Marshall Memo 968

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 9, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Home visits provide an opportunity for children to see that their families and teachers are on the same team, for teachers to demonstrate respect for families, for families and teachers to support one another, and for families and teachers to work together in support of the child."

Judy Paulick, Soyoung Park, and Ariel Cornett (see item #4)

"ChatGPT has no interest in you whatsoever. It isn't curious about your goals or motivated to help you meet them. It lacks the good faith to tell you when your goals are misplaced."

Evan Selinger in "ChatGPT Taught Me Something Powerful About Human Collaboration" in *The Boston Sunday Globe*, December 25, 2022

"Seek feedback about what went wrong. Analyze these errors and use them as opportunities for learning. Think of ways to do things differently when you try again."

Daniel Willingham on the best advice to a struggling student (see item #5)

"If educators discourage procedural fluency with, for example, the times tables, they are undercutting students' ability to grasp the relationships inherent in fractions instantly, which derails the long-term process of making math easier, and thus more fun for learners."

Barbara Oakley and Terrence Sejnowski in "The Promise of Habit-Based Learning" in *Law and Liberty*, November 21, 2022

"Put simply, Twitter's value is how easy it makes it to talk. Its cost is how hard it makes it to listen."

Ezra Klein (see item #1)

1. Ezra Klein on Twitter, Quaker Meetings, and Wikipedia

In this *New York Times* article, Ezra Klein doubts that social media has lived up to the "hopeful imaginings" of its early days. "Is the world more democratic?" he asks. "Is G.D.P. growth higher? Is innovation faster? Do we seem wiser? Do we seem kinder? Are we happier? Shouldn't something, anything, have gotten noticeably better in the short decades since these services fought their way into our lives?"

Absolutely not, he says, and the reason is that "the cost of so much connection and information has been the deterioration of our capacity for attention and reflection." Attention is a collective resource, the ability to focus on society's most pressing problems. Like other collective resources – fresh air, clean water – it can be polluted or depleted.

Everyone is vying for our attention, says Klein: advertisers, politicians, news outlets, social media feeds. "The competition is fierce, and it has led to more sensationalism, more outrageous or infuriating content, more algorithmic tricks, more of anything that might give a brand or a platform or a politician an edge, even as it leaves us harried, irritable, and distracted." Studies show that negative information gets a stronger emotional response than positive information; that's what captures our attention and drives online traffic.

Twitter embodies this dynamic, making it "easy to discuss hard topics poorly," says Klein. "Twitter forces nuanced thoughts down to bumper-sticker bluntness. The chaotic, always moving newsfeed leaves little time for reflection on whatever has just been read. The algorithm's obsession with likes and retweets means users mainly see (and produce) speech that flatters their community or demonizes those they already loathe. The quote tweet function encourages mockery rather than conversation."

It's true that Twitter has been key to putting evidence of longstanding issues in people's faces, playing a key role in changing the conversation about racism and sexual harassment. "And it has also, of course, given new succor and life to the racist right," says Klein. "Put simply, Twitter's value is how easy it makes it to talk. Its cost is how hard it makes it to listen."

ChatGPT and artificial intelligence programs like it will only make this worse, he believes. "They will be deployed to produce whatever makes us most likely to click. But these systems do not and cannot know what they are producing. The cost of creating and optimizing content that grabs our attention is plummeting, but the cost of producing valuable and truthful work isn't. These are technologies that lend themselves to cacophony, not community."

Quakers have an approach that we need to consider, says Klein: silence. In a typical meeting, Quakers sit quietly, sometimes for more than an hour, until someone is moved to say something relevant and important. The same approach is used to make decisions. "I find this

powerful in part because I see it in myself," he says. "I know how I respond in the heat of an argument, when my whole being is tensed to react. And I know how I process hard questions or difficult emotions after quiet reflection, when there is time for my spirit to settle. I know which is my better self."

Obviously we can't run a democracy like a Quaker meeting, says Klein, "but there is wisdom here worth mulling." We don't make our best decisions when our minds are "active and fretful" – pretty much a description of the brain on Twitter, firing off declarative statements and watching expectantly for likes and retweets.

One hopeful sign, concludes Klein, is that major social media platforms seem to be in decline. Perhaps, he says, "the social media web is reaching its terminal point." What are possible alternatives? He describes Taiwan's PTT Bulletin Board, a widely used platform that knits together "civil society – the layer of associations and organizations between government and the market." And he points to Wikipedia, one of the most-visited sites on the Web. "It is a commons but one that is governed so we may use it rather than so that it may use us," he says. "It gives so much more than it takes. It thrives, quietly and gently, as a reminder that a very different Internet, governed in a very different way, intended for a very different purpose, is possible."

"The Great Delusion Behind Twitter" by Ezra Klein in *The New York Times*, December 11, 2022

Back to page one

2. What's Behind the Dramatic Decline in Teen Births?

In this *New York Times* article, Jason DeParle reports that teen births in the U.S. have fallen 71 percent since 1981 – 85 percent among young teens. The decline has been almost the same across racial/ethnic lines, and the rate is accelerating:

- 20 percent in the 1990s;
- 28 percent in the 2000s;
- 55 percent in the 2010s.

In 1992, a quarter of fifteen-year-old girls became mothers before turning 20; today, that's true of only 6 percent of fifteen-year-olds.

In the same time frame, there's also been a decline in child poverty, which raises the question of cause and effect. Do fewer teen births (due to increased contraceptive use, lower rates of teen sex, and strong cultural messages) drive down child poverty because young women have a chance to finish school, start careers, form more-mature relationships, and raise their income before they raise children? Or has the reduction in child poverty (steeper among girls than boys) given young women a sense of opportunity, greater optimism about their futures, and a strong incentive to defer having children?

"They're going to school and seeing new career paths open," says Melissa Kearney (University of Maryland). "Whether they are excited about their own opportunities or feel that unreliable male partners leave them no choice, it leads them in the same direction – not becoming a young mother." Brad Wilcox (University of Virginia) agrees: "There is just a

greater confidence among young women that they have educational and professional opportunities." (Wilcox attributes some of the decline in teen sexual activity to the amount of time they are spending on screens.)

Research and anecdotal evidence, concludes DeParle, suggest that it's not either/or between reducing child poverty and avoiding teen pregnancy. Deferring pregnancy does not guarantee escaping poverty, and economic opportunity doesn't preclude getting derailed by early childrearing responsibilities. We need a full-court press on both fronts.

DeParle tells the stories of three young women, all children of teen mothers, who changed their likely trajectories. "I did what it took not to have children," said one. It involved a lot of determination, hard work, some luck, putting up with taunts from other girls for not being more sexually active, and in one case, dealing with bouts of depression. All three women celebrated making it into their twenties before having a child. "If I die tomorrow," said one who is now married with a child and has a new house and an above-average income, "I can say I achieved the American dream. But if I had gotten pregnant as a teenager? I'm not sure, but I don't think so."

"Their Mothers Were Teenagers. They Didn't Want That for Themselves" by Jason DeParle in *The New York Times*, January 1, 2023

Back to page one

3. A Doctor Who Prescribes Books to Young Adolescents

In this *School Library Journal* article, pediatrician Jaclyn Sisskind (SUNY Upstate Medical University) describes doing a routine medical examination on a teenager who had multiple school absences, was living with an aunt because her mother could no longer care for her, and seemed lonely. Early in the exam, Sisskind asked, "What books do you like?" The girl rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, I hate to read." As Sisskind checked heartbeat and swollen glands she said, "Maybe you need to read a book about a kid who is just like you." "I'd like that," came the reply.

Asked for details, the girl said, "Well, she would have to be super funny. She would be really smart, even though everyone assumes she isn't smart at all. She would be fun to hang out with, but sometimes she would make bad choices. Oh, and her hair would be amazing!" On the girl's phone, they pulled up the library website and found *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo. After hearing the doctor's pitch for the book, the girl promised to read it.

"I ask every patient I see what they are reading," says Sisskind. "It's my magic trick. It catches kids off guard and opens the door for them to talk about themselves, their interests, and their imagination. It is a tool to crack open the shell, just a little, while I check their ears, monitor their growth, and ask about school… I have used books to make kids laugh, to help kids process hard times, and to let kids know they are not alone." With a patient dealing with multiple challenges, Sisskind prescribed seven books to help with body image, the loss of her mother, sexual identity, and finding her voice (see the list in the link below).

Given the power of these connections, it distressed Sisskind to find that some of the books she recommends have been removed from school and community libraries. "What

message does it send if a book is labeled 'inappropriate' when they have seen themselves in those pages?" she asks. "What does that tell someone who has been informed that this book, which mirrors their life, is unacceptable to others?"

Sisskind salutes educators who are fighting book bans: "To all of you, thank you. I stand with you. Your books are important and need to be read. My patients need you. *I* need you. Keep trying."

"Rx for Connection" by Jaclyn Sisskind in *School Library Journal*, January 2023 (Vol. 69, #1, pp. 10-11)

Back to page one

4. Getting the Most from Educators' Home Visits

In this *American Journal of Education* article, Judy Paulick (University of Virginia), Soyoung Park (Bank Street Graduate School of Education), and Ariel Cornett (Georgia Southern University) say that when teachers make home visits, there is great potential for "learning about children and working in solidarity with families." Talking with family members on their home turf changes the power dynamic (many families feel "particularly uncomfortable" visiting classrooms) and opens the door for building trust and sharing important information from both sides about children's learning.

But home visits, however well intentioned, lose their potential if they replicate the power dynamics of in-school parent-teacher conferences and family math and literacy nights, where teachers are positioned as empowered experts and families as disempowered learners. "Simply visiting homes," say the authors, "does not ensure listening."

To get the most out of home visits, say Paulick, Park, and Cornett, educators need to be aware of hierarchical power dynamics and consider "who gets to speak, in what language, and about what topics." They analyzed home visits in two U.S. elementary schools and found that almost all visits followed a similar pattern:

- Families were expecting teachers and had tidied up their homes and caged their pets.
- Family members and children greeted teachers at the door and everyone was seated.
- After brief chit-chat (for example, describing a recent visit to Mexico, children showing the books they were reading), teachers stated the purpose of the visit. Two examples:
- "This is our second home visit with you, and we're here to talk about Julio and Gael. In this meeting, we'll talk to you about their academic progress as well as their behavior and any disciplinary issues. Shall we start with Julio?"
- "We wanted to come by and say hello and to bring by some information. Here are some Goldfish for you, [child], and some pencils. And this is some information about our class and back-to-school night, which is this Thursday. You can come to the classroom and see [child's] hopes and dreams [up on the bulletin board]."
- Teachers usually shared standardized test scores and talked about specific areas in which students could improve.

"In each instance," say Paulick, Park, and Cornett, "teachers positioned themselves as the center of the meeting. Their views, opinions, and insights were the primary drivers for the conversations with families." Teachers asked most of the questions and determined when the visit was over. Although a phone translation program was available, conversations in home visits from one school took place in English, which was not the language of the home. "Teachers expressed reluctance to speak a language in which they were not fluent," say the authors, "but they did not acknowledge the likelihood of similar feelings from families."

"To summarize," say Paulick, Park, and Cornett, "we found that even though these home visits were expressly intended to build relationships rather than to remediate families' deficiencies, overwhelmingly the teachers and families fell back on traditional patterns of power in these interactions. Parents were positioned as learners; teachers were positioned as experts." This was true even when teachers were of the same racial/ethnic group as family members and spoke the language of the home.

There were a few exceptions which, say the authors, give "a glimpse into what is possible." Several vignettes:

- When teachers asked parents open-ended questions – "Do you have any questions for me?" – parents were more active in the conversation (although teachers only sometimes asked follow-up questions).
- In a few cases, a teacher's open-ended question to a child – *What other questions do you have about fifth grade?* – elicited important new information (bullying on the bus) and a promise to follow up.
- When a mother asked what to do about her daughter's friends copying her homework, a teacher said that was not okay, confirming the mother's instinct.
- During a home visit, a mother told her son to stop hiding his face behind a pillow. The son refused, but when the teacher backed up the mother's request, he complied.
- Fathers were more likely than mothers to take the initiative, asking, in one case, about translating a daughter's questions in the classroom, in another, asserting the family's values about the importance of education, in another, expressing pride in a child learning three languages.
- In a few cases, mothers peppered teachers with questions – about their children's adjustment to the class, whether the playground was open after hours, what happened to the cookies sent to the class on the child's birthday, piano lessons at home – and teachers responded.

"Home visits," conclude Paulick, Park, and Cornett, "provide an opportunity for children to see that their families and teachers are on the same team, for teachers to demonstrate respect for families, for families and teachers to support one another, and for families and teachers to work together in support of the child… Having the teacher – traditionally an authority figure – in the home supporting the parents' parenting can be powerful."

For home visits to fulfill this potential, say the authors, there needs to be additional training and structure so teachers enter their students' homes with a humble "fund-of-knowledge" and relationship-building orientation, recognizing that "families have important

assets that teachers must be able to see and learn from" – repositioning themselves as learners and listeners in their students' homes. Four starting points suggested by the study: teachers asking genuinely open-ended questions; using the language of the home; getting parents sharing parenting challenges on which teachers might provide support; and intentionally involving fathers.

"Power Dynamics and Positioning in Teacher Home Visits with Marginalized Families" by Judy Paulick, Soyoung Park, and Ariel Cornett in *American Journal of Education*, November 2022 (Vol. 129, #1, pp. 53-78); the authors can be reached at jhp7h@virginia.edu, spark2@bankstreet.edu, and kcornett@georgiasouthern.edu.

Back to page one

5. Daniel Willingham Updates the Research on Growth Mindset

In this article in *American Educator*, cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham (University of Virginia) says that over the last decade, there's been a huge amount of writing and school PD about Carol Dweck's work. Many educators, he says, "feel they've been harangued on the subject of growth mindset, and they are tired of it." In addition, there's been pushback on the research, especially on whether it's possible to shift students' beliefs about their own intelligence and ability.

Willingham says the most recent research confirms the correlation between a growth mindset, academic achievement (especially among disadvantaged students), and a number of helpful beliefs about schoolwork. The largest international study of half a million 15-year-olds (by PISA) found that students with a growth mindset scored 32-points better than fixed-mindset students on a reading test, were more motivated to master tasks, set more-ambitious learning goals for themselves, saw more value in going to school, and had less fear of failure.

But the PISA data also showed wide variation among countries, with large effects in some and none at all in others. This suggests that there must be other factors involved, says Willingham, and he describes several studies that tried to get a handle on what might be going on. It appears that growth mindset interventions have greater impact when:

- Other students in a class or school believe it's appropriate to take on challenging work.
- The intervention happens before students have selected their courses for the next year.
- Teachers have a growth mindset about their students' intelligence and ability.

When these and other factors are not present, growth mindset interventions have much less impact – or none at all.

Willingham identifies three specific ways teachers can encourage students when they have an academic setback:

- *Seek feedback about what went wrong.*
- *Analyze these errors and use them as opportunities for learning.*
- *Think of ways to do things differently when you try again.*

What's clear is that attempts to shift students to a growth mindset have to be carefully tailored to each situation and be part of a coordinated effort by thoughtful educators to improve attitudes and achievement.

Is it worth trying to promote a growth mindset? "Yes," says Willingham. "We know there aren't any silver bullets. We have to take many small steps with the expectation that each will make a small contribution to greater student success." The most efficient and effective interventions to promote students' growth mindset, he says, are designed to be taken online (one of these can be completed in just two 25-minute sessions). Willingham suggests checking out https://www.mindsetkit.org for free materials.

"Does Developing a Growth Mindset Help Students Learn?" by Daniel Willingham in *American Educator*, Winter 2022-23 (Vol. 46, #4, pp. 35-39); Willingham can be reached at willingham@virginia.edu.

Back to page one

6. Getting Students Doing Their Own Thinking in Math Classes

In this *Edutopia* article, middle-school teacher Crystal Frommert says that early in her career she *thought* her students were doing the intellectual heavy lifting, but in fact, "I was encouraging my students to *mimic rather than think*." She taught new concepts from the front of the room, asked questions to check for understanding, heard correct answers from a few students, and assigned homework – only to hear numerous complaints the next day from students who found it too hard. "But I taught it," she said to herself, "why didn't they get it?"

Inspired by Peter Liljedahl's book, *Building Thinking Classrooms*, Frommert learned to restrain herself from doing too much for students and get them doing their struggling and hard work in class. As a result, she became more of a coach than a sage on the stage and gave students more-differentiated and effective help. Here's what she learned:

• *Answer questions with thinking-producing questions*. As she moves around the room, Frommert responds to substantive questions by asking:

- *What have you done so far?*
- *Where did you get that number?*
- *What information is given in the problem?*
- *Does that number seem reasonable in this situation?*

With low-level questions (*Is this right? Will this be on the test?*) Frommert acknowledges them but avoids giving direct answers.

• *Don't carry a pencil or marker*. If you have something to write with, she says, "you'll be tempted to write for them." Better to give verbal prompts and hints. If another student or group has worked out the problem, show the strategies they used.

• *Collective work.* When groups of students are assigned a set of problems, they frequently divvy up the work (*You do #30, I'll do #31*). Frommert nips this in the bud, insisting that students solve all the problems together, using their collective insights so they all learn what needs to be done.

• *Stall with answers*. When Frommert hears a basic computational question (*What's 3 divided by 5?*), she acts like she's busy helping another student and promises to be right back. "By the time I return to them," she says, "they are way past their question. They will ask a

classmate, work it out, or look it up. If the teacher is not available to think for them, they learn to find alternative resources."

• *Set boundaries*. Students often ask a question simply because the teacher is nearby. In such cases, Frommert asks, "Are you asking me a thinking question? I'm glad to give you a hint or nudge, but I cannot take away your opportunity to think." This trains students to think before asking so they can frame better questions.

"5 Ways to Stop Thinking for Your Students" by Crystal Frommert in *Edutopia*, December 8, 2022

Back to page one

7. Advice on Giving Advice to Teens About Drugs

In this *New York Times* compilation by The Learning Network, 16 teenagers give some blunt guidance to adults on how they should talk to them about drugs. Here are the headlines:

- Honesty is the best policy.
- Focus on harm reduction.
- Start conversations early.
- Help kids understand the risks.
- Share your personal experiences.
- Talk in ways that teens like to listen.
- Make a safe space to ask questions.
- Know that for some young people, scare tactics can work.

"How Teens Think Adults Should Talk to Them About Drugs" by The Learning Network in *The New York Times*, December 1, 2022

Back to page one

8. Books to Complement the New Pinocchio Movie

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Abby Johnson recommends three books that upper-elementary and middle-school students might enjoy if they've watched the movie *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* (in theaters, on Netflix):

- *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo, grade 3-6
- *Cog* by Greg Van Eekhout, grade 4-6
- *A Tale Dark and Grimm* by Adam Gidwitz, grade 4-7

"Exploring Humanity" by Abby Johnson in *School Library Journal*, December 2022 (Vol. 68, #12, p. 18)

Back to page one

9. Short Items:

a. Can You Guess If This Was Written by ChatGPT? – In this *New York Times* article, reporters challenge us to tell whether several pieces of writing were produced by the new artificial intelligence chatbot or real-live students.

"Did a Fourth Grader Write This? Or the New Chatbot?" by Claire Cain Miller, Adam Playford, Larry Buchanan, and Aaron Krolik in *The New York Times*, January 4, 2023

Back to page one

b. The Marshall Memo Story – In this *Principal Leadership* article, Kim Marshall tells how this weekly publication got started and is produced, and five ways it's used by subscribers around the world.

"Fit to Learn: Sharing What Works" by Kim Marshall in *Principal Leadership*, January 2023 (Vol. 23, #5, pp. 22-24)

Back to page one

c. A Matrix for Assessing Assessments – In her CEEL newsletter, Alexis Wiggins shares this matrix (created by her father, Grant Wiggins) for looking at the format and cognitive demand of a quiz, essay prompt, or performance task.

"Assessing Assessments" by Alexis Wiggins in her CEEL Newsletter, Winter 2023; Wiggins can be reached at awiggins@ceelcenter.org.

Back to page one

d. Interesting Factoids from 2022 – Here's a collection of facts from daily editions of *The New York Times* last year.

"71 of Our Favorite Facts from 2022" by The Inside The Times Staff, illustrations by Joohee Yoon, in *The New York Times*, January 1, 2023

Back to page one

If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly publication keeps principals, teachers, instructional coaches, superintendents, and other educators well-informed on current K-12 research and ideas. Kim Marshall, drawing on 53 years 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 Tuesday (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's also a podcast and HTML version.

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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 SmartBrief
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
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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
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