

Marshall Memo 939

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

June 6, 2022

In This Issue:

1. [Five “replacements” in American history](#)
2. [After racist incidents, including all students in the conversation](#)
3. [Using student surveys to improve teaching and learning](#)
4. [Differentiating through four stages of students’ reading development](#)
5. [What happens when students must problem-solve before instruction?](#)
6. [David Brooks’s compilation of wise and witty sayings](#)

Quotes of the Week

“You would just hope, ‘Please don’t call on me,’”

Eric Adams, New York City’s mayor, on how he felt in elementary school, in [“How Adams’s Struggle with Dyslexia Shapes His Policies as Mayor”](#) by Emma Fitzsimmons in *The New York Times*, June 2, 2022

“The phenomenon of replacement, writ large, *is* America, and has been from the beginning, sometimes by force, mostly by choice... All this is of a piece with our traditional self-understanding as a country in which a sense of common destiny bound by ideals matters more than common origins bound by blood... You cannot defend the ideal of ‘E pluribus unum’ by deleting ‘pluribus.’

Bret Stephens (see item #1)

“Given the complexities of learning to read, it is essential to consider how reading develops broadly, the role of each component of reading throughout a reader’s development, and the reality that not all readers develop in every area at the same rate.”

Melanie Kuhn and Katherine Dougherty Stahl (see item #4)

“The thing that made you weird as a kid could make you great as an adult.”

“Anything you say before the word “but” does not count.”

“It’s not an apology if it comes with an excuse.”

“Just because it’s not your fault doesn’t mean it’s not your responsibility.”

“Life hacks” from David Brooks’s compilation (see item #6)

1. Five “Replacements” in American History

In this *New York Times* column, Bret Stephens says there has been a succession of “great replacements” throughout U.S. history:

- First, Native Americans pushed aside by Europeans “through war, slaughter, ill-dealing, and wholesale expulsion;”

- Second, the replacement of Protestants, who now make up less than half of the population thanks to the migration of Catholics, Jews, and more recently, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and people of other faiths;

- Third, the ethnic replacement of the English by indentured servants from Ireland and continental Europe, then immigrants from Germany, France, Ireland, and further east. “Non-Europeans had a tougher time,” says Stephens. “The descendants of enslaved captives from Africa, the only replacements who came against their will, faced years of resistance even after emancipation. And the first major federal law to restrict immigration was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.”

- Fourth, the WASP elites are gradually being replaced by the descendants of immigrants. “To judge by enrollment figures at Brooklyn Tech or elite universities,” says Stephens, “the next generation of elites will also be immigrants or their children, many from South or East Asia.”

- Fifth, and most contentiously, the replacement of the native-born white working class by foreign-born workers. “This is both nothing new and nothing at all,” says Stephens. “The United States has, from its earliest days, repeatedly ‘replaced’ its working class with migrants, not as an act of substitution, much less as a sinister conspiracy, but as the natural result of upward mobility, the demands of a growing economy, and the benefits of a growing population.”

What this says, concludes Stephens, “is that the phenomenon of replacement, writ large, *is* America, and has been from the beginning, sometimes by force, mostly by choice. What the far right calls ‘replacement’ is better described as renewal... All this is of a piece with our traditional self-understanding as a country in which a sense of common destiny bound by ideals matters more than common origins bound by blood... You cannot defend the ideal of ‘E pluribus unum’ by deleting ‘pluribus.’”

[“The Right Weaponizes America Against Itself”](#) by Bret Stephens in *The New York Times*, May 17, 2022

[Back to page one](#)

2. After Racist Incidents, Including All Students in the Conversation

In this *Education Week* article, David Nurenberg (Lesley University) describes a leadership team meeting in a predominantly white high school right after the racially motivated murders in Buffalo, New York. Leaders were talking about how to support the small number of African-American students in the school, and Nurenberg, a consultant, pointed out that they needed to include white students as well. It's important to get past the "false narrative that racism in American was perpetuated by long-dead people and was resolved 50 years ago," he says. "Stopping the story at the Civil Rights Act of 1968 keeps white people ignorant of the ways in which structures and established practices in present-day health care, hiring, criminal justice, and drug enforcement continue to massively disadvantage people of color."

If schools don't fill in this missing narrative, Nurenberg believes, many students will hear a different story via social media, including the "great replacement" theory that motivated the Buffalo killer – that white people are victims of discrimination and in danger of being displaced and victimized by people of color. "The Buffalo shooting," he says, "should be a rallying call for schools to offer white students a genuine education about present-day racism and how it is not just perpetrated by gunmen but also reinforced by the unconscious everyday actions of so many of us ordinary white folk... If we confine our definitions of racism solely to conscious and bestial acts like those of the Buffalo suspect, white educators like me risk perpetuating the conditions that breed acts like this as well as indulging in a sense of helplessness in preventing such actions."

Part of a comprehensive curriculum unit on the origins of today's racial inequalities, says Nurenberg, are the sacrifices of white civil rights heroes like Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and Viola Liuzzo, who gave their lives for the cause. "Such an education makes fighting racial injustice seem much more relevant and much less like learning 'someone else's story' for no other purpose than to evoke guilt or sow division. Every civil rights victory was also, in some part, an active decision by white people to recognize, legally and personally, the humanity of their countrymen and to change their own behavior to reflect this."

["We Need to Talk About Racism with White Students Now"](#) by David Nurenberg in *Education Week*, June 1, 2022 (Vol. 41, #34, p. 21); Nurenberg can be reached at dnurenbe@lesley.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

3. Using Student Surveys to Improve Teaching and Learning

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Audrey Amrein-Beardsley and Tray Geiger (Arizona State University/Tempe) say the most helpful feedback teachers can receive is by surveying "the attentive, perceptive, and astute students with whom they interact daily." Student surveys, which many teachers give on their own, have several advantages over administrators' evaluations and value-added measures (VAM) based on test scores:

- Surveys elicit information from students, who have "the most up-close and in-depth knowledge of what teachers do in the classroom each day," say the authors.

- Surveys can provide specific feedback to teachers on facets of teaching that matter to students.
- The feedback can be timely and actionable, allowing teachers to promptly improve their pedagogy and curriculum.
- Surveys are more efficient and less expensive to organize than classroom observations and value-added calculations, and can avoid the design flaws inherent in those methods.
- Researchers have found that surveys yield more-reliable and stable data on teachers' impact on learning – i.e., which teachers are consistently effective, average, and ineffective over time.

However, say Amrein-Beardsley and Geiger, student surveys have a number of potential problems, including:

- Students may be biased against some teachers based on personality, race, gender, age, and other factors.
- Large class sizes and a negative schoolwide culture may put teachers in some schools at a disadvantage, regardless of their instructional skills.
- The grades students have been receiving, along with the perceived difficulty of class content, may lead students to rate teachers poorly on surveys.
- Students may not know enough about good teaching and a teacher's knowledge of subject matter to give a fair evaluation, especially in the elementary grades.
- Overly long surveys may lead students to lose focus and not take the process seriously, but short surveys may not cover important aspects of teaching.
- Schools may have difficulty surveying enough students to get a fair sampling of opinion.

These concerns, say Amrein-Beardsley and Geiger, mean that data from student surveys should not be used for high-stakes teacher evaluations, salary tiers, or merit pay. But the potential benefits suggest that survey results “*can* be powerful drivers of change, especially when teachers are permitted (and encouraged) to think carefully about what the data do and do not show, how they should interpret the results (given the specific context), and what they can learn from those results to better themselves as teachers and professionals.” The authors have these suggestions for implementing student surveys:

- Use ten or fewer well-chosen questions, each with a Likert scale.
- Questions should be based on authoritative research on effective teaching and include items on culturally responsive pedagogy.
- Questions should be applicable to teachers at different grade levels and subject areas.
- Questions should be student-friendly, straightforward, and jargon-free.
- Survey questions should complement each other and produce a “coherent story about a teacher's performance.”
- There should be at least one open-response question so students can respond in writing; this is often the most valuable feedback.

- While new questions might be introduced for unique circumstances (e.g., Covid-era remote learning) and in-school changes (e.g., team teaching), the core questions should remain the same so educators can track changes over time.
- Surveys must be anonymous so students feel safe about being completely honest; students should be discouraged from including incidents that might identify them.
- Schools should strive for a response rate of at least 70 percent by having students fill out surveys in class (or with remote surveys, reminding students by e-mail).
- Teachers shouldn't give students food, treats, or other incentives for completing surveys as that can introduce bias and invalidate results.

For surveys to have a positive effect on teaching and learning, say Amrein-Beardsley and Geiger, it's essential that teachers be involved and on board with question development, implementation, and follow-up. Teacher buy-in is essential if students are to get a positive message as surveys are administered – and also to increase the likelihood that teachers will be receptive to students' suggestions and use the results to improve their practice.

[Several additional suggestions: (a) Tripod and Panorama, two of the leading student survey companies, have made their core questions freely available, making it much easier for schools to compose high-quality surveys; (b) surveys should be given twice a year so teachers get formative feedback (perhaps in November) and can track improvements they made based on students' input (at the end of the school year); (c) schools must take care not to schedule surveys when students are "surveyed out"; (d) teachers should get survey results promptly, ideally within 24 hours; (e) teachers should look at the results with a supervisor or a critical friend and consider three questions: What positive feedback did students give? Are there questions students might have misunderstood, or results that seem unfair? What are one or two key takeaways for improving my practice? (f) school leaders should analyze overall data and organize PD, peer visitations, and study groups to address staff-wide issues; and (g) see Memos 461, 514, and 589 for additional articles on using student surveys, the first by Ronald Ferguson, a pioneer in the field. K.M.]

[“The Breakfast of Champions: Student Surveys to Sustain and Cultivate Teachers”](#) by Audrey Amrein-Beardsley and Tray Geiger in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2022 (Vol. 103, #8, pp. 49-53); the authors can be reached at audrey.beardsley@asu.edu and tjgeiger@asu.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

4. Differentiating Through Four Stages of Students' Reading Development

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Melanie Kuhn (Purdue University) and Katherine Dougherty Stahl (New York University) say that most primary-grade classrooms have readers with a variety of needs:

- Some children learn to read with little or no phonics instruction.
- Some can use pictures and a few words (*bug, butterfly*) to retell a story, but they need to learn decoding to progress as readers.

- Others can decode words in isolation but can't make sense of a connected text; they need to link their phonetic skills to vocabulary, background knowledge, and sense-making to read with comprehension.
- Students with dyslexia or a specific learning disability need a highly structured, granular approach to make sense of our alphabetic writing system.
- The majority of students need explicit teaching to crack the alphabetic code, but once they've accomplished that, say Kuhn and Stahl, an intensive approach "makes poor use of limited instructional time."

If teachers target one component of reading at a time (decoding, fluency, comprehension, motivation), say the authors, instruction will be lopsided, "causing students to get stuck in their reading development rather than making the progress they should." The key to getting all students to read proficiently is for teachers to "teach flexibly and respond to differing student needs... to think about language, vocabulary, content, and the mechanics of literacy development simultaneously, rather than in opposition to one another."

Kuhn and Stahl believe "reading development is best treated as a holistic process in which some elements need to be consistently emphasized throughout (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension) while others (e.g., alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness) should take on greater or lesser attention depending on student needs. Such a reconsideration involves looking at the ways various components of reading (and writing and language development) support each other, beginning from a child's earliest interactions with text and continuing throughout a reader's life." Here's how the authors believe it plays out in four stages of children's development as readers:

- *Emergent literacy* – Young children at this stage (preschool and before) hear words spoken around them, notice environmental print, are read to, and become familiar with how books work: title and author, letters forming words, words separated by spaces, left-to-right progression, pages turning as a story unfolds. Children learn these concepts about print through:

- Intentional instruction – learning letters and the sounds they make, stretching out the sounds of words, practicing letter recognition;
- Reading and play – rhyming words, playground clapping games, nursery rhymes, stories, poems, and predictable books;
- Early writing – reinforcing the alphabetic principle and the connection between sounds and words on the page;
- Oral language development – telling stories with a beginning, middle, and end and broadening vocabulary;
- Background knowledge – Exposure to informational texts and their unique features.

All this lays the groundwork for students' book reading skills in the years ahead.

- *Novice readers* – At this stage (often first grade), the focus shifts to actual decoding, which needs to be systematic, purposeful, and differentiated (with groupings within the classroom and scaffolding by the teacher). "Because most students need a lot of support learning to blend sounds into words," say Kuhn and Stahl, "much of the reading at this point

involves relatively simple material with an emphasis on familiar content, regular word patterns, and a limited number of high-frequency words.” Decodable texts are essential, but students should also be exposed to poems, texts with controlled vocabulary, predictable texts, books with conversational language, and simple informational material. Readalouds should be used for picture and chapter books and more-challenging informational texts – for enjoyment and to build vocabulary and conceptual knowledge.

Writing has a reciprocal relationship with early reading and the two are mutually supportive. “There is no need to wait for phonemic awareness to be fully established before asking students to compose,” say Kuhn and Stahl. “In fact, allowing them to use inventive, or phonemic, spelling will increase their developing letter-sound knowledge. At the same time, there is no sound reason to push instruction too early.” Some preschools have students learn the 100 most-common high-frequency words, which is “developmentally inappropriate,” say the authors, “and can lead to frustration and even anxiety that hinders their development.”

Kuhn and Stahl list several ways to teach decoding: synthetic, analytic, analogy, and spelling-based. “Which method a teacher uses,” they say, “should depend on teacher knowledge, experience, comfort with the material, and the needs of students.” Whatever method is used, decoding must be accompanied by substantial time reading connected texts. Teachers also need to continue expanding students’ vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and conceptual understanding by reading aloud and discussing more-complex material, high-quality literature, and informational texts. The more topics and genres are used, and the more they connect to students’ interests, the greater the chance of motivating all students to do the daily work of becoming proficient readers. “Luckily,” say the authors, “there are far more selections on a larger range of topics available for novice readers than there used to be, making it easier to lay the base for successfully reading an assortment of complex texts across a variety of categories.”

- *Transitional readers* – The focus at this stage (often second and third grade) is making word recognition increasingly automatic (freeing up working memory to focus on meaning) and improving prosody (appropriate pacing, phrasing, emphasis, and pitch). Teachers can support these by continuing to expose students to a variety of texts at the upper end of their instructional level (85-90 percent accuracy), tuning in to students’ individual needs, and scaffolding instruction by having students read with a partner, engage in choral reading, and echo the teacher’s oral reading. These have been shown to be more effective than the often-discussed practice of repeated reading, say Kuhn and Stahl.

Some teachers overemphasize reading speed, which can impede students’ development of important components of comprehension. “Unless instruction incorporates all the elements of fluency,” say the authors, “some students will experience a new set of difficulties with their reading development.” Their decoding may remain slow and inefficient, they’ll rely too much on context, and sense-making will suffer. “What is important at this stage,” they say, “is that students spend substantial amounts of time reading connected texts, with and without scaffolding, to ensure that they transfer what they are learning about word recognition to their reading.” This can be accomplished by whole-class instruction, large and small groups, dyads

and triads, reading along with audio recordings, reading widely for enjoyment, and reading and writing across the curriculum, including in science and social studies classes. All of this builds background knowledge, conceptual understanding, enjoyment, and the desire to read more and more.

- *Post-transitional readers* – At this stage (upper-elementary grades and beyond), students are increasingly proficient at decoding and fluency and can read independently and understand material with increasing amounts of content; there’s more classroom emphasis on vocabulary and knowledge development in the content areas. “However,” say Kuhn and Stahl, “mechanics should not be entirely set aside.” An effective curriculum should include (with less classroom time than in the lower grades) the structure of words (morphology) and “situational fluency” – understanding the importance of varying pace and tone depending on the material and the purpose for reading. Students will be stronger readers at the post-transitional stage if they have been exposed to plenty of informational texts in the lower grades. Without that foundation of conceptual knowledge and vocabulary, students who appear to be proficient readers in third grade may struggle when they encounter more substantive material.

Kuhn and Stahl’s closing message: “Many of the disputes surrounding best practices are the result of taking what is appropriate for some children and applying it to all learners... Given the complexities of learning to read, it is essential to consider how reading develops broadly, the role of each component of reading throughout a reader’s development, and the reality that not all readers develop in every area at the same rate.” So if some students are reading in first grade, there’s no reason to include them in whole-class decoding instruction. Alternatively, if some third graders are still struggling with blending letter-sounds into words, working with a group of students with similar needs (or providing one-on-one attention) will be more effective than addressing the issue with the whole class. Of course, there are plenty of situations where teaching the whole class is best: hearing a book read aloud, choral-reading a poem, or a classroom discussion.

“By carefully considering both the reading process and the needs of learners,” say Kuhn and Stahl, “it becomes possible not only to improve reading instruction, but also to increase the likelihood that every student will develop as a skilled reader.”

[“Teaching Reading: Development and Differentiation”](#) by Melanie Kuhn and Katherine Dougherty Stahl in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2022 (Vol. 103, #8, pp. 25-31); the authors can be reached at melaniek@purdue.edu and kay.stahl@nyu.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

5. What Happens When Students Must Problem-Solve Before Instruction?

In this *Journal of the Learning Sciences* article, Tanmay Sinha (ETH Zurich, Switzerland) describes a study of students’ emotions as they tried to solve a problem before a teacher’s explanation – an instructional sequence that has shown promising results in some classrooms. Sinha asked 132 university students to solve a problem with varying levels of difficulty and scaffolding and used a webcam to measure their facial expressions and head movements as they displayed a range of emotions:

- Knowledge emotions – surprise, interest, confusion;
- Hostile emotions – anger, disgust, fear, contempt, pain;
- Self-conscious emotions – shame, sadness;
- Pleasurable emotions – happiness.

As students wrestled with the problem, Sinha was able to do a frame-by-frame analysis and code 28 unique categories of emotion. His conclusions:

- Having students engage in problem-solving prior to a teacher’s explanations can be difficult and elicit strong emotions, especially if there’s little scaffolding to support getting to the solution.

- With the most frustrating problems accompanied by the least support, students’ predominant emotion was shame – and surprisingly, this was associated with both metacognitive and cognitive benefits. Sinha theorizes that this happens because shame can reorient students to their goals, values, and self-image and can lead to more-accurate self-evaluation and problem solving.

- Getting scaffolding and support as students worked on the problem brought out knowledge emotions – surprise, interest, and confusion – and those led to effective problem-solving.

- The hostile emotions of anger and disgust had surprisingly positive associations, while contempt had a negative effect.

- The pleasurable emotion of happiness had mixed associations: positive with post-test outcomes but negative with post-tests of knowledge transfer.

Sinha is not recommending that teachers expose students to shame and other negative emotions “for extended periods.” Indeed, he says, “this can result in a negative thinking spiral that can deplete the cognitive ability to problem-solve proactively.” But he believes that a moderate amount of these emotions during problem-solving can be beneficial. That’s because it can keep students alerted to challenges that require focused attention, and can help them understand conflicting information. In addition, managing such feelings is an important part of emotional intelligence – something teachers are constantly working to develop in their students. “When students broaden their emotional vocabulary or describe their emotions more precisely,” says Sinha, “they can take the first step toward accurately diagnosing emotional states and choosing an appropriate response strategy. Such an investment is likely to reap benefits for both achievement and their emotional well-being.”

[“Enriching Problem-Solving Followed by Instruction with Explanatory Accounts of Emotions”](#)

by Tanmay Sinha in *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, April-June 2022 (Vol. 31, #2, pp. 151-198); Sinha can be reached at tanmay.sinha@gess.ethz.ch.

[Back to page one](#)

6. David Brooks’s Compilation of Wise and Witty Sayings

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks shares a selection of “life hacks to help you float effortlessly through the miasma of modern existence.” Here are some of them:

- The thing that made you weird as a kid could make you great as an adult.

- Take photos of things your parents do every day. That's how you'll want to remember them.
- Job interviews are not really about you. They are about the employer's needs and how you can fill them.
- Ignore what they are thinking of you because they are not thinking of you.
- The biggest lie we tell ourselves is, "I don't need to write this down because I will remember it."
- Denying or deflecting a compliment is rude. Accept it with thanks.
- Anything you say before the word "but" does not count.
- It's not an apology if it comes with an excuse.
- Just because it's not your fault doesn't mean it's not your responsibility.
- If you're not sure you can carry it all, take two trips.
- Always make the call. If you're disturbed or confused by something somebody did, always pick up the phone.
- If you can't make up your mind between two options, flip a coin. Don't decide based on which side of the coin came up. Decide based on your emotional reactions to which side came up.
- Never be furtive. If you're doing something you don't want others to find out about, it's probably wrong.
- When you're beginning a writing project, give yourself permission to write badly. You can't fix it until it's down on paper.
- If you meet a jerk once a month, you've met a jerk. If you meet jerks every day, you're a jerk.
- Don't try to figure out what your life is about. It's too big a question. Just figure out what the next three years are about.

[“The Greatest Life Hacks in the World \(for Now\)”](#) by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, June 2, 2022

[Back to page one](#)

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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