Marshall Memo 930

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
April 4, 2022

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"I have had 100 questions, and to be honest, I am quite afraid of saying some nonsense."
A teacher in Italy on students' concerns about the war in Ukraine (see item #1)

"From the time most of my students wake up to the time they go to bed, they spend, at best, 45 consecutive minutes not interacting with technology."
Jesse Pearson (see item #3)

"Early adolescence brings with it the perfect conditions for students to become disengaged from academics."
Hadley Bachman et al. (see item #5)

"The bad news is that plenty of leaders are so sure of themselves that they reject worthy opinions and ideas from others and refuse to abandon their own bad ones. The good news is that it is possible to get even the most overconfident, stubborn, narcissistic, and disagreeable people to open their minds."
Adam Grant (see item #2)

"Well-crafted rubrics can serve as a shared road map for teaching and learning. They mark the most important routes for teachers and students to navigate as they walk the circuitous path to deeper learning and more-effective performances. When educators use those rubrics to teach students how to discuss and describe that terrain, rubrics become the basis for the specific, understandable language of feedback – which students can leverage to guide their next steps to improvement."
Jay McTighe and Tony Frontier in "How to Provide Better Feedback Through Rubrics" in *Educational Leadership*, April 2022 (Vol. 79, #7, pp. 17-23); the authors can be reached at jay@mctighe-associates.com and tonyfrontier@gmail.com.

1. European Students' Anxieties About the War in Ukraine

In this *New York Times* article, Emma Bubola reports on the types of questions teachers across Europe are having to field from students concerned about the invasion of Ukraine and the vivid images on their TikTok feeds, including plenty of misinformation:

- *Russia is big enough, why does he want more land?*
- *Does Putin want to rebuild the U.S.A.?*
- *If you were in Putin's shoes, would you have attacked?*
- *Why are most crazy people men?*
- *Would you stay and fight for your country?*

Answering the last question, an elementary teacher in England said, "It's a difficult one, isn't it? My instinct would be to protect you. Yes, I think I would fight for my country."

A high-school geography teacher in northern Italy said, "I have had 100 questions, and to be honest, I am quite afraid of saying some nonsense." An elementary teacher in Sicily was asked about Russian munitions killing children in a hospital and said it had happened by accident. "I just cannot tell them that they kill children," she said. "It's too hard." When fighter jets flew over this school, which is near a military base, a student asked, "Is the war coming here? Do we have Russians here?" The teacher was reassuring, saying that the Russian civilians in Italy were not evil and meant no harm.

The editor of *First News*, a British newspaper for children, said her publication had delivered the same message. "We don't want Russian children to be picked on and bullied because of Putin. We know that it's happening." Discussing the possibility of nuclear war, a teacher said, "I did my best to calm them and reassure them, but I don't want to lie to my students." Another teacher explained the distinction between threatening to use nuclear weapons and actually using them.

School authorities have scrambled to provide support to teachers. In Britain, the Department of Education said the war raises issues that many teachers have never encountered. "How can I find the words?" asked one teacher. "I myself don't understand it." The Department suggested that teachers "establish the facts," promote discussion, and push back against disinformation. In France, the government suggested that teachers explain the common history of Russia and Ukraine while making clear that the situation "does not substantiate the thesis that Ukraine, a sovereign state, does not have the right to independence." Don't discuss the war if students seem reluctant to do so, the authorities suggested.

But in many classrooms, students thought the war might come to their country and were eager to talk. In a seventh-grade class in Poland just after the invasion, students asked their

teacher to stop the lesson and discuss the war. When students were asked if they had something to say, every hand went up. In some classrooms, there were students who saw Putin as "cool and tough" while others called him a "beast." Teachers had opinions too; one Norwegian elementary teacher said, "It's such a blatant imperialistic war. It's simply a question of right and wrong."

Pulling down a map of Europe was many teachers' first move, pointing out the central position of Ukraine, its access to the sea, and its agricultural and energy resources. A teacher in France tried to reassure his students by noting the distance from their country to Ukraine. In the English elementary classroom, a student looked at the map and said the reason for the war was obvious: "They are just two different countries. One is big and green, the other is small and pink." In the same classroom, a student had some tactical advice for the Ukrainians: Dry up the rivers with "thousands of sponges" so that Russian tanks would crash into the empty ditches.

"Hard Questions from Students Across Europe" by Emma Bubola in *The New York Times*, April 1, 2022

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2. Adam Grant on Persuading a Stubborn Leader

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Adam Grant (University of Pennsylvania) says it's a myth that Steve Jobs changed the world through the strength of his convictions, riding roughshod over preconceptions and his colleagues. In fact, says Grant, Apple's success came because Jobs's team pushed him to change his positions. For years he insisted that he would never make a phone. After he was persuaded otherwise, he vowed not to use outside apps. After a year of persuasion, Apple opened the App Store and logged a billion downloads in under a year. A decade later, the iPhone had generated more than $1 trillion in revenue. "If Jobs hadn't surrounded himself with people who knew how to change his mind," says Grant, "he might not have changed the world."

From interviews with those Apple persuaders and studies of other leaders, Grant concludes: "The bad news is that plenty of leaders are so sure of themselves that they reject worthy opinions and ideas from others and refuse to abandon their own bad ones. The good news is that it is possible to get even the most overconfident, stubborn, narcissistic, and disagreeable people to open their minds." The key is paying attention to instances when they change their minds – their *if…then* pattern that gives clues to the right approach. Here are some possible strategies to overcome the leader traits of arrogance, stubbornness, narcissism, and disagreeableness:

• *Ask a know-it-all to explain how things work*. Leaders who are arrogant and overconfident don't know what they don't know, but calling them on their ignorance is not a winning strategy. "A better approach," says Grant, "is to let them recognize the gaps in their own understanding." You can do this by humbly asking them to give a step-by-step explanation; flaws in logic or gaps in information often reveal themselves.

• *Let a stubborn person seize the reins*. "Intractable people see consistency and certainty as virtues," says Grant. "Once made up, their minds seem to be set in stone." They believe control resides within their heads, and direct arguments will snap back like a rubber band. The trick for subordinates is to "play catch" with the boss, says Grant, tossing them an idea, hearing their variations, tossing it back, asking questions like "What if?" and "Could we?", sparking creativity and allowing them to feel in control. This is how Mike Bell gradually persuaded Steve Jobs to explore the idea of streaming music.

• *Find the right way to praise a narcissist*. "Narcissistic leaders believe they're superior and special," says Grant, "and they don't take kindly to being told they're wrong." The trick is providing a dash of genuine praise, affirming the ways the leader is amazing, and then nudging them to acknowledge an imperfection in a different domain. "It doesn't help to bury criticism between two compliments," says Grant. "The feedback sandwich doesn't taste as good as it looks. Beginnings and ends are more likely to stick in our memories than middles, and narcissists are especially likely to ignore the criticism altogether."

• *Disagree with the disagreeable and argumentative*. "Disagreeable people are determined to crush the competition," says Grant, "and when you urge them to reevaluate their strategy, that's what you become." But it turns out that some bosses secretly admire people who argue with the boss, and if the critic is persistent, and keeps refining their pitch, addressing weaknesses, offering proof of concept, and enlisting supporters, they may end up winning the argument. At Apple, several subordinates who pushed Jobs's thinking ended up leading major divisions.

"In a turbulent world," Grant concludes, "success depends not just on cognitive horsepower but also on cognitive flexibility. When leaders lack the wisdom to question their convictions, followers need the courage to persuade them to change their minds."

"Persuading the Unpersuadable" by Adam Grant in *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2021

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3. Have We Gone Too Far on High-Tech Teaching?

In this article in *Independent School*, California humanities teacher Jesse Pearson lists the technology he's been using since students returned for in-person instruction: Google Docs and Slides, Kahoot, Canva, WeVideo editing tools, online videos, digital notebooks, MacBooks for every student, and more. Of course kids also have a multitude of apps and games on their phones. "From the time most of my students wake up to the time they go to bed," says Pearson, "they spend, at best, 45 consecutive minutes not interacting with technology… Where once a classroom could be a refuge from screens, the pandemic created a world in which, for most kids, the screen became the classroom."

Pearson says the learning platform that he and his colleagues have adopted has made teaching "immeasurably easier." It's easy to upload assignments and share links to texts, videos, images, and slides. Students know what to expect when they turn in assignments, get his feedback and grades "from anywhere, any time," the comments he provides are more

timely and precise, and students can follow up immediately if something isn't clear. Previously a self-professed Luddite, Pearson has come to believe that technology has made "teaching better, learning easier, and education more accessible." What's not to love?

But when his phone rang during class and his students reacted with a chorus of *Ooh, you're in trouble*, Pearson realized that they all had a lingering feeling that the classroom should be to some degree a sanctuary. While students "would gladly stare at their phones all day if we let them," he says, "they are depending on us to provide them with a daily respite, however brief, from the omnipresence of technology, from the fallacy of constant connection… It is OK for kids to learn that technology makes life easier. But we should not allow them to mistakenly think that it always makes life better."

So Pearson resolved to take a few steps back from always putting lessons and materials online, students doing all their work on laptops, turning it in via the cloud, and seeing their grades on their phones. Instead, he's resolved to:

- Get some materials off the screen and into students' hands;
- Have them more frequently use pen and paper, books and journals, meter sticks and paint brushes;
- Look together at work that exists in the real world, that can be seen and touched and felt.

"All of which," he concludes, "means that students will be more inclined to collaborate, comment, and connect. Which was the very reason we were all so desperate to get back to teaching in person in the first place."

"Split On Screens" by Jesse Pearson in *Independent School*, Spring 2022 (Vol. 81, #3, pp. 37-39)

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4. Motivating Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Classes

In this article in *Theory Into Practice*, Rebecca Louick (Eastern Michigan University) and Katherine Muenks (University of Texas/Austin) say that students with learning disabilities tend to blame themselves for their classroom struggles and attribute positive achievements to outside forces, not their own efforts. This dynamic creates motivation problems that further damage their performance.

Louick and Muenks explore the research on three motivational theories that are helpful to teachers who have students with disabilities in their regular-education classrooms:

• *Goal orientation* – Students with mastery goals focus on growing their knowledge and understanding of what's being taught; those with performance goals want to perform well and show others how competent they are, or avoid performing poorly and revealing their incompetence. Research on the goal orientation of students with disabilities suggests that these students do better in mastery-oriented classrooms. However, students with LD tend to perceive classrooms as more about performance than mastery, even if the teacher emphasizes mastery. Students with LD are particularly sensitive about doing poorly, which shifts them to a performance mindset.

• *Self-determination* – According to this theory, students have three core psychological needs in classrooms and the rest of their lives:

- Relatedness – a feeling of connection to others;
- Competence – ability to manage tasks;
- Autonomy – agency over their environment.

"Satisfaction of these needs," say Louick and Muenks, "promotes intrinsic motivation and leads to the development of skills such as self-regulation and goal-setting." Recent research suggests that "the nature of the school environment can have a significant impact on feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among students with LD." Being able to make choices is a key factor – something that teachers using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) try to build into lessons.

• *Expectancy-value* – This theory says that students' motivation is influenced by whether they expect they can complete a task and the value they place on the task. Those depend on students' interest in the subject matter, their level of enjoyment, the utility they see in it, whether they've done well in that area before, and the cultural milieu. So far there's been very little research on the application of the expectancy-value theory in classrooms.

Louick and Muenks suggest some practical applications of these theories as teachers in inclusive K-12 classrooms work with students with learning disabilities:

- Emphasize mastery and improvement over performance and competition.
- Get students striving for "personal best" goals.
- Make statements like, "I believe all students can learn and improve" and "I value effort and good strategies over whether you get all of the answers correct."
- Use errors or mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Allow students to demonstrate improvement by turning in different versions of an assignment.
- Provide clear and frequent feedback.
- Increase the amount of autonomy students have during classes, gradually reducing scaffolding and support.
- Promote a growth mindset – students' belief that intelligence and ability can change with effort and good strategies.
- Promote grit – passion and perseverance toward long-range goals.
- Avoid saying that students with LD are failing because they lack grit or a growth mindset.

"Leveraging Motivation Theory for Research and Practice with Students with Learning Disabilities" by Rebecca Louick and Katherine Muenks in *Theory Into Practice*, Winter 2022 (Vol. 61, #1, pp. 103-112); the authors can be reached at ralouick@gmail.com and kmuenks@utexas.edu.

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5. Getting Middle-School Parents Involved in "Academic Socialization"

"Early adolescence brings with it the perfect conditions for students to become disengaged from academics," say Hadley Bachman and seven Ohio State University colleagues in this *Phi Delta Kappan* article. Students are making the transition to the more academically complex environment of middle school, along with stricter discipline, less-robust relationships with teachers, and decreased autonomy. At the same time, students are going through physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, paying less attention to their parents and more to peers, and desiring more autonomy. "Levels of trust between teachers and parents decline," say the authors, "and parents and teachers are left uncertain about how they can work together to support students during this time of transition."

Bachman et al. say the research points to two high-impact strategies for improving school success for early adolescents. First, it's helpful for educators and parents to "support students' autonomy and developing sense of independence by collaboratively setting behavioral guidelines." These are most effective when adults get kids' input, communicate confidence in their ability to navigate successfully within them, and understand that mistakes will occur.

The second strategy is educators helping parents engage in "academic socialization" with their young adolescents, which includes parents:

- Communicating a belief in the value of education;
- Supporting kids' educational and occupational goals;
- Supporting self-regulation and autonomy;
- Linking schoolwork to current events;
- Discussing learning and study strategies.

Teachers can support these conversations by giving parents information about the academic content being taught, effective learning strategies, and the importance of trust between teachers and parents.

To test the viability of this approach, Bachman et al. conducted a pilot program in a small urban middle school in the Midwest. After conducting two training sessions with 20 teachers, the researchers provided texts to send to the parents of homeroom students twice a week for six consecutive weeks. The texts were designed to help parents have conversations with their children on the key points listed above. Here are some of the texts:

- Help your kids build confidence! Notice if they did well today and talk about what they learned from the success.
- Listening to your kids means a lot. Ask for input on a family decision, like what to eat for dinner or what to do tonight.
- Help your middle schooler become a strong student! Big assignments coming up? Break down tasks into daily goals.
- What is your child's toughest class? Pretend you are the teacher and role-play how to ask for help.
- Kids care more about learning when it connects to real life. Talk together about how their schoolwork relates to current events.

- Connecting school to future goals makes learning more fun! Talk together about how today's classes connect to goals.

Each text was followed by a request to respond with a thumbs-up if parents tried the tip.

At the end of the pilot, researchers followed up with students, teachers, and parents and got some encouraging feedback. Students said their parents more often encouraged them to express their feelings during family conversations and had more talks about future plans. Students also said they felt less home-school conflict and more of a sense of belonging in the school community. Teachers (most of whom sent the texts) said they were more confident in promoting positive academic engagement with students and parents, believed they were getting through to students with low academic motivation, and thought home-school trust had improved. Parents appreciated the school's effort to keep them informed, felt more trust in school staff, and showed increased confidence in teaching their children to enjoy school.

"This brief intervention," conclude the authors, "suggests that even small efforts at positive partnership may have the potential to build trust and increase confidence. Further, when parents responded with a simple 'like' or 'thumbs-up,' teachers were able to see that their message was received and implemented and to imagine these interactions between parents and students, cementing their belief in parents' willingness to be partners in supporting their children's education."

"Texting: A Simple Path to Building Trust" by Hadley Bachman, Elise Allen, Eric Anderman, Barbara Boone, Thomas Capretta, Patrick Cunningham, August Masonheimer, and Brett Zyromski in *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2022 (Vol. 103, #7, pp. 18-22); Bachman can be reached at bachman.33@osu.edu.

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6. A Curriculum Unit on Social Class

In this *English Journal* article, Katelynn Deluca (Farmingdale State College/SUNY) says that as a student, she had a vague awareness of social class: some classmates lived in trailer parks while others had homes with multiple bedrooms and could afford to play on sports teams that weren't sponsored by the school district. "But this knowing didn't translate to *talking* about class," she says. "I also didn't know that there was a reason to talk about class or the reality that some had more than others; it was a reality that my friends and I merely accepted."

But social class *is* a reality in many students' lives, says Deluca. "Failing to teach students about class can cause them to blame themselves and their families for perceived shortcomings within their lives: Why can't I live in a bigger house? Why do I have to take public transportation? Why can't my parents afford the latest technology or clothing? Ignoring class also prevents wealthy students from learning more about the world around them and how their experiences are different from others'."

Deluca believes writing is a good way for older students to explore the subject and suggests three activities to get students thinking more deeply about social class. She

acknowledges that this can be "an emotional, even traumatic, experience for students from all class backgrounds, especially as it means examining privilege and oppression."

• *Income and wealth* – Students are asked how they see class in their everyday lives, and they talk about money, housing, neighborhoods, schools, cars, clothing, food and drink, and the places people go. Students then keep a reflective journal for two weeks, recording each time they notice themselves perceiving another person or group based on something financial – what they saw and the assumptions they made. Then students talk in class about objects – sneakers, clothes, brands, restaurants – and notice that they're all talking about many of the same things.

"As the discussion progresses," says Deluca, "Students spend time digging into their assumptions to see how quickly they create an entire reality for another person without realizing it. This kind of observational work can be difficult for students because it forces them to confront stereotypes and norms that they have often unconsciously accepted, and the power of stereotypes in their thinking." The goal is to help students recognize how they participate in the class system that operates around them. When students feel uncomfortable, they are encouraged to write about it in their journals, with the teacher giving them feedback on what they have written and, with their permission, sharing selected writings in subsequent discussions.

• *Access* – Social class is clearly more than money; students consider education, location, power, and access as part of the quality of life – resources, opportunities, spaces, knowledge, creative thinking and expression, self-direction, and autonomy. Students then write about times when they felt like an insider – and when they felt like an outsider. What made them feel that way? "What aspects of their identity, affect, representations, language, body language, facial expressions, or other constructions contributed to their status as insider or outsider?" asks Deluca. "What were the unwritten rules of this experience that established some as included and others as excluded? How were such rules communicated to them? How did they communicate these rules to others?" Then students write about those experiences from different vantage points. This discussion can carry over to other parts of the curriculum – for example, when a class reads *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros.

• *Location* – Students look closely at their own community by conducting a series of interviews asking: Who lives in this community? What is the median income? What does education look like? What kind of career opportunities are available? How do others perceive this community? What are some phrases or terms common to this area? What does power look like informally and in the formal political structure? How might we be able to persuade stakeholders – local politicians, school administrators, nonprofits, corporations – to invest in, reconsider, or engage in the community? Interviews culminate in 3-5-page essays that students present to the class. The two previous activities deepen this analysis; students see it's more than rich and poor, access and marginalization, and ask: What local businesses are visible? What is the quality of schools? What opportunities for a future are young people exposed to?

"Using writing to explore social class," says Deluca, "can help students – and teachers – talk explicitly about class rather than talking around it." Teaching this unit, she's found that

students become more comfortable and confident writing and talking about it, and see the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, and other social constructs. "When students develop a more informed and nuanced understanding of the role of class," she concludes, "they are better able to disregard harmful myths and stereotypes. They are better prepared to acknowledge the ways class operates in their daily lives and to make decisions about this important part of each person's identity."

"Using Writing to Explore Social Class" by Katelynn Deluca in *English Journal*, March 2022 (Vol. 111, #4, pp. 34-40); Deluca can be reached at Katelynn.deluca@gmail.com.

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7. Are Keywords the Best Way to Solve Math Word Problems?

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Sarah Powell and Xin Lin (University of Texas/Austin) and Jessica Namkung (University of Nebraska/Lincoln) report on their study of using keywords to decide which operation to use to get the right answer to word problems. This is taught in many elementary math classrooms and is a strategy that many students figure out on their own. Powell, Lin, and Namkung looked at hundreds of released standardized test items for grades 3-8, identified the likely keywords, and ascertained whether those words matched the correct solution strategy for each problem. Here's an example of a problem where the keyword matched the solution:

> *Jack has 24 fish. He puts them into four bowls. Each bowl has an equal number of fish. How many fish are in **each** bowl?*

And here is a problem where the keyword does not lead to the right solution:

> *A basketball team scored a total of 747 points for the season. This was nine **times** the number of points scored in the first game. How many points were scored during the first game?*

What did the study find? With single-step word problems, the keyword led to a correct solution less than 50 percent of the time; for multistep word problems, it did so less than 10 percent of the time.

Clearly, say the authors, the keyword strategy is not the best approach. What's more, teaching it fails to develop the mathematical reasoning skills that students need for more-difficult problems down the road. "To develop reasoning about word problems," they argue, "educators must challenge themselves to not rely on the superficial word-problem strategy of using keywords." Instead, they recommend:

- Help students understand the schemas of word problems – what the problem is asking.
- Help students use visual representation and graphic organizers to digest and organize the relevant information.
- Demonstrate and use metacognitive strategies to help students work through a word problem – e.g., read the problem, make a plan, solve the problem, check your work.

"An Investigation of Using Keywords to Solve Word Problems" by Sarah Powell, Jessica Namkung, and Xin Lin in *Elementary School Journal*, March 2022 (Vol. 122, #3, pp. 452-473); the authors are at srpowell@utexas.edu, nmin2@unl.edu, and xin.lin@utexas.edu.

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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 52 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 150 articles each week, and selects 8-10 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
ASCD Express
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education