Marshall Memo 866

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 14, 2020

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"When teachers are working from an established curriculum, not creating lessons from scratch, the likelihood of success goes up. When their professional learning is driven by curriculum, it becomes more focused and intentional… It's a simple matter of addition by subtraction. Time not spent planning lessons from scratch (and attending busywork professional development) means increased bandwidth to study student work, anticipate and plan for student misconceptions, and to develop the kind of deep subject matter expertise that enables teachers to respond creatively and flexibly in the moment."

Robert Pondiscio in "Teachers' Professional Learning Should be Driven by Curriculum" in *Education Gadfly*, December 10, 2020

"One of the hardest things for educated men and women to do is imagine what it's like to read without background knowledge. Like the fish that doesn't realize it's in water, literate Americans are swimming in knowledge, allusions, and idioms that enliven their discourse and resolve ambiguities. A simple example is the word 'shot.' Very young children can 'read' the word, but it means something very different on a basketball court, in a doctor's office, or when the repairman uses it to describe your refrigerator."

Robert Pondiscio in "Reading Comprehension Is Not a 'Skill'" in *Education Gadfly*, December 10, 2020

"Just think about going to school every day and not seeing yourself represented. Can you imagine?... I try to help white teachers imagine going to school for twelve years and having only black teachers. First, that blows their minds. Imagine the majority of books are about black people. Imagine this also in terms of the larger macro context of all the presidents being black. I ask them to imagine and discuss how they feel about it."

Gloria Boutte (University of South Carolina), interviewed in "We Be Lovin' Black Children: NCTE's 2020 Outstanding Elementary Educators in the English Language Arts" in *Language Arts*, November 2020 (Vol. 98, #2, pp. 71-78); Boutte can be reached at gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu.

1. The Year's Most Important Education Research Findings

In this *Edutopia* article, Youki Terada and Stephen Miller identify what they believe are the ten most significant education studies of 2020 (see the full article below for links to the studies):

• Technology and ease of access to content are key to successful remote learning. Students must have a good Internet connection, a workable device, a single, dedicated hub for curriculum content and assignments, and clear communication from teachers via e-mail or text. It's also helpful to reduce visual clutter, hard-to-read fonts, and unnecessary decorations in virtual spaces. Students should be regularly asked questions like, *Have you encountered any technical issues?* and *Can you easily locate your assignments?*

• When students generate questions about the content they're studying, they are more engaged, think more deeply, and have better retention. Asking questions is significantly more effective than conventional study strategies like re-reading, highlighting, and underlining key sentences.

• Vocabulary "sticks" when students act words out. When students are learning new vocabulary, retention doubles when they use their hands and bodies to dramatize the words. Drawing or looking at pictures is also helpful.

• Once students master decoding, they will become better readers if they spend more time learning about the world – especially social studies (history, geography, civics, and law). Focusing on reading skills (like finding the main idea) is not a good use of students' time.

• Writing by hand (or drawing) produces deeper learning than typing or tracing words. However, keyboarding is a useful skill, especially for students with dyslexia.

• The Lucy Calkins *Units of Study* literacy program is insufficiently explicit and systematic in teaching young readers how to decode and encode written words. Calkins is reported to have conceded the point and is working on "rebalancing" the program.

• Clear standards and a scoring rubric mitigate implicit biases that teachers may have. Vague, holistic grading criteria, on the other hand, allow biases to work against students of color. [See Marshall Memo 850 for a summary of this study.]

• High-school grades are better predictors of college success than ACT and SAT scores, and spending time prepping for those tests does not guarantee doing well in college. One study found that students with very high ACT scores, but indifferent high-school grades, often flamed out in college. Why? Researchers believe it's because grades are a better indicator of key skills like perseverance, time management, and the ability to deal with distractions.

• When learning to code, mathematical prowess is less important than language skills. This suggests that passing advanced math tests should not be a criterion for admission to programming classes.

• Pollution is linked to students' school attendance and asthma problems. When three coal-fired plants near Chicago were shuttered, student absences went down, as did emergency room visits for asthma-related crises. About 2.3 million public school children live close to coal-fired plants, and many of these students are economically disadvantaged.

"The 10 Most Significant Education Studies of 2020" by Youki Terada and Stephen Merrill in *Edutopia*, December 4, 2020

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2. Reframing Unproductive Thinking

(Originally titled "How Cognitive Distortions Undermine Well-Being")

"Now more than ever," says instructional coach/author Chase Mielke in this *Educational Leadership* article, "we have to take care of ourselves so we don't burn out doing the critical work of innovation in education." But in the process, he says, we need to be aware of several cognitive distortions "that I have battled personally and seen countless educators exhibit." These mental lapses can "undermine our well-being and collectively destroy civility."

• *Polarized thinking* – For example, *Professional development is either terrific or a waste of time.* The way out of this one is to acknowledge the problem and consider a *however*. "Teaching kids remotely is not why I got into teaching; however, I can still build personal connections and share my passion for my content from a distance."

• *Emotional reasoning* – This is when strong feelings sweep us to an overgeneralized conclusion. For example, Mielke's son, dealing with some behavior challenges in his school, blurted out, "I'm the meanest boy." The workaround: think of emotions as clouds that always move on: "I'm feeling pessimistic, but I know I'm just tired and frustrated with this situation. I'm not a pessimistic person."

• *Mind reading* – This is great, says Mielke, "until it's not. And usually it's not." An e-mail from your boss reads, *See me,* and we draw on our innate negativity bias to imagine a worst-case scenario – you've been revealed as a fraud and are about to be fired. The solution: ask questions before jumping to conclusions. With a student: "I'm worried about you since you missed the last couple of assignments. What's going on?"

• *Pervasiveness* – When Mielke was a high-school teacher, he got upset when a student said, "I hate reading." What the kid meant was that he hated reading boring texts. The best way to deal with this cognitive distortion is to think, *Just because… doesn't imply…* "Just because our last meeting was tense doesn't imply that we can't find resolution this time."

• *Permanence* – In the darkest days of the pandemic, it seems that it will never end. "The best way to fight permanent thinking," says Mielke, "is to identify and root out these words: *always, never, every time*." For example, "That kid has a lot of challenging behaviors. But his prefrontal cortex is still developing. He'll get there; he just needs extra modeling and support."

"How Cognitive Distortions Undermine Well-Being" by Chase Mielke in *Educational Leadership*, December 2020/January 2021 (Vol. 78, #4, pp. 16-20); Mielke is at chase.affectiveliving@gmail.com.

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3. Helping a Teacher in Crisis – and Thinking About Prevention

(Originally titled "Interrupting Doom Loops: Reflections on Mid-Year Teacher Exits")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Henry Seton describes his near meltdown when he moved to a new school in Ohio after ten years of successful teaching at a high-poverty school in Massachusetts. While the schools were similar, several factors combined to create a crisis in Seton's classes:

- A longer school day;
- Larger classes;
- More students dealing with trauma;
- Fewer support services;
- Lower academic and behavioral expectations (Seton was the only teacher in his grade regularly assigning homework);
- A weak curriculum.

"I had never taught so many students living with grandparents or court-appointed guardians because their parents were incarcerated," says Seton. "In the first semester, I broke up more fights than I had in the previous decade." He lost his temper and shouted more than he had in the past.

Reluctant to be a complainer, Seton avoided talking to administrators. He exercised before school, meditated during his lunch break, worked with a therapist, and asked educator friends for advice in the evening. He considered quitting, but was well aware of the effect a mid-year departure would have on his students.

Finally Seton told the school's leaders the situation was untenable, and together they came up with a plan:

- Substitute coverage allowed Seton to take two days off campus to "recenter."
- He used the time to make the curriculum more engaging and provide more scaffolding and a "gentler release of responsibility."
- His smallest section was eliminated, with students redistributed to the remaining classes, creating some breathing space in his daily schedule.
- School leaders swapped the novice co-teacher who had been working with Seton in his most challenging group for a veteran colleague. Together they rethought classroom management, coming to a better approach on "what to sweat, what to let slide."

These changes stopped the "doom loop" that Seton had been in and allowed him to do some solid teaching for the remainder of the school year, even after the pandemic shifted the school to remote instruction.

"I remain humbled and humiliated about how poorly I performed at my new school," he says, "but at least my students did not have to adjust to another teacher… I walked away from

last year with renewed gratitude for teaching, more conscious than ever of the complexity and fragility of the classroom ecosystem. I am looking for a new school that will be a better fit for me going forward, but I remain hopelessly in love with teaching and thankful that my passion for the work has not been extinguished."

Seton suggests several ways that schools can help prevent the kind of crisis he experienced:

- Administrators making frequent, informal classroom visits and intervening early when they see problems;
- Leaders scheduling regular check-in meetings with new teachers and surveying the staff;
- A non-evaluative mentoring program for new teachers;
- Colleagues reaching out when they hear a "commotion next door," offering pointers, taking out-of-control students for a reset, and covering classes;
- Leaders creating "a staff culture that promotes vulnerability, self-care, and community – one where colleagues catch each other when they fall."

"Interrupting Doom Loops: Reflections on Mid-Year Teacher Exits" by Henry Seton in *Educational Leadership*, December 2020/January 2021 (Vol. 78, #4, pp. 63-67); Seton can be reached at hseton@gmail.com.

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4. Supporting Teens During Remote and Hybrid Instruction

In this article in *Usable Knowledge*, Emily Boudreau (Harvard Graduate School of Education) reports on ways that families and schools can foster adolescent development during the pandemic:

• *Peer connections* – Relationships with fellow students are central to teens' developing identities – and their academic growth. To fill some of the gaps created by school closures, teachers can:

- Orchestrate group projects that require collaboration;
- Build time into the schedule for students to socialize;
- Include social media as a tool for students to connect (although it isn't a substitute for in-person interaction, and many families are concerned about too much time on devices).

• *Opportunities to feel competent* – Teens' sense of efficacy can be undermined during remote learning. What helps:

- Plenty of support with WiFi connections, devices, and tech problems;
- Not letting up on standards; insisting on less, says Boudreau, "sends the message to students and their families that they are unable to keep up."
- Meaningful community service, and connecting classroom work to the wider world.

• *Loose-tight parent supervision* – "Teens and parents often clash around questions of autonomy and control," says Boudreau, and these conflicts may be heightened if parents try to micromanage students' academic work. A better dynamic is providing scaffolding,

opportunities for individual check-ins with teachers, counselors, and coaches, and ways to connect with other adults who can provide support.

• *Mental health* – A recent study found that 81 percent of students reported an increase in anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and other psychological concerns. Schools can help by:

- Connecting students with an advisor or mentor who sees the whole child;
- Not responding reflexively with punishments when students are absent and have academic lapses, but considering underlying explanations;
- Starting school activities later to allow teens to get enough sleep;
- Working to establish trust with families, especially across racial and cultural lines.

• *Safety* – When schools are closed, there are greater opportunities for teens to get in trouble, especially if parents work outside the home. Schools can:

- Partner with local parks and recreation departments and other community organizations to provide a supervised space;
- Talk to teens about developing a peer network committed to safety;
- Form social pods or partnerships with others in the community;
- Set clear schedules, routines, and expectations.

• *Self-sufficiency* – Educators and families need to work together to get teens advocating for themselves and taking greater responsibility for their schoolwork, says Boudreau. Parents can help by:

- Encouraging teens to create a plan for getting their work done, taking responsibility, and learning time-management skills;
- Being sensitive to teens' biological clocks, which lean toward late bedtimes;
- Recognizing that socializing is an important developmental need;
- Being willing to engage with teens when they ask why certain parts of the curriculum are worth studying.

"Supporting Teenagers in a Pandemic" by Emily Boudreau in *Usable Knowledge*, August 27, 2020; Boudreau can be reached at emily_boudreau@gse.harvard.edu.

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5. Curriculum-Based Teacher Teamwork

In this 62-page report from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsch make the case for tying teacher professional development much more closely to the curriculum content that teams are teaching – as they teach it. This is quite different from standard PD, which most often consists of "short-term, isolated experiences," say Short and Hirsch. "We need to accept," they continue, "that teachers are poorly served by traditional approaches to professional learning. Professional development programs have not had substantial positive impacts on teacher performance or student outcomes, and teachers often view them as compliance exercises with little relevance to their work."

The Carnegie report also aims to change the unsystematic way curriculum materials are assembled by teachers: students often work with materials teachers create themselves and assemble through Google and Pinterest searches. The alternative proposed by Short and

Hirsch: teacher teams working with expert support to master high-quality instructional materials and assessments, monitor their implementation, and continuously improve teaching and learning.

In an appreciation of the report in *Education Gadfly*, Robert Pondiscio had this to say: "When teachers are working from an established curriculum, not creating lessons from scratch, the likelihood of success goes up. When their professional learning is driven by curriculum, it becomes more focused and intentional… It's a simple matter of addition by subtraction. Time not spent planning lessons from scratch (and attending busywork professional development) means increased bandwidth to study student work, anticipate and plan for student misconceptions, and to develop the kind of deep subject matter expertise that enables teachers to respond creatively and flexibly in the moment."

Short and Hirsch offer this point-by-point comparison of their curriculum-based approach to conventional professional development:

- From grouping teachers by school to grouping them by the curriculum being taught;
- From one-time workshops (usually outside school hours) to ongoing sessions, coaching, and feedback during the regular school day;
- From a focus on topics or themes to a focus on instructional materials and specific teaching strategies;
- From lectures, PowerPoint slides, and Q&A to active learning, including participating in lessons as students;
- From seeing coaching as reserved for novice and struggling teachers to providing curriculum-focused feedback for all teachers;
- From giving support with new curriculum materials only to a selection of teachers to all teachers participating in curriculum-based professional learning.

A number of schools, districts, charter schools, and other organizations have piloted curriculum-focused teacher teamwork, and their efforts are detailed in the report: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, EL Education, Gladstone Elementary School, Instruction Partners, Lafayette Parish Schools, Teaching Lab, Boston Public Schools, OpenSciEd, Baltimore City Public Schools, New Teacher Center, Sunnyside Unified School District, Illustrative Mathematics, District of Columbia Public Schools, Leading Educators, Sullivan County Schools, TNTP, Caldwell Parish School District, and Achievement Network.

Short and Hirsch's report is organized around a graphic resembling the periodic table (hence the title, "The Elements"). Here are the four major segments, with a brief description of the subtopics, and selected quotes from the report:

<u>Core Features:</u>

• *Curriculum* – The main idea: teachers developing deep expertise in the content they teach and the instructional materials they're using with students. "Through textbooks, teachers' guides, classroom assessments, and other instructional tools," says the report, "curriculum establishes the pace and pathways for student progress." Importantly, the curriculum provides "talking points, but not a script."

• *Transformative learning* – Teachers assess and clarify their beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and practices as they work with students. This happens, often with some discomfort, "when professional learning challenges teachers' long-held ideas about what students can do."

• *Equity* – Teachers develop their understanding of how to prioritize and promote high expectations. They "learn about students' communities, cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, strengths, and interests and use that understanding to employ culturally responsive teaching strategies." They reset the bar for what rigorous instruction looks like, base their opinions and value of curriculum on its results with students, and provide scaffolding to get all students over the bar.

Functional Features:

• *Learning designs* – Teachers get an in-depth briefing on how instructional materials are organized, see the storyline of each unit and lesson sequence, and watch videos of lessons being implemented with students similar to their own. Teachers then engage with lessons from a student's-eye point of view, going through the same kind of inquiry and struggle their students will experience, thus building empathy for what students will go through – and a deeper understanding of the materials. These components build "homegrown expertise" with the curriculum.

• *Beliefs* – Today's U.S. standards-based curriculum materials demand a lot more of students than in the past, especially higher-order thinking and problem solving. Teachers need to be immersed in the content and then given time and space to reflect on the dissonance with what they've been teaching and expecting, and prepare to teach at a higher level. "Without ensuring that teachers fully understand and buy into new paradigms of student learning and success, we can't expect them to embrace new curriculum."

• *Reflection and feedback* – This needs to be separated from the teacher evaluation process, taking place in an atmosphere of reflection and feedback from colleagues and skilled coaches. It's essential to build trust, use evidence of how students respond to the materials, and observe and reflect as teammates. "These detailed conversations help teachers understand how to apply new instructional materials within the context of their school, and how to use their knowledge of students' culture, needs, and interests to make lessons and materials more relevant and engaging."

• *Change management* – Introducing curriculum-based teamwork is a process, not an event. Leaders must skillfully address teachers' individual concerns and group challenges with new instructional materials – and stay the course. "Teachers need careful support as they transition away from the instructional style they have developed, practiced, and feel comfortable with while keeping pace with students' needs."

Structural Features:

• *Collective participation* – "Too often, teachers go it alone. Traditionally, they work separately from their colleagues, with limited opportunities for collaboration once the classroom door is closed." With the Carnegie model, same-grade/same-subject teacher teams

work closely to think through, teach, troubleshoot, and assess student results on the materials they're using.

• *Models* – Schools choose from a number of models, including study groups, institutes, workshops, and learning walks. Curriculum-based teamwork is tailored to each school, usually starting with a summer institute, grouping teachers by grade and content area, providing in-house coaching and other supports, and continuing through the school year.

• *Time* – An intensive two-week summer institute is important to this process, as is scheduling regular team time during the school year, especially as each new curriculum unit is launched. The report urges schools to make a commitment to provide significant team time, be creative carving out time (including early dismissals, delayed starts, adjusting daily schedules, and hiring building substitutes) – and make sure meeting time is used well.

The Essentials:

• *Leadership* – School and district administrators need to promote a shared vision, enlist the strengths and talents of teachers and leaders, and model and promote active learning for students and adults.

• *Resources* – Budgetary support for materials, personnel, and time is essential for success. The report emphasizes the need for honest accounting of the resources needed, an "audit for expertise" – finding the right teacher leaders, coaches, and external experts to make the initiative work – and ongoing commitment. It's especially important to use new Consumer Reports-type groups (such as EdReports) to identify the highest-quality curriculum materials.

• *Coherence* – This "aligns system and school policies, priorities, practices, and curriculum to a shared vision of learning and teaching." Short and Hirsch suggest three big ideas: *Share the vision, ask why and how, and go step by step*. Curriculum-focused teamwork has to mesh with other efforts so it supports – and is supported by – the school's and district's plan for high achievement for all students.

"The Elements: Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning" by Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsch, Carnegie Corporation of New York, November 2020

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6. Award-Winning Children's Fiction

In this *Language Arts* feature, Desiree Cueto (Western Washington University) and six colleagues showcase the winner, honorees, and recommended books of the 2020 Charlotte Huck Award for outstanding fiction for children (capsule summaries and cover images are available in the link below):

- *Room on Our Rock* by Kate and Jol Temple (the winner), illustrated by Terri Rose Baynton (Kane Miller, 2019)
- *When Aidan Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff, illustrated by Kaylani Juanita (Lee & Low, 2019)
- *New Kid* by Jerry Craft (Quill Tree, 2019)
- *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga (Balzer & Bray, 2019)

- *Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border* by Mitali Perkins, illustrated by Sara Palacios (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019)
- *I Can Make This Promise* by Christine Day (Quill Tree, 2019)
- *Roll With It* by Jamie Sumner (Atheneum, 2019)
- *For Black Girls Like Me* by Mariama Lockington (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019)
- *Fry Bread: A Native American Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard, illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal (Roaring Brook, 2019)
- *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family* by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali, illustrated by Hatem Ali (Little, Brown, 2019)
- *Lubna and Pebble* by Wendy Meddour, illustrated by Daniel Egnéus (Dial, 2019)
- *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky* by Kwame Mbalia (Disney-Hyperion, 2019)
- *Planet Earth Is Blue* by Nicole Panteleakos (Wendy Lamb, 2019)
- *The Moon Within* by Aida Salazar (Arthur A. Levine, 2019)

"2020 Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children" by Desiree Cueto, Maria Acevedo-Aquino, Patrick Andrus, Bettie Parsons Barger, Donna Bulatowicz, Cecilia Espinosa, and Mary Lee Hahn in *Language Arts*, November 2020 (Vol. 98, #2, pp. 91-99); Cueto can be reached at Desiree.Cueto@wwu.edu.

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 50 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine