Marshall Memo 773

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 11, 2019

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"As educators, we will never know all the stressors students face in their homes and communities."

Carolyn Stone in "Rulings, Policies, and Student Stress" in *ASCA School Counselor*, February 2019 (Vol. 56, #3, p. 6-8), no e-link; Stone is at cstone@unf.edu.

"It is way easier to make a hard test that smart people can do well on than one that shows growth tied to teaching and learning."

Jack Buckley (quoted in item #4)

"Even when access gaps are closed, white and affluent students are more likely to use technology for creativity and problem solving with greater levels of mentorship from adults, while students from minority groups and low-income neighborhoods use technology more commonly for routine drills with lower levels of adult support."

Justin Reich (see item #1)

"Kids who barely scratch out a few sentences to a standardized test prep question might be writing thousands of words of Warrior Cats fan fiction at home at night."

Justin Reich (*ibid.*)

"Time is one of the most powerful levers for change in a school. Everything about how a school runs, from where staff go, to when they have breaks and collaborative time, to what classes students can take, is based on how leaders schedule the limited time within a school day, week, and year."

Katrina Schwartz in "Time Is an Essential Teacher Resource, So How Can Schools Be More Creative With It?" in *MindShift*, February 2019, https://bit.ly/2C9TIXJ

1. Bridging the Digital Divide

(Originally titled "Teaching Our Way to Digital Equity")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Justin Reich (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) reports two research findings on the implementation of new classroom technologies over the last 50 years. First, teachers tend to use new gadgets to extend existing practices – for example:

- Tablet computers replacing hard-copy notebooks.
- Smartboards performing the same functions as overhead projectors.
- Learning management systems distributing digital worksheets to students.

A second finding is that when innovative uses of new technologies emerge, it's often more-advantaged students who benefit, either in high-SES neighborhoods or in the upper tracks within schools. "Even when access gaps are closed," says Reich, "white and affluent students are more likely to use technology for creativity and problem solving with greater levels of mentorship from adults, while students from minority groups and low-income neighborhoods use technology more commonly for routine drills with lower levels of adult support."

This pattern of inequity extends beyond classroom instruction: one study found that when students in wealthier schools played around with computers and maker activities, adults viewed their activities positively – they were hackers – but when students in poorer schools (or lower-track classes) engaged in the same activities, they were seen as slackers.

How can educators change this pattern of unequal access and expectations? Reich offers the following suggestions:

• *Work on adult attitudes*. Visiting schools, Reich has noticed that teachers are aware of some students' disadvantages in the digital domain, but there are differences in how teachers react. Some level the playing field by *cutting back* on assignments that require computers and home Internet access; others fully incorporate technology into their assignments, open their classrooms early, welcome students after hours, and encourage the use of computer labs and libraries.

• *Co-opt students' interests*. Teachers need to recognize that seemingly frivolous student technology activities can be gateways to career opportunities in programming, marketing, communications, sound engineering, and other fields. "Kids who barely scratch out a few sentences to a standardized test prep question," says Reich, "might be writing thousands of words of Warrior Cats fan fiction at home at night."

• *Involve families*. "If it takes a village to raise a child, then teaching whole villages is a promising strategy for digital equity," says Reich. He points to Boston's TechGoesHome program, which provides families with low-cost laptops and trains parents to be tech-savvy, and the University of Colorado's Family Creative Learning Project, which engages the whole family in multi-generational digital learning.

• *Ensure equal access*. "Schools should pay particular attention to where students get rich digital learning opportunities in their courses, and who can and does take advantage of these opportunities," says Reich. When courses are elective, seats tend to be taken by white and Asian boys. Access is more equitable when technology is integrated into required courses – for example, Bootstrap for teaching algebra through computer game design, and Project GUTS, which uses computer simulations in middle-school science.

• *Audit content and opportunities*. Survey teachers, parents, and students and use the data as the basis for a full-faculty discussion about changes that need to be made, including helping parents get more comfortable with technology and provide needed support to their children at home.

"Teaching Our Way to Digital Equity" by Justin Reich in *Educational Leadership*, February 2019 (Vol. 76, #5, p. 30-35), https://bit.ly/2RoO9u4

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2. Effective Use of Assistive Technology in Upper-Elementary Classrooms

(Originally titled "Assistive Technology: Promises Fulfilled")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, California fifth-grade teacher Kyle Redford says many digital games and apps have been "disappointing, distracting, or time-wasters." But there's one area of technology that she believes has fulfilled its promise: "Probably more than anything else in my 30 years as a teacher, assistive technology has changed my instruction." Redford appreciates the way it supports students with disabilities and differences and increases all students' access to high-level learning that would be impossible without technology. Several key areas:

• *Reading* – Audio versions of classroom books and digital books that highlight the words being read on the screen are powerful tools (Bookshare https://www.bookshare.org/cms/ is a free service available to anyone with a known print disability). "With decoding support in place, many dyslexic students become leaders in book discussions," says Redford. "After they discover that reading involves more than sounding out words, many find they are skilled at making connections, drawing inferences, and making predictions."

• *Writing* – Dictation apps, available now on all devices including cell phones, convert students' speech into written text and work wonders on their confidence as writers. "Once they get comfortable with dictating what they want to say into a dictation app and editing the text produced," says Redford, "students who previously turned in minimalistic, poorly composed written work now regularly surprise me with more volume, detail, and depth of thought." Dictation apps aren't for everyone, she says; an alternative is a predictive spelling app that

gives lots of support to students who are having difficulty with mechanical skills. "Student output often increases once these students are allowed to focus on their *ideas*," says Redford, "instead of being distracted by spelling and handwriting snags."

• *Behavior* – When struggling students are engaged and successful, they are much less likely to act out, improving classroom culture and enabling the teacher to focus on instruction rather than discipline.

Why aren't assistive technologies more widely used? One misconception is that they give unfair advantages to some students, creating divisions in classrooms. The opposite is true, says Redford: "Assistive technologies help offset inequities by providing students who have learning differences with better access to learning opportunities." Another myth is that technology keeps students from acquiring key skills. Not true, says Redford; assistive tools help students work around their disabilities and become skilled, confident, and included by classmates. A third worry is that students will become dependent on technology. "But one of the most compelling attributes of assistive technology," says Redford, "is the sense of independent confidence it provides for students with learning disabilities (or differences)… Down the road, they will require much less adult support to keep pace with academic expectations."

"Assistive Technology: Promises Fulfilled" by Kyle Redford in *Educational Leadership*, February 2019 (Vol. 76, #5, p. 70-74), https://bit.ly/2GDuBAk; Redford can be reached at kredford@mcds.org.

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3. What Teachers Can Learn from Athletic Coaches

In this *MindShift* article, writer/researcher Linda Flanagan bemoans the fact that fewer and fewer teachers are coaching athletic teams. Why is she concerned? Because there are many important classroom insights to be gained from working with a sports team. Here are some:

• *Tie teaching and learning to a performance*. "In sports, players practice their skills in order to play the game better," says Flanagan, "and coaches modify what and how they train based on the athletes' performance. Students in the classroom would benefit from similar high-stakes public performances." The key is continuous, immediate feedback on practice, with lots of opportunities to improve, for an important application of skill. An example from a California high school: students who have been reading *Lord of the Flies* must take part in a libel "trial" of the author, William Golding, using local courthouses.

• *Increase the amount of feedback*. "The feedback makes kids feel safe and more willing to speak up next time," says Flanagan, "even if they're uncertain about their answers."

• *Think team*. The bonding common in athletic teams is often absent in classrooms because academic success doesn't depend on classmates. "Learning that involves group performances, where every student plays a role and relies on others, can stir up similar feelings of connection," says Flanagan.

• *Build closer relationships*. Coaches often get to know their players on a personal level and share more of themselves. Although teachers don't have as much concentrated time with students, they would do well to emulate coaches in building relationships.

• *See students in another context*. A child who is timid in the classroom may be a powerhouse on the soccer field. Teachers can see a whole other side of disruptive or chronically unprepared students when they watch them in an athletic context.

"What Teachers and Sports Coaches Can Learn From Each Other" by Linda Flanagan in *MindShift*, February 7, 2019, https://bit.ly/2SFT0eY

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4. A More Flexible Approach to Social-Emotional Learning in Schools

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Rebecca Bailey, Laura Stickle, Gretchen Brion-Meisels, and Stephanie Jones (Harvard Graduate School of Education) affirm the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) – especially for students who enter school with any kind of disadvantage. But in their work with educators implementing SEL programs around the U.S., the authors have found the following challenges:

- Some SEL curriculums don't reflect students' experiences, and at times oversimplify or ignore students' real-world problems.
- Many SEL programs aren't aligned with children's stages of development, often teaching the same set of skills across the grades.
- Scripted lesson plans don't allow teachers to respond to students' concerns in real time.
- 30-minutes-a-week SEL blocks are insufficient and tend to get pre-empted by academic priorities.
- Educators seldom get enough training and support to implement SEL programs or to engage in their own social-emotional growth.

The authors' takeaway: "There is a pressing need for an approach to SEL that is more flexible and feasible to implement and adaptable to individual and place-based needs, while still achieving meaningful outcomes for children." Here are the characteristics they advocate:

• *Teach age-appropriate social-emotional skills at each level*. In the pre-school years, children develop basic emotional skills such as recognizing and communicating feelings and managing anger and sorrow. Executive function skills emerge around age 4 and develop during the early years of school. Here's a grade-by-grade sequence of appropriate SEL learning in the elementary grades:

- Kindergarten – Stop and think power: Learning to wait, share, take turns, and practice self-management following classroom routines.
- Grade 1 – Focus power: Increasing the amount of time students can pay attention to adults' instructions, listen to peers, and concentrate on tasks and activities.
- Grade 2 – Remember power: Becoming more independent and carrying out multi-step tasks, following directions, and making and carrying out detailed plans.

In the next two grades, students use these foundational skills to understand the world through others' eyes and resolve conflicts:

- Grade 3 – Empathy and perspective-taking: Recognizing and responding to others' feelings, needs, wants, ideas, and perspectives, and caring about friendships with peers;
- Grade 4 – Conflict resolution skills: As relationships become more complicated, students need adult guidance on how to deal with disagreements and conflicts when they arise.

In the upper-elementary grades, students must learn to integrate multiple skills, building and maintaining positive, healthy relationships:

- Grade 5 – Relationship skills: At this age, students have a growing desire to connect with others, and relationships with peers and supportive adults, as well as issues in their communities, are often the most important factors in their lives.

An effective social-emotional learning curriculum should address the right skills at each level.

• *Social-emotional learning should occur in classrooms and also in hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds*. "SEL instruction is most effective when children have frequent opportunities to practice SEL skills in various contexts," say the authors. All staff should be trained in a set of basic, uncomplicated "active ingredients" of social-emotional learning for each grade level. "Focusing on these strategies, rather than comprehensive curricula or scripted lessons, enables teachers and staff to address challenges or opportunities as they arise. This approach can also increase consistency throughout the school community and smooth students' transitions between classrooms and grades."

• *SEL works best when teachers respond to students' specific needs and experiences*. To get students truly engaged, say the authors, teachers need to be trained and empowered to use students' experiences in school, at home, and in their communities. Educators need ideas and resources and a clear sense of what is essential and what is optional (or may be adapted). They should use teachable moments to get their students practicing SEL skills in response to everyday challenges, for example, addressing conflict effectively, managing emotions, and paying attention. Teachers using this approach found they addressed two or three situations a day in the elementary grades, one a day in middle school.

The authors report that a pilot program in a summer school produced significant gains in students' social-emotional skills and was well received by teachers. Educators also liked having detailed strategies at their fingertips, including a pack with detailed descriptions for each strategy and general guidance on how to implement strategies over time – in other words, a mix of autonomy and structure.

"Re-Imagining Social-Emotional Learning" by Rebecca Bailey, Laura Stickle, Gretchen Brion-Meisels, and Stephanie Jones in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2019 (Vol. 100, #5, p. 53-58), https://bit.ly/2UMmIMR; the authors can be reached at Rebecca_bailey@gse.harvard.edu, laura_stickle@gse.harvard.edu, gretchen_brion-meisels@gse.harvard.edu, jonesst@gse.harvard.edu.

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5. Cautionary Notes on Performance Assessments

In this *Education Week* special report, Stephen Sawchuk says that asking students to show what they can do, not just what they know, has a long history – at least since John Dewey. But Sawchuk says there are some key lessons from recent research and experimentation:

• *Consider the context*. The biggest question is whether a performance assessment is appropriate to a particular instructional situation. For example, if students are doing research for a newspaper article, an open-ended task makes sense. But if a teacher wants to quickly assess content knowledge, a multiple-choice test is the best choice. Another question is whether the results of the assessment should be used for high stakes. That's because it's difficult to get good inter-rater reliability when different educators score performance assessments. If a performance task is embedded in classroom learning, student feedback, and grades, the lack of precision is acceptable. But for consequential decisions like grade-level promotion, high-school graduation, and school ratings, there are problems.

• *Keep costs in mind*. "Coming up with good performance tasks can be expensive as well as time-consuming," says Sawchuk. This is especially true if there's a need for comparability and reliability. Even when performance tasks are used for low stakes, teachers need training to ensure fair grading. New Hampshire is currently the only state that's using locally generated performance tasks statewide.

• *Align teaching and testing*. It's not enough to have a new assessment that measures students' higher-order understanding and application, says Sawchuk; teaching and curriculum materials need to be in sync. If new assessments are imposed on schools that continue to use traditional instruction, the results won't be good – and there will be equity problems. "It is way easier to make a hard test that smart people can do well on than one that shows growth tied to teaching and learning," says Jack Buckley, former head of the U.S. Department of Education's statistical office.

• *Plan for scaling up and communicating results*. "Parents and teachers can be a performance assessment's biggest boosters, or its toughest foes," says Sawchuk, "which means it's key to keep them apprised of the assessment program and the logic behind it as it's piloted, rolled out, and scored." Maine tried to implement an ambitious performance assessment system a few years ago and ran into stiff resistance; there wasn't enough teacher training and support, and many parents were uncomfortable with the 4-3-2-1 grading scale. In 2018, the state walked back the requirements, giving districts the option to return to traditional assessments for graduation.

"Four Lessons Learned When Teachers Went Beyond Bubble Tests" by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, February 6, 2019 (Vol. 38, #20, p. 3-4 of the "Projects, Portfolios, and Performance Assessments" supplement), https://bit.ly/2UMmIMR

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6. Strategic Support for First-Generation College Applicants

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Julia Duncheon (University of Texas/El Paso) and Stefani Relles (University of Nevada/Las Vegas) describe how one urban high school went about getting college information to students who were the first in their families to apply. The school did a good job providing "passive brokerage" of college information, including:

- Posting materials created by external organizations, including Upward Bound fliers, SAT registration information, and posters from colleges and universities;
- Confirming students' eligibility for external resources like SAT and college application fee waivers and scholarship conference applications;
- Connecting students to opportunities such as the Community Scholars Program, Upward Bound, and an engineering program;
- Scheduling and hosting events including a Pathways to College presentation, college application sessions, Cash for College workshops, and college fairs.

All this was helpful, but the "underlying paradox," say Duncheon and Relles, is that "passive brokerage democratized awareness of available resources, but with little or no consideration regarding how a first-generation student might interpret and respond." What many of these students lacked was social capital from families unfamiliar with the application process.

Realizing this, the high school engaged in a number of more-active forms of brokerage, aiming to reach students who might otherwise not have taken advantage of all the available opportunities. Some examples:

- A teacher posting specific information on her classroom whiteboard and drawing students' attention to it;
- A teacher creating a FAFSA handout for her students;
- The school paying for a student's third SAT registration;
- Tracking down students to complete applications just before a deadline;
- Correcting a student's misinterpretation of a college liaison's advice;
- Directing students into a make-up class;
- Providing a long-term campus presence for several external partners and resources, including GEAR UP, After School Enrichment, and community college courses.

Duncheon and Relles believe high schools serving first-generation college applicants need to provide both passive and active forms of brokerage to maximize the chances of college admission.

"Brokering College Opportunity for First-Generation Youth: The Role of the Urban High School" by Julia Duncheon and Stefani Relles in *American Educational Research Journal*, February 2019 (Vol. 56, #1, p. 146-177), https://bit.ly/2UUFW33; Duncheon can be reached at jcduncheon@utep.edu.

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7. Children's Books on the Jewish Experience in America

In this *School Library Journal* article, Rachel Kamin lists award-winning children's books that portray Jewish culture, history, religion, and contemporary life:

Picture books:

- *Irving Berlin, the Immigrant Boy Who Made America Sing* by Nancy Churnin
- *Write On, Irving Berlin!* by Leslie Kimmelman
- *God Bless America: The Story of an Immigrant Named Irving Berlin* by Adah Nuchi
- *Gittel's Journey: An Ellis Island Story* by Lesléa Newman – An eight-year-old girl journeys to America alone.
- *A Moon for Moe and Mo* by Jane Breskin Zalben – Jewish and Muslim boys become friends.

Middle grades:

- *Refugee* by Alan Gratz – This novel follows the connections among child refugees from Nazi Germany, Cuba, and Syria.
- *Viva Rose!* by Susan Krawitz – The child of Russian immigrants in Texas in the early 1900s learns that her older brother is involved with revolutionary leader Pancho Villa.
- *All Three Stooges* by Erica Perl – Two seventh graders preparing for their bar mitzvahs use humor to deal with a family tragedy.
- *This Is Just a Test* by Madelyn Rosenberg and Wendy Wan-Long Shang – A coming-of-age story about a 12-year-old anxious about nuclear war, his bar mitzvah, and more.

Young adult (Grade 8 and up):

- *The Girl with the Red Balloon* by Katherine Locke – A girl visits the Berlin Wall and is transported back in time into East Berlin in 1988.
- *Ready to Fall* by Marcella Pixley – A boy's fear of getting cancer.
- *You'll Miss Me When I'm Gone* by Rachel Lynn Solomon – A family wrestles with Huntington's disease.

"The Jewish Experience in America" by Rachel Kamin in *School Library Journal*, February 2019 (Vol. 65, #1, p. 34-36), no e-link

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8. Books Featuring People with Disabilities

In this article in *School Library Journal*, Marlaina Cockcroft suggests these 2015-2018 winners of Schneider Family Book Awards to fill the void in many school libraries of books featuring people with disabilities (this listing didn't include plot summaries):

For young children:

- *Silent Days, Silent Dreams* by Allen Say
- *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille* by Jen Bryant
- *Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- *A Boy and a Jaguar* by Alan Rabinowitz

For middle school:

- *Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess* by Shari Green
- *As Brave As You* by Jason Reynolds
- *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt
- *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberley Brubaker Bradley
- *Rain Reign* by Ann Martin

For teens:

- *You're Welcome, Universe* by Whitney Gardner
- *When We Collided* by Emery Lord
- *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* by Teresa Toten
- *Girls Like Us* by Gail Giles

"The Enduring Search" by Marlaina Cockcroft in *School Library Journal*, February 2019 (Vol. 65, #1, p. 28-32), no e-link

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9. Short Item:

An interview with Dylan Wiliam – This 19-minute interview with assessment guru Dylan Wiliam by Anthony Mackay http://ncee.org/2019/01/global-ed-talks-dylan-wiliam/ contains insights on, among other topics, putting knowledge back into the curriculum.

"Global Talks with Anthony Mackay: An Interview with Dr. Dylan Wiliam," January 24, 2019, National Center on Education and the Economy (spotted in *The Education Gadfly,* February 6, 2019)

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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 48 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:

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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 Teaching in the Middle School
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