Marshall Memo 912

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 22, 2021

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Teenagers swim in a sea of digital information… If youth consume information without the ability to assess its credibility – unable to tell who is behind a cause and what their motives might be – they are easy marks for rogues of all stripes."

Joel Breakstone, Mark Smith, Sam Wineburg, Amie Rapaport, Jill Carle, Marshall Garland, and Anna Saavedra (see item #3)

"We thought homework was great… until we had children of our own. Then the tears came, along with the feelings of incompetence, the negativity, more tears, thinly veiled references to running away, and some quietly mumbled cusswords. And that was just from us!"

Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele (see item #1)

"The more students read, the better readers they become. Unfortunately, poor readers spend significantly more time *learning about how to read* than they do actually reading, which limits their access to the best and most motivating part of reading: the worlds it opens to readers."

Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele (*ibid*.)

"Unfortunately, the term *formative assessment* is often misunderstood by practicing educators to mean simply pausing every once in a while to ask, 'Does everybody understand?'"

Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele (*ibid*.)

"Somewhere – likely within your own faculty – there are teachers who have strengths in the same areas where you have needs, and there are teachers who have needs in the same areas where you have strengths. Share your strengths, and reach out for help with your weaknesses."

Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele (*ibid*.)

"Every student deserves to be heard in the classroom, but making sure that happens isn't easy. The eager student with their hand up after every question may shut down contributions from

others, while the wallflower in the back may have a perspective others haven't considered but doesn't feel comfortable sharing it. Balancing the dynamics between students requires the teacher to work very intentionally to make space so that every student can share their thoughts. And hearing from a variety of students is essential for on-the-fly formative assessment – is it time to move on, or does this point need reteaching?"

Hoa Nguyen in "How to Open Class Participation to Everyone" in *Edutopia*, November 5, 2021

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1. Ineffective Practices That Need to Be Shown the Door

(Originally titled *Why Are We Still Doing That?*)

In this ASCD book, Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele (husband and wife teacher educators at Millersville University) suggest alternatives to six classroom practices they believe are "ineffective or inadvertently damaging."

• *Round robin reading* – Calling on students to read aloud from an unfamiliar text in front of peers, either in a particular order or popcorn style, is problematic for a number of reasons, say the Himmeles. But it's still used in many classrooms because teachers believe it's the best way to hold students accountable, teach fluency, and build comprehension. The problem is that high-stakes public performances can bring out the worst in struggling students, make them feel like bad readers, and produce embarrassment and loss of status. In addition, this unfortunate dynamic distracts many students from the content that's being read, undermines comprehension, and gives very little reading practice to individual students.

"The more students read, the better readers they become," say the authors. "Unfortunately, poor readers spend significantly more time *learning about how to read* than they do actually reading, which limits their access to the best and most motivating part of reading: the worlds it opens to readers."

Alternatives – The Himmeles suggest choral reading, shared reading (with an enlarged text), studying song lyrics, oral assisted reading, reciprocal reading, and plenty of individual reading time with student-chosen texts.

• *Teaching to learning styles* – The theory is that children learn best when content is presented in a way that aligns with their individual learning styles – most often visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The Himmeles summarize the problems: first, trying to customize content to individual students can be suboptimal for conveying what's being taught – for example, contriving a kinesthetic learning experience for something best taught visually.

Second, students may internalize the belief that they can learn only in certain ways, narrowing their repertoire. And third, research has failed to show that teaching to learning styles works. This "neuromyth" persists, say the authors, because it's intuitively appealing – each student is unique – and many teachers "just love the idea," dismissing the arguments against it.

Alternatives – The Himmeles suggest that teachers use metacognitive approaches (getting students thinking about how they think and learn) and plan the best modalities for the whole class to reach the intended learning outcome – which might include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements. For example, teaching numbers to first graders, a teacher might use written numbers, unifix cubes, oral number stories, and laminated copies of a 100s chart for each child. "This multimodal type of lesson is especially helpful for English learners," say the authors, "because it helps them learn both language and content at the same time while including frequent checks for understanding."

• *Homework as the default* – "We thought homework was great," they say, "until we had children of our own. Then the tears came, along with the feelings of incompetence, the negativity, more tears, thinly veiled references to running away, and some quietly mumbled cusswords. And that was just from us!" The research evidence on homework, they say, is mixed. There's no clear evidence that it boosts achievement in the elementary grades, and it can create undue stress, turn struggling children off learning, and drive home the idea that they can't work independently and aren't good students. This is especially true if students get zeroes for homework not handed in, drastically pulling down their grades. As the quote above suggests, homework can create problems at home, with studies showing greater downsides in non-English-speaking and low-income families.

Alternatives – Assign homework judiciously and with intention, say the Himmeles. Before sending home an assignment, teachers should ask themselves if it truly adds value, if students will be able to complete it within a reasonable amount of time, how much support they have at home, the consequence for not doing it, and whether the assignment might undermine motivation and interest in the content. In addition, the Himmeles suggest rethinking assumptions about parental involvement with homework: Is it the best way parents can support their children? Are they the best enforcers (*No videogames until it's finished*)? And should they be involved instructionally? Finally, the authors suggest that schools support healthy after-school habits, including reading, hobbies, and productive parent-child conversations.

• *Formative assessment imposters* – Checking for understanding during lessons, in ways that inform and potentially transform instruction, is solidly endorsed by decades of research (Dylan Wiliam cites evidence that it can add an extra six to nine months of learning during a school year). "Unfortunately," say the Himmeles, "the term *formative assessment* is often misunderstood by practicing educators to mean simply pausing every once in a while to ask, 'Does everybody understand?'" That's an "imposter" for formative assessment, they say. Others include commercial benchmark tests, cold-calling, and the traditional Q&A (a "class discussion" in which the teacher converses with a few eager-beaver students).

Alternatives – "By the end of every lesson," say the Himmeles, "teachers who use authentic formative assessment have a pretty good feel for which students understand the

content and who needs more help." That happens when teachers embed whole-class participation techniques in lessons – for example, a chalkboard splash, pause/star/rank, student answers on dry-erase boards or via clickers, focusing on feedback over grades, circulating and continuously monitoring learning, and replacing "Any questions?" with "What questions do you have?" or "Ask me two questions."

• *Test-obsessed practices* – U.S. schools have begun to move away from the test prep mania of the high-stakes standardized-test No Child Left Behind days – prioritizing "the short-term appearance of progress over *actual* progress." But not fast enough, say the Himmeles. They're still seeing rigid pacing guides, publicly displayed data walls, teaching to sample test items, shortchanging science and social studies, and ignoring the input of content experts.

Alternatives – The simplest remedy, say the authors, is stopping those negative practices. "Don't be bullied by a rigid pacing guide," they argue; resist teaching to sample test items, take down the public data walls ("keep progress private"), promote curriculum depth over breadth, maintain a healthy skepticism toward test prep-oriented data-driven decision making, restore social studies and science as essential disciplines, and re-prioritize a love of reading.

• *Behavior charts and withholding recess* – "A punitive response to student misconduct can often feel like the most effective and logical consequence to student misbehaviors," say the Himmeles, "but in reality, when it involves shame, it often leads to repeated or worse behaviors." That's what happens, they believe, with public charting of student behavior and keeping misbehaving students in from recess and other "fun" activities. The fact that it's often the same students getting punished is one clue as to why the research is so negative on these practices. In addition to being counterproductive, behavior charts produce a stream of interruptions to instruction.

Alternatives – The Himmeles endorse high-quality social-emotional programs, teaching students pro-social behaviors and conflict resolution, adopting effective classroom management techniques (including thoughtfully addressing disruptions), the 2 x 10 strategy (spending two minutes a day for ten days in a row chatting with a struggling student on a topic of their choice), restorative practices, and focusing on the "co-creation of a peaceful community."

The Himmeles close with reflections on the daunting challenges their aspiring teachers face: "On bad days, you won't just feel like a bad teacher; you'll feel like a bad person. Sometimes you will rise to the challenges you face, and sometimes you will fail – and it's the failures that you're bound to remember." They suggest four statements to help all front-line educators keep things in perspective:

- *We all have choices*. "Teachers often have more control than we think we do, and the most effective teachers think through their options to determine what they and their students actually need in order to thrive."
- *Our choices have side effects*. All the problematic practices described above have been implemented with good intentions – but end up undermining teaching and learning.

- *We all need grace*. Mistakes are inevitable and we need to forgive ourselves and focus on positive change.
- *We need one another*. "Somewhere – likely within your own faculty – there are teachers who have strengths in the same areas where you have needs," they say, "and there are teachers who have needs in the same areas where you have strengths. Share your strengths, and reach out for help with your weaknesses."

Why Are We Still Doing That? by Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele, ASCD, 2021; the authors are at William.Himmele@millersville.edu and Persida.Himmele@millersville.edu.

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2. Which Students Get More Teacher Attention?

"My teacher doesn't like me," said a middle-school student to Maurice Elias (Rutgers University) during one of his school visits. In this *Edutopia* article, Elias says he was skeptical because he knew the teacher and thought that couldn't be true. But observing the class a couple of times, Elias noticed that the student who had spoken to him sat on the right side of the room and the teacher focused almost exclusively to the left side. Informed of this, the teacher was surprised – it was an unconscious tendency – and addressed it with the student and the class. With this awareness, he made a point of looking toward all parts of the classroom.

Elias says all teachers have quirks like this – they might be called biases – and some students take them personally, participate less in class, lose self-confidence, and achieve less well. British researcher Michael Fielding suggests that teachers delegate students (on a rotating basis) to give them private feedback on where they tend to face, who gets called on more, in what areas of the room, and which students are called on by name. In addition to providing valuable insights to teachers, this job can increase students' awareness of how they believe they're treated by teachers, administrators, lunch aides, bus drivers, and other adults in their school.

Teachers can also self-monitor on who they speak to informally, who's prodded to participate, who gets to be the teacher's helper, and which students are encouraged to take part in clubs and other extracurriculars.

"Class participation involves a number of social and emotional competencies," says Elias, "as well as character attributes such as courage, persistence, and confidence." Teachers can level the playing field by:

- Being explicit about the class norm of equitable participation;
- Providing focus questions for discussion up front and giving students a few minutes to gather their thoughts and write them down;
- Having students meet in pairs or small groups to share ideas before an all-class discussion;
- Making a point of creating achievement- and interest-diverse groups and having students work with as many different classmates as possible over time;
- Rotating which students are called on to report their group's ideas.

"Who Do You Call On? Rooting Out Implicit Bias" by Maurice Elias in *Edutopia*, May 21, 2021; Elias can be reached at melias@psych.rutgers.edu.

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3. Addressing Students' "Digital Illiteracy"

"Teenagers swim in a sea of digital information," say Joel Breakstone (Stanford University) and six colleagues in this *Educational Researcher* article. "On the Internet, traditional gatekeepers and hallmarks of authority are largely absent… If youth consume information without the ability to assess its credibility – unable to tell who is behind a cause and what their motives might be – they are easy marks for rogues of all stripes."

Breakstone et al. report on their study of high-school students' ability to look at Internet material with a critical eye. A national sample of 3,446 students was asked to examine a series of actual websites and respond to several constructed-response questions. Students struggled on every task, with fewer than 3 percent scoring at a Mastery level. Specifically:

- On a site claiming to disseminate factual reports on climate science, 96.8 percent of students didn't discern the organization's ties to the fossil fuel industry.
- With an anonymously posted Facebook video supposedly showing Democratic ballot stuffing, more than half of students thought it provided strong evidence; only one student figured out that the video was filmed in Russia.
- Students were often duped by weak evidence of credibility – a website's About page, copious information, the domain (.org versus .com), and the "look."
- Most students continued to engage in "close reading" of each website's main page, rather than leaving the website and looking elsewhere for evidence of credibility.

Students' ability to see through misleading websites correlated with race, social class, and U.S. region, with students of color and those from lower-income families and rural areas doing less well.

"Taken together," say the researchers, "these findings reveal an urgent need to prepare students to thrive in a world in which information flows ceaselessly across their screens… When browsing the Internet is how we become informed citizens, traditional ways of reading are not merely ineffective, they're dangerous… Today, when advertisers, corporations, lobbyists, clickbait sites, conspiracy theorists, hate groups, and foreign governments work overtime to hijack attention, often the wisest thing to do is *not* to read but to preserve attention by practicing *strategic ignoring*."

The most important skill for schools to teach, conclude Breakstone et al., is *lateral reading* – immediately leaving an unfamiliar website, opening new browser tabs, entering search terms, and using the "awesome powers of the Internet" to learn more about the site. But students won't do this "unless they understand, in deep and compelling ways, that the Web plays by a different set of rules from the vetted texts provided to them in school." It's also important that students learn several other Internet skills, including well-chosen search terms,

reverse image searches, checking archived versions of webpages in the Internet Archive, and being aware of "motivated reasoning" – not starting a search with one's mind already made up.

"Students' Civic Online Reasoning: A National Portrait" by Joel Breakstone, Mark Smith, Sam Wineburg, Amie Rapaport, Jill Carle, Marshall Garland, and Anna Saavedra in *Educational Researcher*, November 2021 (Vol. 50, #8, pp. 505-515); Breakstone can be reached at breakstone@stanford.edu.

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4. Critical Thinking and Fact-Checking on the Internet

"Engaged learning should be an exchange of ideas and not limited to one idea or one form of thinking," says media literacy expert Belinha De Abreu in this article in *Knowledge Quest*. She suggests questions students might ask as they look at online media messages:

- Who created this message?
- Why is this message being sent?
- What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently than me?
- What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

De Abreu recommends a number of resources for honing students' online skills, including these fact-checking websites:

- Open Secrets follows connections between political contributions, lobbying data, and government policy;
- Factcheck.org monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. politicians;
- Poynter is a journalism site focused on fact-checking and accountability;
- Snopes gives ratings to current information: True, Mostly True, Mixture, Mostly False, Unproven, Outdated, Miscaptioned, Correct Attribution, Misattributed, Scam, and Urban Legend.

"Gatekeeping Misinformation with Media Literacy Education" by Belinha De Abreu in *Knowledge Quest*, November/December 2021 (Vol. 50, #2, pp. 26-31)

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5. Vetting Online History Materials for Sourcing Information

In this article in *Social Education*, Lauren McArthur Harris and Leanna Archambault (Arizona State University) and Catharyn Shelton (Northern Arizona University) report that their study of best-selling online eleventh-grade history materials on Teachers Pay Teachers found that 70 percent were of low to moderate quality. "These resources," say the researchers, "often did not include multiple historical perspectives or authentic pedagogies, such as opportunities for discussion or a focus on important themes rather than on minutiae." The researchers are also critical of the lack of sourcing information – authorship, context, access, publication date, and more.

Harris, Archambault, and Shelton suggest four questions that teachers might ask as they curate online materials to ensure that they're solid – and helpful for students as they develop important civic reasoning and media literacy skills:

- *Is ample sourcing information included?* This includes, author, artist, photographer, date, type of source, where published or created, contextual information, and the URL or other access.
- *Will students have enough contextual information to analyze the sources?* This includes the author's background, why the source was created, and concurrent historical events.
- *Do the sources follow copyright and fair use guidelines?* Here's one summary.
- *Does the lesson include sources from diverse perspectives?* For example, giving voice to women, people of color, and those from non-Western cultures.

The authors also suggest a number of online collections with detailed sourcing information:

- The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy
- Gilder Lehrman Collection
- Google Arts and Culture
- Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project
- Library of Congress
- National Archives DocsTeach
- National Museum of African-American History and Culture Collection
- National Museum of the American Indian: Native Knowledge 360 Education Initiative
- The New York Times archive
- United States Holocaust Museum Education Resources

"Getting Serious About Sourcing: Considerations for Teachers and Teacherpreneurs" by Lauren McArthur Harris, Leanna Archambault, and Catharyn Shelton in *Social Education*, October 2021 (Vol. 85, #5, pp. 260-266); the authors are at Lauren.Harris.1@asu.edu, Leanna.Archambault@asu.edu, and Catharyn.Shelton@nau.edu.

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6. More-Detailed Appreciation for Students' Writing

In this article in *Edutopia*, Alex Shevrin Venet says she recently saw that the critical feedback she was giving students on their writing was copious and detailed – lots of corrections and suggestions – while her positive comments were vague and unhelpful – *Nice work. Great job. Powerful sentence*. "As a writer," she says, "I know how hard it is when the negative feedback outweighs the positive. We all have things to work on, but focusing only on what to fix makes it hard to feel that our skills are seen and appreciated."

So Venet reached out on Twitter, asking for teachers' favorite positive comments on student writing. The suggestions fell into three groups:

• The teacher's reactions as a reader:

- This part really moved me.
- I laughed out loud when I read this line.
- I pumped my fist here.

- Your writing makes me think…
- You opened a door in my mind.
- Now I am questioning…
- Now I am connecting to…
- Now I am remembering…
- This is such an awesome part.

• Recognizing the student's craft and choices:

- You crafted --- effect so smoothly by…
- You navigate this topic in such an engaging way, especially by…
- You chose the perfect tone for this topic because…
- Skillful use of transition/example/grammatical structure…
- What you're doing here reminds me of [mentor text]…
- I see you doing what [mentor writer] does…
- This was effective because…

• Celebrating growth:

- This part shows me that you have improved with [a skill] because compared to last time…
- Tweet! Put this onto a T-shirt!
- Frame this and hang it on a wall! In other words, keep it and share it!

"How to Give Positive Feedback on Student Writing" by Alex Shevrin Venet in *Edutopia*, November 11, 2021

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7. High-School History Students Write Op-Ed Articles

In this article in *Social Education*, Arizona educator Philip Robertson says secondary history teachers face two challenges as they design units and lessons:

- How to show students that history matters, connecting the past with the present and showing that everyone's history is important;
- How to orchestrate primary source investigations that build on students' culture and knowledge.

Robertson has found that getting students to research a topic and write an op-ed article is a powerful tool for addressing these challenges – especially with students who feel their voices may not be valued. He's used the Op-ed Project, which provides specific guidance for creating effective opinion pieces.

"Op-Eds: Illuminating the Present with the Past Through Student Inquiry" by Philip Robertson in *Social Education*, October 2021 (Vol. 85, #5, pp. 287-289); Robertson can be reached at robertson.philip@cusd80.com.

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8. Read-along Books for a Netflix Series

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Abby Johnson suggests books that students might read if they're watching the Netflix series, *Ada Twist, Scientist*:

- *Jabari Tries* by Gaia Cornwall, PreK to grade 2
- *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires, K-2
- *Libby Loves Science* by Kimberly Derting, grade 1-3
- *Frankie Sparks and the Class Pet* by Megan Frazer Blakemore, grade 1-3

"Read-Alikes for *Ada Twist, Scientist*" by Abby Johnson in *School Library Journal*, November 2021 (Vol. 67, #11, p. 14)

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

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
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
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