

Marshall Memo 864

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 30, 2020

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Quotes of the Week

“The logistical gymnastics necessary to balance work and school when all the crucial resources – time, physical space, Internet bandwidth, emotional reserves – are limited have pushed many to the point of despair.”

Erika Christakis in [“School Wasn’t So Great Before Covid, Either”](#) in *The Atlantic*, December 2020 (Vol. 326, #5, pp. 17-22)

“I have to become better at forgiving myself. As a perfectionist, the unknown nature of the school year scares me, but I have to find ways to allow myself to feel okay about not being the one in control. I am going to make a concerted effort to keep things in perspective. There are simply greater forces at work here, and as long as I am doing my best, my best will have to be good enough.”

Wendy Price in “Self-Care as a Priority” in *Communiqué*, Dec. 2020 (Vol. 49, #4, p. 2)

“Despite the popularity of promoting a growth mindset in students, too many schools continue ignoring the power of ‘yet.’ Instead of judging a student’s performance at a discrete moment in time, we should offer students the chance to improve their skills until their proficiency matches their true ability. Few of us perform at our highest level the first time we demonstrate a skill, and our students are no different.”

Matthew Campbell in [“Better Ways to Measure Student Progress”](#) in *Edutopia*, November 23, 2020

“Gifts for teachers are problematic.”

Lillie Marshall (see item #8)

1. Helping Students Deal with Misleading News

In this article in *Education Week Teacher*, Sarah Schwartz says many students who are tuned in to online news are ingesting lots of disinformation, conspiracy theories, and manipulated images and videos. Fact-checkers are working overtime, but some students believe what they're viewing and bring it into the classroom. This creates a challenge for teachers, especially those who teach history, government, and civics.

Avoidance is one approach. A recent survey found that the majority of teachers shy away from commenting on the widely debunked accusation of massive voter fraud for fear of objections from some families. Marcy Richie of Generation Citizen pushes back. "You need young people to be critical thinkers and question," she says. "But there are also certain things that are true and not true." The time-honored practice of encouraging students to see both sides of an issue isn't the best way to deal with outright falsehoods.

So what should teachers do? One approach is establishing "standards of proof" in classroom discussions – requiring students to present multiple sources of credible information to support a claim. For example, after the 2020 election, an Illinois high-school student said he'd heard that Pennsylvania had bused in ballots with the names of dead people. Asked for his source, the student said Fox News and The Gateway Pundit.

The teacher asked the class to expand the search, checking with their local news station and then viewing an interview with a law professor who explained that there wasn't evidence for the claim. The teacher then suggested waiting a few more days and following additional reporting on the story. A week later, the student who had made the claim about dead voters conceded: "I think I'm making a sweeping generalization."

The teacher didn't tell the student he'd swallowed nonsense, but asked him (and other students) to evaluate the story and come to their own conclusions. Students also learned that not all news sources are equally accurate, and how to look "laterally" to judge the trustworthiness of a website. Adolescents don't like being seen as an easy mark, and they enjoy learning specific techniques for spotting disinformation. Teachers have found that students enjoy discovering a "deepfake" more than defending that it's real.

[The [Ad Fontes](#) website provides a continuous update on news sources, ranking them on two axes: from factual to propaganda and left to right.]

["Disinformation is Rampant. Here's How Teachers Are Combatting It"](#) by Sarah Schwartz in *Education Week Teacher*, November 25, 2020

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2. Using British Parliamentary Debates to Teach High-School Rhetoric

In this *English Journal* article, Missouri teacher Charles Carpenter describes how, late one night, he happened on the CSPAN program *Prime Minister's Questions*. He realized that it was a tape of the previous Wednesday's session in which the U.K. prime minister answered questions live on the floor of the House of Commons. Having never seen this weekly ritual, Carpenter was intrigued. "As the session transpires," he says, "there are elements of political jousting, proverbial point-scoring, and stylistic humor integrated in the exchanges."

In a flash, Carpenter realized that the lively banter of politicians across the Atlantic (and the boisterous reactions from the benches on both sides) would make excellent material for teaching rhetorical analysis in his high-school English classes. Viewing debates from another English-speaking country was especially helpful, given the polarized and toxic climate in the U.S. political arena since the 2016 election cycle. Here's how Carpenter has used clips from the *Prime Minister's Questions*:

- *Setting the table* – At the beginning of the unit, he introduces students to the key elements of rhetoric in the AP curriculum, including Aristotle's Triangle and the Five Traditional Canons by Cicero. He also subscribed to the YouTube UK Parliament's official channel, which archives years of televised sessions. (It's possible to access selective clips via the *Guardian* and other news outlets.)

- *Vocabulary on the walls* – Early in the unit, Carpenter has students create posters explaining various rhetorical devices and post them around the classroom – for example, *metonymy*, *exigence*, *parallelism*, and *persona*. Students are encouraged to use these as memory prompts.

- *Curation* – Carpenter chooses 2-3 clips from a recent *Prime Minister's Questions* based on relevance and understandability. If necessary, he prepares a quick explanation if students need to be brought up to speed on the finer points of a debate (on Brexit, for example) or recent events (perhaps the prime minister lost a significant vote earlier that week). "This short preface allows students to immediately focus on the important rhetorical elements in the forthcoming exchanges," he says, "and not have to wallow in trying to figure out what's going on."

- *Note-taking format* – Students draw a grid on a sheet of paper, with horizontal rows for who is speaking and vertical columns for the clips. Each cell is for students to jot the rhetorical elements they notice for the speakers in each clip.

- *Viewing and note-taking* – As the clips are played, students try to capture in their notes the rhetorical elements present in each clip, noting the often raucous audience reactions to humor (laughter), well-made points (*Hear, hear!*), and arguments deemed to be ineffective (derisive jeering).

- *Discussion* – The class talks about what students noticed, with Carpenter sometimes pushing back – for example, "I agree with what's been said. However, the exigence in the first clip revolved around severe flooding damage in the country, so do you think it was a good time to be funny or sarcastic? How might the audience perceive that?"

• *Argumentative writing* – Finally, Carpenter asks students to write about what they believe was the most successful piece of rhetoric and why, drawing on the classroom posters if they are helpful. After discussing a January 6, 2016 clip in which Prime Minister David Cameron used a quote from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (and several other Shakespeare-related puns) to attack what he said was the disorganized nature of the political opposition led by the Labour Party’s Jeremy Corbyn, Carpenter asked: “Is Cameron’s use of Shakespeare puns effective for an audience of parliamentarians? What about the British public at large? Defend your opinion using evidence from the clip.”

“Demystifying Rhetoric: Prime Minister’s Questions as a Classroom Approach” by Charles Carpenter in *English Journal*, November 2020 (Vol. 110, #2, pp. 69-76); Carpenter can be reached at carpenterc@carthagetigers.org.

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3. What It Took to Turn Around a Failing High-School Junior

In this article in *English Journal*, California teacher/author Ernesto Cisneros says that when he was his teenage children’s age and attending the local high school, he was “such a mess.” He remembers that he cut classes half the time, got mostly Ds and Fs, and nobody seemed to notice – including his parents, who were preoccupied working long hours. “As long as kids weren’t carrying weapons or selling drugs at school, no one cared what we did,” says Cisneros, “– well, almost no one.”

One day a counselor called him into her office and said his scores on state tests were out of synch with those Ds and Fs. How about if he tried an AP history class? Cisneros was game: “In my mind, I figured receiving an F in an honors class was way more impressive than getting an F in a remedial class.” And the honors class might be more interesting than one of his remedial classes, where the only assignment was to correctly write down the teacher’s joke of the day.

In the AP class, Cisneros was immediately struck by the fact that students were copying the notes the teacher was writing on the board. The teacher had students stand and reenact major events in U.S. history; they were engaged, working, learning. Cisneros slouched at the back, intrigued and entertained. At first, the teacher cut the new student some slack and didn’t call on him.

But after a few days, Cisneros raised his hand to answer a question, and was stung by the sarcastic term students flung at him: *Filler*. They were saying he was in the class only because another body was needed so the AP course could remain open. “I was hurt,” he says. “No! I was pissed. *Really pissed*. That night I decided I’d walk into the honors classroom and teach those little punks a lesson. I wanted to hurt them where it would hurt most.”

The teacher had a competitive scoring system, ranking students every day based on their grades and participation. “Yes, it’s a messed-up system with all sorts of potential negative effects,” says Cisneros, “but hey, it worked for me by giving me the meaning and purpose I didn’t realize I needed. For the first time in my life, I found myself studying at home. Studying! Me! Alone! At home!” Fueled by anger, he went over his notes again and again,

forcing himself to memorize every vocabulary word and concept.

The next day, he got the highest grade in the class, and took great satisfaction watching his classmates' faces "as they came to the realization that I, Ernesto Cisneros, the filler – a kid who spent most of his day mastering my infamous Foosball spin move at the neighborhood recreation center, the same kid who had not done homework for the last three years – had just earned the highest score on the test." In the next few weeks, his grades and class rank steadily improved. "Every double-take, every pair of eyes growing, every snicker just fueled my work ethic," he says.

At the end of the school year, the counselor asked to see him again. She said she was "pleasantly surprised" by his grades in the AP class and placed him in all honors classes for his final year. She smiled smugly and seemed to take credit for what Cisneros had accomplished. "Well, this filler didn't care," he says. "This filler figured having a free boost in my grades was a no-brainer. AP classes didn't scare me at all. That world history class proved to be fairly easy. (I didn't realize that the feeling was due to having studied hard for each test.)"

Senior year was challenging. He had years of bad study habits to unlearn, big knowledge gaps to fill, and lots of reading to catch up on. He pays special tribute to two teachers, one who made sure he attended tutoring every day (Cisneros had a crush on her), another "who cared enough to call me out in front of the entire class, made me rewrite my essays over and over again until they matched my abilities."

That year he made new friends, joined new clubs, and earned good enough grades to get into college. Now he's a teacher in the same school district he attended and has published an award-winning novel. "Sometimes," he concludes, "students need someone else to help them believe in themselves. And then, anything is possible."

["How the F-Word Changed My Life"](#) by Ernesto Cisneros in *English Journal*, November 2020 (Vol. 110, #2, pp. 110-112); Cisneros can be reached at author.ernestocisneros@yahoo.com.

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4. Kwame Anthony Appiah on Academic Dishonesty

In this *New York Times* Ethicist column, Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York University) says there are four ways teachers can appeal to students to be honest with online academic work:

- *Character* – "You don't want to be the kind of person who cheats," says Appiah. "Dishonesty is a vice. So is intellectual laziness, which can make cheating appealing as a substitute for effort, and so is the vanity that may make you seek a better grade than you deserve."

- *Duty* – Passing off someone else's work as your own, or inflating your level of competence, is a betrayal of teachers' trust. In addition, it's unfair to rule-following students when the grading curve is distorted in your favor.

- *Data* – An important purpose of assignments, quizzes, and exams is providing feedback to address misconceptions and fix learning problems. When you cheat, the grades and

teachers' comments you receive are much less helpful. "If you don't care about how you're doing," asks Appiah, "why take the course?"

- *Consequences* – If you're caught, cheating and plagiarism can have serious consequences, especially at the university level.

"To students who cheat routinely, all this will seem naïve or sentimental or irrelevant," says Appiah. "They want the best grades they can secure because good grades will help them get ahead and land the kind of job they want." But the chickens will come home to roost in the real world, where competence is what counts. "Ethics is about living well," Appiah concludes. "Preparing for exams can help you develop skills that are useful later in life. All of which is to say that the person you're letting down when you don't do the work is you."

["As An Instructor, How Do I Deal with Cheating in the Age of Zoom?"](#) by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *The New York Times*, November 22, 2020; Appiah is at Anthony.Appiah@nyu.edu.
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5. One Way to Deal with Online Cheating

In this *New York Times* article, philosophy professor Christian Miller (Wake Forest University) says he's hesitant to give exams while his courses are remote – there's too much temptation for students to cheat by looking at crib notes, getting help from friends, or going online. So how can teachers at all levels check on students' learning?

Remote proctoring is one option: students are video-recorded as they take an exam, allowing the teacher to spot any suspicious web searches or communication. But Miller believes active surveillance conveys mistrust, and there are also concerns about privacy and racial bias.

A better option, he believes, is honor pledges. Handled well, these have been surprisingly effective: "Students who abide by them refrain from cheating not because they can't," says Miller, "but because they choose not to."

What does "handled well" mean? Just promising to abide by the school's honor code at the beginning of the year is not enough. "As we know from both ordinary life and recent experimental findings," says Miller, "most of us are willing to cheat to some extent if we think it would be rewarding and we can get away with it. At the same time, we also want to think of ourselves as honest people and genuinely believe that cheating is wrong. But our more-honorable intentions can be pushed to one side in our minds when tempting opportunities arise to come out ahead, even if by cheating."

That's why an explicit pledge just before an important assignment or test is effective; it serves as a "moral reminder" of the school's culture of honesty. Miller believes this can work in a remote as well as an in-person environment.

Honor codes won't eliminate all cheating. "Deeply dishonest students will not be deterred," he says. "But fortunately, the research confirms what experience suggests: most students are not deeply dishonest."

[“How Dishonest Are Students?”](#) by Christian Miller in *The New York Times*, November 15, 2020; Miller can be reached at millercc@wfu.edu.

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6. Rotating Learning Stations with Hybrid Learning

In this *Edutopia* article, New Jersey ELA supervisor Kara Douma says the trickiest part of hybrid instruction (some students in the classroom, some at home) is synchronous teaching. Teachers haven’t been trained for this scenario! The first step, says Douma, is knowing the goals of the lesson and how learning will be assessed. With those in place, one viable strategy is station rotation – students moving through learning activities on a fixed schedule.

The idea is to create a set of activities aligned with the learning goal, break the class into small groups, and closely monitor progress as students move from station to station actively engaging with the content. Douma suggests setting up four stations, with students rotating among them about every 15 minutes, with a one-minute get-up-and-stretch break between each one:

- A teacher-led station – Students work directly with the teacher, who is observing and providing immediate feedback. “The teacher-led station is highly coveted instructional time,” says Douma. “It’s when connections are made, and teachers get to know how kids learn to better plan for and support their progress.”

- A collaborative station – Here, students work on an assignment or project, building confidence, trust, and relationships. Students may all be in-person, facing each other six feet apart, or in virtual groups for students at home, or a combination. The teacher might take a quick break from their teacher-led station to check in on the collaborative groups.

- An online station for independent practice – This one uses a web-based learning platform on which students practice skills and get immediate feedback (the teacher receives data as well).

- An offline, no-tech station for independent practice – In this time block students are off their computers (which cuts down on screen fatigue) and work with books, notebooks, graphic organizers, and manipulatives. One activity at this station might be journaling and keeping track of their work at all the stations.

[“How to Make Station Rotation Work During Hybrid Learning”](#) by Kara Douma in *Edutopia*, September 29, 2020

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7. Helping Students with ADHD Cope with Remote Instruction

In this article in *Edutopia*, journalist Katy Reckdahl says that parents of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (there are about 6.1 million children with ADHD in the U.S.) are finding that remote learning often produces tears and tantrums. “Without the usual support from teachers or the familiarity of classroom rules and structure,” says Reckdahl, “the struggle to stay organized and keep up with lessons and homework has suddenly become overwhelming... In the physical classroom, teachers can generally see when students with

ADHD are confused, fidgety, and in need of a quick refocus prompt – but many of these signals are lost in translation during Zoom instruction. And because learning from home is generally more independent, it requires more focus and organization, two qualities that are often in short supply for students with ADHD.”

Reckdahl interviewed a number of teachers and gathered the following pointers for supporting these students during Covid-time:

- *Accommodate kids’ learning preferences.* Extended teacher talk that requires sustained mental effort by students is particularly unfriendly for those with ADHD. Chunking instruction and introducing choice is helpful, as well as introducing physical movement (standing up every few minutes), using white noise in the background, regularly doing individual check-ins, and having students keep their hands busy with objects that don’t make noise (pipe cleaners, rubber bands, a small handball). One student found it helpful to tune in to his classes on a smartphone as he walked around his house and yard.

- *Support ways to keep track of time and schedules.* This might include timers that signal the start and end of classes and times when assignments are due (using a kitchen timer or prompts on the student’s computer or smartphone). The Pomodoro technique is also helpful – working for 25 minutes and then taking a five-minute break. It’s important to post the schedule in the same place every day, and have log-in ID and password information at students’ fingertips. “If any child starts off class in a panic,” says New Orleans educator Sari Levy, “they won’t do well in class. Nobody should feel that way.”

- *Start with the big picture.* This helps develop executive function (which one professor describes as “goal-directed problem-solving, and goal-directed persistence”), using a mental map to guide behavior. During remote instruction, it’s especially important for students with ADHD to have the big idea, a clear picture of where they’re going, and then a step-by-step progression for getting there – with plenty of scaffolding.

- *Use effective online strategies.* Students with ADHD tend to skim when they read on a screen, which taxes their working memory. The trick is to slow them down, get them reading closely, and then summarize each paragraph. It also helps to number paragraphs and have students jot the main idea – or perhaps create a hashtag – for each one.

- *Build in brain and body breaks.* All students benefit from these, but they’re especially helpful for students with ADHD. One teacher makes a point of a get-up-and-do-something-different break every half hour – gathering materials, getting a drink, visiting the bathroom, goofing around, chatting with peers or family members. After a break, doing a breathing exercise helps students refocus on learning.

[“5 Ways to Support Kids with ADHD During Remote Instruction”](#) by Katy Reckdahl in *Edutopia*, November 12, 2020

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8. Holiday Gifts for Teachers: What's Appropriate? What's Meaningful?

"Gifts for teachers are problematic," says Boston teacher Lillie Marshall in this *Teaching Traveling* article. "Presents are *not* required, nor expected, and in many cases they just cause problems." Here's why:

- *Ethics and fairness* – Even inexpensive gifts like cookies or a coffee mug involve time and effort for busy parents. And if the teacher is in the middle of grading papers or tests, does a gift feel like a bribe, putting the teacher in an awkward spot? "How must it feel for a mother to see a D given by a teacher to her son, after she spent hours wrapping gifts?" asks Marshall.

- *Pressure* – There can be a "gift-giving arms race," sometimes communicated via message board or social media: *I'm thinking of giving a \$20 Target gift card. Do you think that's enough?* Other parents may feel it's an expectation and spend time and money they can ill afford.

- *Who does the work* – "In my experience as a teacher and a parent, gift giving organization duties fall 99% of the time on the female head of household," says Marshall. "I would much rather the women of the world get an extra two hours of sleep than shop for me – or better yet, help their children organize their backpacks!"

- *Overload* – Most of the physical gifts Marshall has received over 17 years in the classroom have been things she already has, doesn't have room for (mugs!), is allergic to (certain lotions), or would rather buy herself.

So how *can* families express their appreciation for the amazing work teachers are doing? The good news is that two options are far easier and cheaper than tangible gifts:

- A letter or e-mail saying specifically how the educator has helped a child – or perhaps a quirky aspect of the class the family enjoys. "Trust me, you will make the teacher's day with a letter like this," says Marshall, "and they will treasure it for years to come."
- Something the class or school really needs – for example, parents pooling donations to buy a printer for the classroom, a wall hanging, a stand-up desk for the teacher, a raised planter for the school's playground, or meals for needy students.

"My point," Marshall concludes: "If you really want to give a present (gift-giving does make some people happy), I encourage you to reach out to the teacher or school to ask what they would actually find useful or nice."

["A Warning About Gifts for Teachers: Read This Before You Buy!"](#) by Lillie Marshall in *Teaching Traveling*, November 22, 2020

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9. Giving Thanks in Just Six Words

The New York Times recently invited readers to submit six words about something that made them grateful. (Writer/editor Larry Smith popularized this format in his series, *Six-Word Memoirs*.) More than 10,000 readers responded, and here's a selection of those that the *Times* printed:

- The crinkling eyes above the mask.

- A furtive hug with a friend.
- The backyard haircuts are getting better.
- Miss family, but safer for them.
- Teenage son still likes to snuggle.
- Sunny mornings, a window facing east.
- Postcards crossing the country – real mail.
- Never been social, now I’m good.
- Hearing granny laugh on the phone.
- It’s just a cold, not Covid.
- Wasn’t too late to say sorry.
- Faith, family, friends, dedicated medical professionals.
- The many people who deliver food.
- Toddler sees Audrey Hepburn, says “Mama!”
- I watched her learn to read.
- Water cooler chats with six-year-old son.
- Thankful for learning, in my pajamas.
- I teach funny, resilient 8th graders.
- Democracy triumphed. Now pass the stuffing.
- Empty calendar means frequent dinners together.
- There’s really more kindness than hate.
- Fell in love six feet apart.
- Lost job. Lost boyfriend. Found happiness.
- Fell in love at age 75.
- This stinking year is nearly over.

“You’re Thankful. You Told Us Why” in *The New York Times*, November 26, 2020

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10. Short Item:

Video on principal time management – In this [25-minute talk](#), Mark Shellinger of the National SAM Innovation Project suggests four key steps school leaders can take to continuously improve teaching and learning. Shellinger is at mark@samsconnect.com.

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

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

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

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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