences were not a reflection of teachers’ actual effectiveness with students, but rather of varying interpretation and implementation of the state’s evaluation standards by supervisors.

The researchers say these variations may be the result of differing conceptions of effective teaching within and among schools, and/or different preferences for identifying exceptional or struggling teachers – grist for future research. They also caution that if school-

based supervisors were somehow able to achieve greater differentiation in teacher ratings, that wouldn't necessarily make the ratings more valid.

Cowan, Goldhaber, and Theobald conclude with implications of their study. First, they say, school leaders should use "caution in the use of teacher performance ratings to make high-stakes comparisons between teachers in different school settings." Second, "states that use locally implemented performance evaluations for statewide accountability efforts may need to ensure that they are consistently implemented across school districts." And third, researchers should be cautious in drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of different educator preparation and licensure programs based on the evaluations that teachers receive once they're hired.

["Performance Evaluations as a Measure of Teacher Effectiveness When Implementation Differs: Accounting for Variation Across Classrooms, Schools, and Districts"](#) by James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, and Roddy Theobald in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, July-September 2022 (Vol. 15, #3, pp. 510-531); Cowan can be reached at jcowan@air.org.

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5. The Experiences of Transgender School Staff and Students

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Mario Suárez (Utah State University), Mollie McQuillan (University of Wisconsin/Madison), and Harper Keenan and Lee Iskander (University of British Columbia/Vancouver) report on their study of the professional experiences of transgender educators, compared to that of transgender students. Some key findings:

- Although the landmark *Bostock* decision upholds the right of trans adults to employment free from gender-based discrimination in the U.S. (and the Human Rights Act gives similar protection in Canada), 23 percent of trans educators in this study said they faced gender-based barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment in PK-12 schools.
- About half of the trans educators in the study said they were planning to leave their jobs as soon as it was viable; this was close to the percent of all educators (55 percent) who said they plan to leave the profession earlier than they originally intended.
- Trans educators reported that they received significantly more support from their students than they did from their peers.
- 69 percent of trans educators reported satisfaction with their professional role.
- But there were problematic levels of workplace discrimination and harassment: 29 percent reported verbal harassment within the last year, more than one-third reported not feeling emotionally safe at work, and nearly 10 percent said they felt physically unsafe.
- About 17 percent reported losing a job, with 59 percent believing gender played a part; 23 percent believed they had not been hired at some point because of their gender identification.

- Trans educators reported fewer instances of victimization and safety concerns than trans students; 75 percent of trans students reported feeling unsafe in their schools and 83 percent reported victimization.

- The researchers note that for students, school attendance is legally required, whereas employment is noncompulsory. But there are serious concerns for both populations.

[“Differences in Trans Employees’ and Students’ School Experiences”](#) by Mario Suárez, Mollie McQuillan, Harper Keenan, and Lee Iskander in *Educational Researcher*, June/July 2022 (Vol. 51, #5, pp. 352-358); Suárez can be reached at mario.suarez@usu.edu.

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6. Award-Winning Children’s Books About Women

In this feature in *Social Education*, the National Council for the Social Studies announces the winners of the Septima Clark Women in Literature Awards for 2022 (click the link below for cover images and brief reviews):

Elementary level winner:

- *The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee* by Julie Leung, illustrated by Julie Kwon

Elementary level honorees:

- *The Leaf Detective: How Margaret Loman Uncovered Secrets in the Rainforest* by Heather Lang, illustrated by Jana Christy
- *Classified: The Secret Career of Mary Golda Ross, Cherokee Aerospace Engineer* by Traci Sorell, illustrated by Natasha Donovan

Secondary/intermediate winner:

- *Legacy: Women Poets of the Harlem Renaissance* by Nikki Grimes

Secondary/intermediate honorees:

- *Code Name Badass: The True Story of Virginia Hall* by Heather Demetrios
- *Grace Banker and Her Hello Girls Answer the Call: The Heroic Story of WWI Telephone Operators* by Claudia Friddell, illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley

[“The Septima Clark Women in Literature Award, 2022”](#) by Heidi Torres and the Awards Committee in *Social Education*, May/June 2022 (Vol. 86, #3, pp. 188-191)

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7. Short Items:

a. Revised Standards for Professional Learning – Learning Forward has just completed a major revision of its Standards for Professional Learning. The June 2022 issue of [The Learning Professional](#) is devoted to the process and content of the new standards. You can view the new standards [here](#).

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b. New Mental Health Crisis Hotline – In this NPR article, Rhitu Chatterjee gives details on the new 988 mental health crisis hotline, which went live on July 15, 2022.

[“The New 988 Mental Health Hotline Is Live. Here’s What to Know”](#) by Rhitu Chatterjee
“The New 988 Mental Health Hotline Is Live. Here’s What to Know” by Rhitu Chatterjee in
Shots: Health News from NPR, July 16, 2022

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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.

Subscriptions:

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- A free sample issue

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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 18+ 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
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