

Marshall Memo 855

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 28, 2020

In This Issue:

1. [The pandemic's likely trajectory](#)
2. [Building students' writing proficiency with digital tools](#)
3. [Jennifer Gonzalez on preventing plagiarism in middle and high schools](#)
4. [Less class time on ELA, more on social studies](#)
5. [Fascinating and funny stories that detract from learning](#)
6. [Time management basics](#)
7. [School librarians' role in promoting literacy](#)
8. [Children's books about voting](#)
9. [Recommended 2019 young adult coming-of-age novels](#)

Quotes of the Week

“It will take two things to bring this virus under control: hygienic measures and a vaccine.”
Paul Offit (quoted in item #1)

“Remote learning is stressful at first but very easy to get used to.”
A Massachusetts high-school student's exit ticket at the end of a Zoom class last week
(personal communication from the student's teacher)

“I learned that if you actually pay attention, the class goes by faster.”
(another student, *ibid.*)

“I also learned that even though we are remote, we can still take care of each other.”
(a third student, *ibid.*)

“Reading is the core of personal and academic competency.”
(see item #6)

“Reading tests are really knowledge tests in disguise.”
Daniel Willingham (quoted in item #4)

“Unfortunately, students are expected to learn how to avoid plagiarism by some kind of osmosis.”
Jennifer Gonzalez (see item #3)

“The answer to managing your day is you.”
Dan Rockwell (see item #7)

1. The Pandemic's Likely Trajectory

In this article in *Politico Magazine*, Elizabeth Ralph reports on her interviews with a number of experts on how they believe the coronavirus pandemic will end in the U.S. and around the world. "It will take two things to bring this virus under control," says Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center and an attending physician in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Children's Hospital, Philadelphia: "hygienic measures and a vaccine." Here is Ralph's synthesis of the sequence predicted by the experts she consulted:

- The virus continues to spread and cause significant illness and death, except in areas with widespread mask-wearing, social distancing, and hand-washing. "Masks and distance really work," says Emily Landon, chief infectious disease epidemiologist at University of Chicago Medicine.
- If rapid antigen tests are perfected, approved, and widely distributed, it will be easier to identify cases, trace contacts, and isolate those who are infectious.
- Approval of at least one effective vaccine is expected in early 2021.
- Vaccination begins with essential workers and high-risk populations.
- Vaccine production and distribution ramps up, overcoming formidable logistical challenges, and more people are vaccinated.
- Vaccination, combined with continued mask-wearing, social distancing, etc., leads to a steady decline in Covid-19 cases and deaths.
- There continue to be outbreaks, but treatments improve and new case numbers and deaths are fewer, especially in high-compliance areas.
- There are several "known-unknowns": the effectiveness and longevity of vaccines; how many people refuse to be vaccinated; how many agree to have a second vaccination; unexpected mutations in the virus; and continued compliance with hygienic measures.
- By mid-to-late 2021, a high percentage of Americans have been vaccinated at least once.
- By November 2021, most people in the U.S. have received two doses of the vaccine and there is "herd immunity" in the nation, with few new cases and deaths.
- Second-generation vaccines with better effectiveness are introduced, further reducing cases.
- Within two years, as more people develop immunity through vaccination or exposure and as treatments become more effective, Covid-19 is one of a number of other ordinary illnesses people get every winter (with sniffles or flu-like symptoms), and the U.S. is fully back to "normal."

- In many parts of the developing world, this process moves more slowly, and international travel doesn't return to pre-pandemic levels for several years.

[“Here’s How the Pandemic Finally Ends”](#) by Elizabeth Ralph in *Politico Magazine*, September 25, 2020

[Back to page one](#)

2. Building Students’ Writing Proficiency with Digital Tools

In this article in *Edutopia*, South Carolina teacher Lauren Gehr describes some advantages of digital interaction with students about their writing:

- It’s easier for teachers to differentiate and personalize comments according to students’ needs and social-emotional state.
- Students can refer back to teachers’ comments and are less likely to forget them.
- Digital commenting can be done synchronously and asynchronously, in school and at home, with conferences scheduled when the writing is ready for assessment.
- The timing of conferences is not tied to the school day, and students can work at their own pace addressing teachers’ feedback.

Gehr recommends three digital tools for this work:

- *Google Docs* – With this application, teachers can highlight a word, phrase, or passage for feedback. “This feature means that a teacher can leave their digital fingerprint on their students’ work,” says Gehr, “with the sure knowledge that the student will see the comments and feedback in the correct context.” Students can respond, and Google Docs makes it easier to keep work organized, communicate via the chat function, track students’ progress, and have everything in one place when it’s time to assess.

- *Flipgrid* – Teachers can record video or audio suggestions on students’ writing, and students can respond with comments or questions; these exchanges are saved to show progress and inform assessment.

- *Wakelet* – This online curation and collection tool helps students organize content and tools like Google Docs and Flipgrid by topic – e.g., narrative, argumentation, links to research sources, and a final portfolio of learning.

“Whether education is happening virtually or face-to-face,” Gehr concludes, “digital tools can help ensure that students receive quality writing instruction.”

[“Promoting Strong Writing Skills with Digital Instruction”](#) by Lauren Gehr in *Edutopia*, September 21, 2020

[Back to page one](#)

3. Jennifer Gonzalez on Preventing Plagiarism in Middle and High School

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez says a lot of teachers’ time and teeth-gnashing goes into catching and punishing plagiarism. Some students know exactly what they’re doing as they cut corners, but Gonzalez believes there isn’t always devious intent. A few years ago, she noticed that many of the slides her daughter had created for a class project

could not have been written by a fifth grader. Asked about this, the girl said she'd copied and pasted the material from a website. "It took me forever to explain why that was wrong and what she needed to do instead," says Gonzalez. "She seriously had no idea. She wasn't trying to cheat. Eventually, I convinced her that she really, really needed to revise, and even though she did, I could tell she was mostly humoring me."

That was a fifth grader, but studies have found that many college students don't have a clear understanding of what exactly plagiarism is, making it harder for teachers and professors to prevent it. "Unfortunately," says Gonzalez, "students are expected to learn how to avoid plagiarism by some kind of osmosis. As they progress from grade to grade, they are expected to already know how to weave research into their writing in original, elegant, and ethical ways, but far too often, they don't have this skill set."

What is to be done? From her years in the classroom and a review of research, Gonzalez recommends the following exercises for grades 7-12, with the approximate time each one might take:

- *Recognizing plagiarism* (15-20 minutes) – Have students read a passage of 500-800 words and then examine several (teacher-created) examples of student writing about the text, some of which contain plagiarism, some without it. Students respond Yes or No, discuss in groups, and are then told if their assessments are correct. After a few rounds, students should be able to correctly spot most instances of plagiarism.

- *Summarizing* (20-30 minutes) – "Students need to be able to read something, digest it, and then explain what they learned in their own language," says Gonzalez. This is best taught with short, straightforward texts using the following whole-class sequence; *I do* (modeling), *We do* (guided practice), *You do* (independent practice). Students practice reading, looking away from the passage, verbally recalling the gist, writing it in language that is disconnected from the source and sounds like them, and checking back for proper attribution, no plagiarism, and proper crediting of the source. It's helpful for students to compare their summaries with those of one or more classmates.

- *Paraphrasing* (20-30 minutes) – This is slightly different than summarizing: students take a specific idea and retell it, giving credit to the author – for example, *According to... in her article..., ... says....* This is best taught in the same *I do/We do/You do* sequence with lots of feedback and peer comparisons along the way.

- *Using direct quotes* (20-30 minutes) – Students learn that the only time it's okay to use an authors' exact words is when they're in quotes and directly attributed to that person. *I do/We do/You do* is effective for this skill as well.

- *Using a formal citation style* (30-40 minutes) – Common Core ELA standards require students to start applying a formal style as early as seventh grade, so practice should begin in middle school with the school's or district's choices (e.g., grade level, MLA or APA). Gonzalez recommends working with 2-3 sample items, starting with articles and books similar to the ones students will encounter in their writing and research projects. Students generate a reference list at the end of their paper, modify the author references they've done in the third and fourth exercises above, and then apply the skills with new passages. Once they've

achieved mastery, students can learn to use time-saving citation generators like EasyBib, BibMe, or the citation feature in Google Docs. The final step is having students do research and write an essay or extended response applying these skills.

These five exercises are contained in Gonzalez's ready-made lessons linked in the full article below.

["Teaching Students to Avoid Plagiarism"](#) by Jennifer Gonzalez in *Cult of Pedagogy*, February 26, 2017

[Back to page one](#)

4. Less Classroom Time on ELA, More on Social Studies

In this Thomas B. Fordham Institute paper, Adam Tyner and Sarah Kabourek argue that background knowledge is more important than generic reading skills (e.g., identifying the main idea) in developing students' reading comprehension. An example: students might be able to accurately read the words *Berlin Wall*, but wouldn't understand the true meaning if they didn't know that Berlin, the capital of Germany during World War II, was divided by the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, and that a wall kept East Germans from escaping the lack of economic opportunity and freedom on the Communist side. "There's little doubt," say Tyner and Kabourek, "that background knowledge is critical for a reader to make sense of a given text." The study takes it a step further, quoting Daniel Willingham (University of Virginia): "Reading tests are really knowledge tests in disguise."

These research-based insights about background knowledge have been around for decades, say Tyner and Kabourek, but have not been put into practice in many U.S. classrooms that are using skills-based, knowledge-weak instruction.

Below are the key findings of the Fordham study, which used PreK-5 data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study:

- Elementary students in the U.S. spend much more time on English language arts than any other subject, but this massive ELA block isn't paying dividends in reading proficiency.
- Students from lower-SES homes, Hispanic students, and those attending traditional and charter public schools spend more time on ELA than students in private schools, which spend more time on content subjects.
- Increasing classroom minutes on social studies is associated with improved reading proficiency, most likely because it provides rich background knowledge and fosters imagination and engagement.
- The students who benefit the most from additional social studies time are girls and those from lower-income and/or non-English-speaking homes.

Tyner and Kabourek pivot from these findings to three recommendations for U.S. elementary schools:

- *Devote more time to high-quality social studies instruction.* They suggest that teachers spend at least 45 minutes a day on history, geography, current events, and civics, capturing the extra minutes currently spent on less-effective ELA activities (e.g., practicing generic

comprehension skills). Increasing social studies learning will improve students' reading proficiency by building knowledge and vocabulary that is applicable across subject areas. "Just as important," say the authors, "additional social studies time will probably also help students develop the strong knowledge base needed for a successful transition to middle school."

- *Use the literacy block to build student knowledge.* Curriculum packages like *Wit and Wisdom* and high-quality text sets integrate knowledge-building with reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities.

- *Align end-of-year reading assessments with curriculum content.* Many reading tests focus on abstract reading skills, but the passages they choose nonetheless privilege the background knowledge some students happen to have. The problem is that tests' content could come from anywhere, rather than from the topics in social studies, science, or literature students have been studying that year. Tests results therefore don't reflect (or reward) the work that teachers and students are doing each year.

The authors quote E.D. Hirsch and Robert Pondiscio on the need for domain-specific language arts curriculum. "Rather than idle away precious hours on trivial stories or randomly chosen nonfiction," say Hirsch and Pondiscio, "reading, writing, and listening instruction would be built into the study of ancient civilizations in first grade, for example, Greek mythology in second, or the human body in third." End-of-year reading tests would focus on each year's content, and teachers would "teach to the test" in the best sense, preparing students with the knowledge and skills to be successful in those rigorous assessments of content and skills – and prepared for success in the next grade. Louisiana is piloting this idea, and the results will be scrutinized in the years ahead.

["Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension"](#) by Adam Tyner and Sarah Kabourek in a Thomas B. Fordham Institute paper, September 24, 2020; Tyner can be reached at atyner@fordhaminstitute.org.

[Back to page one](#)

5. Fascinating and Funny Stories That Detract from Learning

In this *Edutopia* article, consultant/researcher Kripa Sundar describes a fourth-grade geology lesson about volcanoes. The teacher grabs every student's attention with a dramatic story: "The loudest known sound was made by a volcano called Krakatau, in Southeast Asia. When Krakatau erupted in 1883, it was reported to have sounded like 15,000 nuclear bombs! Like 200 megatons of energy! What do you imagine a volcano eruption sounds like?" Students are fascinated, and several share their speculations.

But this highly engaging story had nothing to do with the intended learning outcome, which was the *causes* of volcano eruptions, not the noise produced. "Researchers call these attention-grabbing, interesting, and irrelevant pieces of information *seductive details*," says Sundar. "They can be words, illustrations, photographs, animations, narrations, videos, or sounds." Studies show that when teachers try to engage students with off-message material, learning is impaired. That's probably because:

- Students are distracted or confused by the captivating or amusing details and don't focus on the essential content.
- They're reminded of irrelevant prior knowledge, causing further distraction.
- Students' attention is spread too thin and they don't grasp the teacher's key point.
- Seductive details are especially unhelpful at the end of a lesson, because at this point, they're more likely to stick.

"I know that a laugh can break the tension in class or build rapport with students," says Sundar, "especially now when we can all use a smile." But teachers need to choose attention-getting moves with careful attention to their intended learning outcomes. To that end, she has these suggestions:

- *Focus on the content.* Ask yourself, "How can I make this content fun? How does it connect to my students' lives?" Sometimes a brief story or graphic won't be distracting because it signals that it's intended for fun and not related to the content.

- *Less is more.* Don't include information or visuals (like stock photos) that are jazzy but don't add value. In addition, Sundar advises, have clear titles, use borders and blocks of color to highlight key ideas, and help students connect ideas to other subjects and topics within your subject area.

- *End with clarity.* The closing moments of a lesson should revisit key ideas and get students retrieving knowledge and skills to reinforce them in long-term memory.

["The Student Engagement Trap, and How to Avoid It"](#) by Kripa Sundar in *Edutopia*, September 17, 2020

[Back to page one](#)

6. Time Management Basics

"The seduction of distraction is it makes you feel important while diluting usefulness at the same time," says Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*. Being super-busy with a long to-do list is not conducive to getting big-picture results. "The answer to managing your day is you," Rockwell says, and suggests four principles:

- Stop doing other people's work.
- Focus on high-value, high-return activities, eschewing busywork.
- Identify no more than three essential items that you must complete before day's end.
- Carve out large chunks of unstructured time to chill out. This really matters to long-range productivity, says Rockwell.

["Distraction: Defeating the Beast That Contaminates Leadership and Dilutes Effectiveness"](#) by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, September 23, 2020; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

[Back to page one](#)

7. School Librarians' Role in Promoting Literacy

“Reading is the core of personal and academic competency,” says a 2020 position statement from the American Association of School Librarians. The paper goes on to outline six ways librarians can support literacy goals with educators and students:

- *Inquire* – Librarians pose questions, get students looking for answers, and develop lifelong skills in independent reading, information literacy, critical thinking, and communication.

- *Include* – Librarians expose students to resources that are diverse, inclusive, and represent a variety of views. Students have equitable access to the library’s material, including through adaptive devices, and explore for academic purposes and personal enjoyment.

- *Collaborate* – Librarians are effective instructional partners, working with classroom teachers and specialists to design, implement, and evaluate interdisciplinary units and lessons to develop students’ proficiency in reading and inquiry.

- *Curate* – Librarians select and prune resources to create a rich reading culture in their schools and “support the developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all learners.” Librarians follow principles of intellectual freedom while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

- *Explore* – Librarians use their knowledge of resources inside and outside the school so that students can “exercise choice and curiosity in what they read, view, and hear,” explore new ideas, and produce creative learning products.

- *Engage* – Librarians ensure open access so stakeholders are served at the point of need. They lead professional development that promotes literacy, instruction, and the integration of resources, and model and advocate for intellectual freedom and learners’ right to read.

“The School Librarian’s Role in Reading” from an American Association of School Librarians position statement, January 25, 2020; the full statement is available [here](#).

[Back to page one](#)

8. Children’s Books About Voting

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Cicely Lewis recommends books that can inspire future voters and inform those who are eligible to vote this year:

- *Lillian’s Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* by Jonah Winter, illustrated by Shane Evans (Random/Schwartz & Wade, 2015), grades 1-4
- *For Which We Stand: How Our Government Works and Why It Matters* by Jeff Foster, illustrated by Julie McLaughlin (Scholastic, 2020), grades 3-7
- *We the People: The United States Constitution Explored and Explained* by Aura Lewis and Evan Sargent (Quarto/Wide-Eyed Editions, 2020), grades 5-8
- *The Voting Booth* by Brandy Colbert (Hyperion, 2020), grades 7-10
- *Votes of Confidence: A Young Person’s Guide to American Elections* by Jeff Fleisher (Lerner/Zest, 2020), grade 8 and up

9. Recommended 2019 Young Adult Coming-of-Age Novels

In this *English Journal* feature, Bryan Gillis (Kennesaw State University) says he read all the young adult books that were featured on “best of” lists last year and chose the six coming-of-age books he believes are must-reads (see the link below for cover images and capsule reviews):

- *Dig* by A.S. King (Penguin Books/Dutton), grade 9 and up
- *Like a Love Story* by Abdi Nazemian (Balzer + Bray), grade 9 and up
- *Lovely War* by Julie Berry (Penguin Random House), grade 8 and up
- *Patron Saints of Nothing* by Randy Ribay (Penguin Random House), grade 7 and up
- *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi (Make Me a World/Random House), grade 7 and up
- *Shout* by Laurie Halse Anderson (Viking/Penguin Random House), grade 7 and up

[“Honor List of 2019: Prize-Winning YAL: Coming of Age – Past, Present, and Future”](#) by Bryan Gillis in *English Journal*, September 2020 (Vol. 110, #1, pp. 92-99); Gillis can be reached at bgillis@kennesaw.edu. The link access is for NCTE members.

[Back to page one](#)

© Copyright 2020 Marshall Memo LLC

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.

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

Website:

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a running count of articles)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (bio, writings, consulting)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 16+ years

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