Marshall Memo 916

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 20, 2021

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Happiness is tricky. Sometimes you have to fight for it. Sometimes, though – the best times – it sneaks up behind you, wraps an arm around your waist, and pulls you close."

Nicola Yoon in *Instructions for Dancing* (spotted in *School Library Journal* editors' choices, December 2021)

"Words are like ice cream. A little ice cream tastes good, but a lot of ice cream isn't better."

Dan Rockwell in "If Words Had Calories: Suggestions for Bloviators" in *Leadership Freak*, December 16, 2021; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

"Learners are more likely to be fired up and excited about their work when they have some power and control over what or how they're learning."

Mike Anderson (see item #3)

"They need to know the *why* before they can worry about the *what* or the *how*."

Mike Anderson (*ibid*.)

"Research indicates that when teachers publicly point out which students are doing well on a task, or when teachers make it obvious that some students are experiencing challenges, students become focused on how they are perceived by their peers, *rather than on mastering the task*."

Eric Anderman and Adriana Martinez Calvit in "Is Your Deeper Learning Instruction Boring Students?" in *Educational Leadership*, December 2021/January 2022 (Vol. 79, #4, pp. 32-37); the authors can be reached at anderman.1@osu.edu and Martinez.893@buckeyemail.osu.edu.

1. One Teacher Can Make a Difference

In this article in *Chalkbeat*, Kelly Gleischman describes the life-saving kindness of a middle-school English teacher. At 14, Gleischman was borderline suicidal as she dealt with unkind "friends" in school, divorced parents at war with each other, additional conflicts in the family, and the realization that she was gay. "I don't know what it was," she says. "But somehow Ms. Hunt became my light when I began to doubt whether my life was worth living at all."

Gleischman began dropping by this teacher's classroom after school, worried every time that she was coming across as weird and needy. "Her room, bright and airy from the windows that lined two walls, became my safe space," she says. "Although I didn't mention my sexuality or share the depth of my self-loathing, she let me talk about my day, listened to the problems I was having with my mom, and gave me advice on how to deal with the loneliness I felt among the girls in my class. I can still picture her concerned eyes as she listened to my pain and gave me space to unravel the tightly wound ball of feelings in my chest."

At a particularly dark moment that year, Gleischman sobbed in her bedroom, convinced that no one cared, thinking, *I just want this all to end*. She e-mailed Ms. Hunt, apologizing for bothering her, describing her problems but not voicing her suicidal thoughts. The next morning she found the teacher's response in her inbox: "So sorry to learn that things have gone from bad to worse. I'm holding you in my heart and know that 'this, too, shall pass' for you as they say. Please don't ever think that you're a bother to me in any way. I treasure our times together and feel quite honored that you trust me enough to share parts of your life with me… I look forward to getting together soon. In the meantime, know that I'm sending you all my love and support."

Looking back on this exchange and subsequent conversations, Gleischman credits Ms. Hunt with pulling her back from the brink. She became a teacher herself, and now works at a nonprofit helping make schools safe and inclusive for all students.

"When I Was 14, an English Teacher Saved My Life Without Knowing It" by Kelly Gleischman in *Chalkbeat*, December 15, 2021

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2. The Keys to Intrinsic Motivation in Classrooms

(Originally titled "6 Intrinsic Motivators to Power Up Your Teaching")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, teacher/author/consultant Mike Anderson says that personal passions like running, mountain biking, singing, or gardening are fueled by intrinsic motivation, which often has six drivers: autonomy, belonging, competence, purpose, fun, and curiosity. Teachers who harness these elements greatly enhance their students' learning. Here's how:

• *Autonomy* – "The need for self-direction is vitally important if we want students to be self-motivated," says Anderson. "Learners are more likely to be fired up and excited about their work when they have some power and control over what or how they're learning." One way to accomplish this is giving students more choice over the books they read, the writing they do, and how they show what they've learned.

• *Belonging* – Abraham Maslow believed that humans' need for connection and affiliation is comparable to our need for food, water, shelter, and safety. Some ways this is naturally put to work in classrooms: think/pair/share, lab partners, book clubs, Socratic seminars, group projects. But simply assigning students to groups with a few ice-breakers and get-to-know-you exercises is not enough. Kids need direct instruction and guided practice to develop the social skills that make well-structured collaborative activities productive.

• *Competence* – "When learning is too hard, it's frustrating. When it's too easy, it's boring," says Anderson. "When challenges are within reach, and when students see themselves growing and getting better at something, they are more motivated." This is the challenge of differentiation – finding the sweet spot of challenge for groups of students with different interests and levels of achievement. Anderson once observed a calculus teacher giving her students a worksheet with a variety of problems and saying, "See if you can find the problems that are hard enough to make you sweat a little, but you can do with some hard work and a little help."

• *Purpose* – Anderson likes to ask students the reason they are doing a piece of schoolwork. "They need to know the *why* before they can worry about the *what* or the *how*," he says. An in-the-future purpose won't work with many students; they need to know why it's important for them in the moment. With service learning this is straightforward, and purpose can be built into projects and writing done for peers, families, or the community.

• *Fun* – There are some parts of the school day where this isn't possible, but dice, dominoes, spinners, cards, and apps like Kahoot can make a range of activities more enjoyable. And then there are ways of getting students moving and interacting that turbocharge learning – for example, creating cards with matching pairs of math facts and solutions, words and definitions, or famous people and historical facts, taping them to students' backs, and challenging the class to find the matches with no talking.

• *Curiosity* – Making connections to things students love and are curious about – chess, social justice, manga, music, soccer, skateboarding – will increase motivation, engagement, and joy. This can happen in independent research projects, literature circles, project-based learning, and more.

"6 Intrinsic Motivators to Power Up Your Teaching" by Mike Anderson in *Educational Leadership*, December 2021/January 2022 (Vol. 79, #4, pp. 20-25); Anderson can be reached at mike@leadinggreatlearning.com.

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3. Teachers' Beliefs and Their English Learners' Reading Achievement

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Min Hyun Oh and Jeannette Mancilla-Martinez (Vanderbilt University) report on their study of elementary teachers' beliefs about English learners' language development and how well their ELs performed on reading comprehension. Through an online survey of teachers in three schools in the U.S. South, Oh and Mancilla-Martinez identified what teachers knew (based on empirical evidence) and assumed to be true about students' language learning, development, and teachers' role in those experiences.

The researchers organized teachers' responses into six groupings; here are the actual survey statements (rated on a Likert agree-disagree scale) in each category:

• *Asset view* – the belief that ELs can flexibly use both languages receptively and expressively:

- Young children exposed to two languages naturally master both.
- Young children can easily keep two languages separate and use each when necessary.
- When children use words and letter sounds from their home language when writing in English at school, this is evidence that they are using all of their language resources.

• *Bilingual development understanding* – the belief that language and literacy development occurs through natural exposure and use:

- Children learn the language used at school (English) from peers and siblings, so it is not necessary that parents teach them that language.
- It is more important to understand the home language than to speak it.
- All children learning two languages experience a silent period, when they do not speak the second language.
- When children use words and letter sounds from their home language when writing in English at school, this is evidence that they are using all of their language resources.

• *Two-monolinguals view* – the belief that dual language development should occur separately in each language:

- It can be harmful to children to mix two languages when adults speak to them.
- Learning two languages can have long-term negative consequences for language and literacy development.
- ELs should acquire English within 2 years of enrolling in US schools.
- If an EL is speaking English on the playground, he or she should be speaking English in the classroom.

• *Lenient expectations* – a well-intentioned belief that being patient with ELs is the priority in their learning because given enough time, they'll become proficient in English:

- When a child is hesitant to speak in the language of the classroom (English), teachers should wait until the child speaks on his or her own.

- ELs do not need supplemental language instruction; they will pick up English if they are in classrooms with effective literacy and content instruction.
- It is good practice to allow ELs more time to complete assignments.
- Effort is more important than achievement when I assess ELs.
- It is inappropriate to use grade-level texts to teach ELs when their reading ability is below grade level.

• *English standard* – the belief that "standard" English should be prioritized in student achievement and evaluation and "nonstandard" English or language mixing needs to be corrected:

- Children should be corrected when they mix two languages in the same sentence.
- Teachers should correct children when they speak accented English.
- I support legislation making English the official language of the United States.
- ELs not performing on grade level should be retained.

• *English-only achievement* – this belief frames English as the priority in instruction and student achievement, but also views ELs' developing English knowledge as a barrier to academic engagement:

- If possible, families should use the language used for instruction (English) with their children.
- It is okay for ELs to disengage from the most academically difficult parts of a lesson.
- It is good practice to lessen the quantity of coursework for ELs.
- It is not fair to other students when I give ELs accommodations on assignments.

The researchers matched teachers' beliefs with their students' reading comprehension levels measured by the NWEA MAP reading assessment. The conclusions:

• Asset view and Bilingual development understanding beliefs in teachers were significant predictors of better reading comprehension among EL students.

• Lenient expectations and English-only achievement beliefs were significant predictors of lower reading comprehension.

"Overall," conclude Oh and Mancilla-Martinez, "our study affirms the importance of professional development and training opportunities to cultivate research-informed teacher beliefs about ELs' language development and learning. Studies have emphasized the need for well-prepared teachers who understand the dual language acquisition process, so that they can serve as effective advocates for their ELs."

"Elementary Schoolteachers' Bilingual Development Beliefs and English Learners' English Reading Comprehension Achievement" by Min Hyun Oh and Jeannette Mancilla-Martinez in *Elementary School Journal*, December 2021 (Vol. 122, #2, pp. 165-190); the authors can be reached at min.hyun.oh@vanderbilt.edu and jeannette.mancilla-martinez@vanderbilt.edu.

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4. Getting Serious About Vocabulary

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, author/consultant Angela Peery says one thing educators can agree on, based on decades of research, is that "increasing the number of words

our students know is a good thing." A rich vocabulary and conceptual understanding benefit kids in three ways:

- Supporting learning in all disciplines, providing "velcro" that connects prior knowledge to new words and concepts;
- Boosting reading comprehension through the grades by making texts more accessible;
- Enriching spoken language and writing by adding specificity and voice.

Conversely, a limited vocabulary makes speaking, reading, and absorbing new knowledge significantly more difficult, limits the amount of hours spent reading, and poses daily obstacles to self-confidence and school success.

Which words should teachers focus on? Peery recommends general academic words that cut across disciplines and help students express themselves in academic settings, and, within each discipline, domain-specific terms that students need to understand math, science, social studies, and other subjects. She describes eight effective vocabulary-building strategies:

• *Informal conversations* – The more verbal back-and-forth children have with educators and other adults in their lives – with lots of questions, responses, probing, extending – the more their word knowledge and verbal acuity will grow.

• *Anchored word learning* – The higher-level, more-sophisticated words that come up in classroom discussions, readalouds, trade books, and content texts should be highlighted to stretch students' vocabularies and build new knowledge. Teachers might provide direct instruction and practice on 3-5 important words at a time.

• *Vocabulary anchor charts* – Peery recommends a three-column TIP format: **T**erm (the word), **I**nformation (a student-friendly definition), **P**icture (a visual or icon). Prominently displayed in the classroom, these are most helpful for words with straightforward meanings, not heavily conceptual words. Students might also keep their own TIP charts in notebooks or digital form. The beginning of a new chunk of instruction is a good time to add new words to the class and individual charts.

• *Save the last word for me* – Groups of 3-5 students get a baggie or manila envelope containing a set of vocabulary cards (a word on one side, the definition on the other); one student pulls out a card, says the word aloud, and other members of the group take turns offering a definition. The first student summarizes, offers additional thoughts, and elicits group consensus on the meaning. Students take turns repeating the process until all the cards have been discussed. This game is especially helpful when a class is preparing for an assessment.

• *Snap minilessons* – Brief (5-15-minute) explicit vocabulary instruction might occur daily, weekly, or at other intervals. Peery recommends a four-step procedure, acronym SNAP: **S**ee and **S**ay each word; **N**ame and **N**otice a category or group the word belongs to (or notice connections to related words); **A**ct on the word (in small groups, students engage in a brief task or conversation about the word); and **P**roduce an individual, original application of the word.

• *Vocabulary self-collection* – In individual notebooks, students write a few words each week that they notice in their reading or daily lives, write the definition, where they encountered the word, and why it's important to them. At an appointed time each week, students share and discuss their individual word lists, which Peery says will often spark lively

discussions and raise "word consciousness, a critical goal of word learning." Alternatively, students might work in cooperative groups identifying words in a text that merit study and discussion.

• *Word talks* – Students give a brief presentation on one or more words they believe are important for their classmates to know (perhaps drawn from their personal word collections). Scheduled on a regular basis, this activity is most appropriate for general academic words, not for those that are highly specialized and domain specific.

• *Digital tools for independent practice* – Peery recommends three vocabulary-building websites:

- Flocabulary – hip-hop videos for learning new terminology;
- Freerice – an addictive vocabulary game with five difficulty levels;
- Vocabador – studying SAT words, students choose an avatar and "get into the ring" to play against other virtual wrestlers.

"8 Ways to Grow Students' Vocabulary" by Angela Peery in *Cult of Pedagogy*, December 13, 2021; Peery can be reached at drangelapeery@gmail.com.

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5. Getting High-School Students Doing More of the Work

In this article in *Edutopia*, Wisconsin English teacher Jamie Kobs describes how she has her high-school students give each other feedback on their writing and other classroom assignments. There are six benefits: students have an authentic audience in mind as they work; the feedback they get is more immediate; the notion that the teacher is the only expert in the room is downplayed; students tend to be more receptive to comments from peers than from the teacher; engagement and sense of community improve; and Kobs has less grading to do. Here are some specific strategies:

• *Video pitches* – Once students have brainstormed and come up with an idea for a writing assignment, they describe it in a brief Flipgrid video (working title and a short synopsis). Students watch their own video and respond to those of two classmates, asking for clarification (*I didn't get the part about…*), expressing curiosity (*What happened next?*), making personal connections (*Something similar happened to me…*), and making suggestions (*Something was missing when…*). Sometimes a classmate will say, "I can't wait to read it!"

• *Rate and recognize* – When students work in groups (a book club, for example), Kobs asks each student to give their group's collaboration a 4-3-2-1 rating and give a shout-out for individual group members. Kobs strategically intervenes with groups with low ratings and shares shout-outs with the whole class.

• *Reflections on Google Forms* – After a Socratic seminar or graded discussion, Kobs asks students to reflect on their own performance. Two prompts:

- *Give a specific example of something someone else said during this discussion that resonated with you. Why did it stick?*
- *Who in your Socratic circle would you like to recognize? For what?*

This allows Kobs to see and recognize comments and contributions that reached a lot of classmates. Using Google Forms allows her to copy and paste comments for students' individual assessments.

• *Sticky notes on Jamboard* – After other performance-based assessments (for example, creating a podcast), Kors has students anonymously leave comments on Jamboard frames. Possible prompts: *What did you like about this podcast? What engaged you as a listener?*

"Using feedback in the assessment process requires consistent modeling, repetition, and a commitment to sharing the feedback with students and creating opportunities for them to act on the feedback," concludes Kobs. "But the payoff is worth the effort. You'll be working toward a classroom culture where students feel seen, heard, valued, and consequently, engaged in their work."

"Simple Ways to Solicit Peer Feedback" by Jamie Kobs in *Edutopia*, August 23, 2021

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6. Getting the Most from Think/Pair/Share

(Originally titled "Getting the 'Think-Pair-Share' Technique Right")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, teacher/author Kate Jones and assessment guru Dylan Wiliam say this time-honored protocol has great potential for improving engagement and learning – provided it's used well. Their suggestions:

• *Plan worthwhile questions*. Think/Pair/Share takes extra time, so it's vital that questions get students thinking at a deep level.

• *Don't skimp on think time*. When a question is posed, students' first impulse is to start chatting. They need to pause, reflect, retrieve prior knowledge, and jot initial thoughts. Retrieval is important to strengthening memories and recognizing knowledge gaps.

• *Insist on listening*. "Listening requires effort, attention, and time," say Jones and Wiliam. Pairs are a safe space for students to test ideas, see other perspectives, and rehearse what they'll say when the class reconvenes. Some teachers tell students they'll be asked to share what their *partner* said or assign students an A or B letter and prompt the whole class when it's time for each letter to be the listener.

• *Pause and extend*. After each share-out, the teacher builds in think time and asks ABC questions: Is there anything else that could be *added*? Can you *build* on that answer? Does anyone want to *challenge* the answer or provide an alternative response?

• *Use individual dry-erase boards*. Students write a few key words as they think, compare with their pair partner, and hold their boards up during sharing.

"Getting the 'Think-Pair-Share' Technique Right" by Kate Jones and Dylan Wiliam in *Educational Leadership*, December 2021/January 2022 (Vol. 79, #4); the authors can be reached at katesofiajones@gmail.com and dylanwiliam@mac.com.

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7. Close Reading of a Course Syllabus

This fall, Kenyon Wilson, a Tennessee performing arts professor, decided to see how carefully the 70 students in a music course were reading the syllabus. On the second of three pages, he gave a locker number and combination and told students there was a $50 bill for the first student to get there. During the first class, he dropped a hint, saying, "Hey, there are some new things in the syllabus. Make sure you, you know, make sure you catch them."

When the course wrapped up in early December, nobody had opened the locker and the professor reclaimed his cash. "My semester-long experiment has come to an end," Wilson wrote on Facebook. Hearing this, one student said he felt "pretty dumb, pretty stupid." Others felt "bamboozled" but were good-natured about the gag, saying it was very much in character for this professor.

Interviewed about the prank, Wilson said he was trying to liven things up during the pandemic: "The syllabus is a really dry document. I mean, it's not supposed to be exciting to read, but I thought if my students were going through and reading it, I might as well reward them." He acknowledged that as a student, he would probably not have picked up on the locker information. "We read the parts that we deem important," he said. "You know, what's the attendance policy? What are the things I need to do to pass this class? And then there's other stuff." In this case, "other stuff" included instructions on what to do if a student tested positive for Covid-19.

"Professor Puts Clues to a Cash Prize in His Syllabus. No One Noticed" by Isabella Grullón Paz in *The New York Times*, December 18, 2021

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8. Short Items:

a. Progress on Democracy – This article from *Our World in Data*, complete with maps and charts, shows the dramatic progress over recent centuries in democratic decision-making.

"200 Years Ago, Everyone Lacked Democratic Rights. Now, Billions of People Have Them" by Bastian Herre in *Our World in Data*, December 2, 2021

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b. The Best Children's Books of 2021 – This School Library Journal feature lists the editors' picks for picture, chapter, middle-grade, young adult, nonfiction, poetry, graphic novels, audio, and manga books, and also the editors' favorite quotes and personal reads.

"Best Books 2021" by Mahnaz Dar, Kimberly Fakih, Amanda Mastrull, Florence Simmons, and Ashleigh Williams, illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh, in *School Library Journal*, December 2021 (Vol. 67, #12, pp. 32-62)

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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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- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
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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
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Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
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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