Marshall Memo 619

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 11, 2016

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"When I first saw the universe on the Hayden Planetarium dome [at age 9], I knew I wanted to commit my life to learning about it. You have no idea how deep my fuel tank was to resist a force in my way. This awesome view of the moon? Just added a gallon of fuel. Looking at Saturn for the first time buying my first telescope – more fuel. I've often reflected on the brilliant minds that didn't make it because their fuel tanks didn't go as deep."

Neil deGrasse Tyson in "Life's Work" in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February, 2016, answering Alison Beard's question about what made him persevere in science despite people who discouraged him; https://hbr.org/2016/01/neil-degrasse-tyson

"Like heavy-duty cognitive tasks, such as keeping multiple pieces of information in mind at once or avoiding distractions in a busy environment, empathy depletes our mental resources. So jobs that require constant empathy can lead to 'compassion fatigue,' an acute inability to empathize that's driven by stress, and burnout, a more gradual and chronic version of this phenomenon."

Adam Waytz (see item #2)

"RTI is designed to remove the oh-so-human temptation to speculate and slowly mull over learning problems and instead spur teachers into action to improve learning, see if the actions worked, and make adjustments in a continuous loop."

Amanda VanDerHeyden et al. (see item #4)

"However, knowing what works and doing what works are two different endeavors. It is difficult for people to successfully follow diets, stick to budgets, and, yes, to implement RTI."

Amanda VanDerHeyden et al. (*ibid.*)

1. Creating An Emotionally Positive Workplace

"Most leaders focus on how employees think and behave – but feelings matter just as much," say Sigal Barsade and Olivia O'Neill in this *Harvard Business Review* article. "[T]o get a comprehensive read on an organization's emotional culture and deliberately manage it, you have to make sure that what is codified in mission statements and on corporate badges is also enacted in 'micromoments' of daily organizational life. These consist of small gestures rather than bold declarations of feeling." Research on culture has shown that people "catch" feelings from others. To create a positive emotional culture, leaders need to be intentional about several things:

- *Harness what people already feel* – and build in gentle nudges during the workday for laughter, meditation, and kind comments about colleagues.
- *Model the emotions you want to cultivate*. Walking into a room smiling broadly spreads positive emotions to colleagues; frowning does the opposite. One resort company made joy and fun part of the annual performance evaluation. Among the criteria are "how well each employee integrates fun into the work environment, rating everyone on supportive behaviors such as being inclusive, welcoming, approachable, and positive."
- *Encourage people to fake it till they feel it*. "If employees don't experience the desired emotion at a particular moment," say Barsade and O'Neill, "they can still help maintain their organization's emotional culture. That's because people express emotions both spontaneously and strategically at work. Social psychology research has long shown that individuals tend to conform to group norms of emotional expression, imitating others out of a desire to be liked and accepted."

Of course the culture will be deeper and longer lasting if people genuinely believe in its values and assumptions.

"Manage Your Emotional Culture" by Sigal Barsade and Olivia O'Neill in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2016 (Vol. 94, #1-2, p. 68-73), https://hbr.org/2016/01/manage-your-emotional-culture

Back to page one

2. "Compassion Fatigue" in the Helping Professions

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Adam Waytz (Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management) says empathy is an essential component of leadership. The problem is that empathy "taxes us mentally and emotionally, it's not an infinite resource, and it

can even impair our ethical judgment." Here are the downsides of demanding too much empathy from our colleagues, and what managers can do:

• *Empathy is exhausting*. "Like heavy-duty cognitive tasks, such as keeping multiple pieces of information in mind at once or avoiding distractions in a busy environment, empathy depletes our mental resources," says Waytz. "So jobs that require constant empathy can lead to 'compassion fatigue,' an acute inability to empathize that's driven by stress, and burnout, a more gradual and chronic version of this phenomenon." Human services professionals are especially prone to this.

• *Empathy is zero-sum*. "The more empathy I devote to my spouse, the less I have left for my mother," says Waytz; "the more I give to my mother, the less I can give to my son." We also tend to invest empathy more readily in our immediate circle, with less for outsiders. "This uneven investment," he says, "creates a gap that's widened by our limited supply of empathy. As we use up most of what's available on insiders, our bonds with them get stronger, while our desire to connect with outsiders wanes."

• *It can erode ethics*. When we identify strongly with insiders, our feelings toward outsiders can become harsh and negative, says Waytz. "In making a focused effort to see and feel things the way people who are close to us do, we may take on their interests as our own. This can make us more willing to overlook transgressions or even behave badly ourselves." People are more likely to cheat when it benefits another person. Empathy toward colleagues can also prevent people from whistle-blowing – think of Penn State, various police forces, some military units, Citigroup, JPMorgan, and WorldCom. Scandals in these organizations tended to be exposed by outsiders who didn't have an empathic bond with the perpetrators.

Waytz says the key is avoiding empathy overload. Here are his suggestions for reining in excessive empathy:

- *Split up the work*. Each employee might be asked to zero in on a certain group of stakeholders. "This makes the work of developing relationships and gathering perspectives less consuming for individuals," he says.
- *Make it less of a sacrifice*. Our mindsets can affect the tendency to empathy overload, says Waytz. This is especially true in contentious bargaining, when people come to believe positions can never be reconciled. "We can avoid burnout by seeking integrative solutions that serve both sides' interests," he says.
- *Give people breaks*. "Understanding and responding to the needs, interests, and desires of other human beings involves some of the *hardest* work of all," says Waytz. "Despite claims that empathy comes naturally, it takes arduous mental effort to get into another person's mind – and then to respond with compassion rather than indifference." People need relief from empathy work – doing projects of their own, working in a bubble to relax, meditate, and do whatever else helps them recharge their empathy batteries.

A few years ago, Ford Motor Company asked its engineers (mostly male) to wear an Empathy Belly – it simulated the experience of pregnancy, complete with back pain, bladder pressure, fetal kicking, 30+ pounds of extra weight, a change in the center of gravity, bodily awkwardness, and difficulty driving. The idea was to build empathy among the engineers.

While well-intentioned, Waytz believes this experiment was misguided. "After wearing it, engineers may overestimate or misidentify the difficulties faced by drivers who actually are pregnant. Talking to people – asking them how they feel, what they want, and what they think – may seem simplistic, but it's more accurate," says Waytz. It's also less taxing to employees and their organizations, because it involves collecting real information instead of endlessly speculating. It's a smarter way to empathize."

"The Limits of Empathy" by Adam Waytz in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2016 (Vol. 94, #1-2, p. 58-66), https://hbr.org/2016/01/the-limits-of-empathy

Back to page one

3. History Curriculum Units on the Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks

In this *Harvard Educational Review* article, Leslie Duhaylongsod, Catherine Snow, and Robert Selman (Harvard Graduate School of Education) and Suzanne Donovan (Strategic Education Research Partnership) describe a middle-school history curriculum they recently developed. Their goal was to get sixth graders highly engaged in debating ancient-history topics while introducing them to rigorous historical thinking. Building on Word Generation, a vocabulary-building curriculum, the authors dubbed their history curriculum Social Studies Generation or SoGen. Their theory of action for the curriculum can be summarized thus:

- Purposeful reading of engaging, high-interest history topics via Readers' Theatre;
- Building background knowledge;
- Preparing for debate;
- Structured classroom discussion and debate;
- Formulating and defending arguments;
- Practicing taking the perspective of another person;
- Using rich academic language and complex reasoning;
- Expository, argumentative writing;
- Deep reading comprehension;
- Building teacher capacity.

Here are some of the topics and debate provocations. Students had to do research, decide on a position, and make a coherent argument:

- Were the Egyptians pharaohs oppressive rulers or great leaders whose actions were justified?
- Were the Egyptian pyramids and other monumental structures great achievements or a waste of Egypt's surplus?
- In Roman gladiator fights, who should decide if the gladiator "games" should continue to the death – gladiators, merchants, Christians, or advisors to the emperor?
- Was living in Pompeii (prior to the disastrous eruption of Vesuvius) an irresponsible decision or was the eruption unpredictable and therefore unavoidable?
- Which Greek city-state, Athens or Sparta, would be a better place to live? Why?
- Alexander: A great leader or a power-hungry tyrant?

The researchers knew they were successful when students were able to take the perspective of people living in ancient times – for example, understanding that the Egyptians truly believed in the afterlife and therefore burying precious jewels and artifacts with their dead was not (to them) wasteful.

"Toward Disciplinary Literacy: Dilemmas and Challenges in Designing History Curriculum to Support Middle-School Students" by Leslie Duhaylongsod, Catherine Snow, Robert Selman, and Suzanne Donovan in *Harvard Educational Review*, Winter 2015 (Vol. 85, #4, p. 587-608), available for purchase at http://hepgjournals.org/doi/10.17763/0017-8055.85.4.587

Back to page one

4. Keys to Effective Implementation of RTI

In this *Education Week* article, Amanda VanDerHeyden (Education Research & Consulting), Matthew Burns (University of Missouri), Rachel Brown (University of Southern Maine), Mark Shinn (National Louis University/Chicago), Stevan Kubic (National Center for Learning Disabilities), Kim Gibbons (University of Minnesota), George Batsche (University of South Florida), and David Tilly (Iowa Department of Education) say that starting in 2001, RTI spread among U.S. schools "like the latest diet fad." Response to Intervention "is designed to remove the oh-so-human temptation to speculate and slowly mull over learning problems and instead spur teachers into action to improve learning, see if the actions worked, and make adjustments in a continuous loop. Guided by assessment data, children progress through a series of instructional tiers experiencing increasingly intensive instruction as needed."

Sounds pretty straightforward. "However," say the authors, "knowing what works and doing what works are two different endeavors. It is difficult for people to successfully follow diets, stick to budgets, and, yes, to implement RTI." VanDerHeyden and her colleagues suggest four "implementation pearls" to avoid ineffective implementation of RTI:

• *With screening, less is more*. Over-testing is a problem in many schools, say the authors, chewing up as much as 25 percent of instructional time and producing far more data than can be used. Teachers need to select the most accurate, strategic assessment tools and use every bit of the data they generate

• *Focus on Tier 1 instruction*. "Every teacher should be supported to know exactly what students are expected to learn within their grade level, to map a calendar of instruction onto that timeline using resources beyond the textbook, and to assess student mastery of skills," say VanDerHeyden et al. "When core instruction is strong, a majority of students perform in the 'not-at-risk' range on screening." When a significant number of students (20 percent or more) don't show mastery on an assessment, the best thing is for the teacher to rethink the segment and teach it again for the whole class. "Improvements to core instruction require serious teamwork, trust, and a paradigm shift in schools in which teachers may be accustomed to working in isolation," say the authors.

• *Use interventions matched to students' needs*. "At the surface level," say VanDerHeyden et al., "targeting reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness for the weakest students sounds great. But intervening without

consideration for what a student specifically needs is like choosing an antibiotic without identifying the bacteria causing the infection." Implementing a poorly chosen Tier 2 or 3 intervention for 20 weeks is not very strategic, yet that's what many schools are doing.

• *Intervention intensity is not the same as "longer and louder."* The key is aligning effective interventions with what struggling students need and constantly fine-tuning with an eye to what's bringing each student to proficiency.

"RTI Works (When It Is Implemented Correctly)" by Amanda VanDerHeyden, Matthew Burns, Rachel Brown, Mark Shinn, Stevan Kubic, Kim Gibbons, George Batsche, and David Tilly in *Education Week*, January 6, 2016 (Vol. 35, #15 p. 25), www.edweek.org

Back to page one

5. Ethical – and Unethical – Collaboration in Secondary Classrooms

In this article in *Independent School*, Alexis Brooke Redding, Carrie James, and Howard Gardner (Harvard Graduate School of Education) note that in recent years, many secondary schools have increased the amount of student collaboration in classrooms. "Group activities," say the authors, "allow students to learn from each other by pooling a range of skills to create work that is – at its best – stronger than any single student could create alone. These activities also encourage students to develop important inter- and intra-personal skills that will help as they transition to both college and the workplace."

But at the same time, there's a lot of homework copying (one study found 74 percent of high-school students admitted to it) as well as outright cheating on tests (51 percent said they did). In another study, nearly 40 percent of college students said they consider digital plagiarism either "not cheating at all" or "just trivial cheating." Scandals at Harvard, Stuyvesant High School, and many other schools and districts around the U.S. make clear that this is a widespread phenomenon. Redding, James, and Gardner see three forces at work in many secondary schools that have soured the collaborative process:

• *Pressures that tempt students to cheat* – "The growing pressure to achieve at any cost, particularly for students who are focused on selective college admissions, can trump any inclination to follow the rules and complete work ethically," say Redding, James, and Gardner. Distressingly, high-achieving students seem to cheat the most. Many students regard it as "no big deal."

• *A cheating ethos in some schools* – Stuyvesant's scandal involved students sharing answers in their strong areas with peers who were strong in other areas – a form of "reciprocal altruism" that sometimes resulted in somewhat lower scores for top-notch students but had the effect of boosting the overall performance of this elite school. The widespread ethos had built up over a period of years and students regarded it as worth the risk. An 2010 editorial in the student newspaper said it all: "We as a student body are considered to be some of the 'best and the brightest' in New York City, if not the nation, and yet, often our high grades reflect not our hard work and academic aptitude, but rather our willingness to cheat, lie, and game the system."

• *Unreflective digital collaboration* – Google Docs and Wikipedia allow students to collaborate and share ideas online. "While these contexts and tools can be (and often are) used in ethical ways," say the authors, "there is abundant evidence that some students leverage them for illicit purposes." Schools need to clearly define ethical collaboration and intervene with and identify the moral trip-wires, which means putting in place:

- Vertical support – A mentor or moral exemplar who makes crystal clear what the boundaries are;
- Horizontal support – Other students join the conversations and persuade their peers that the long-term costs of cheating outweigh the short-term gains.
- Wake-up calls for students who are showing signs of crossing the ethical line, sometimes because parents are pushing them to bring home As.

"Ultimately, these actions – among others – can help create the kind of classrooms and schools where ethical collaboration takes place and students can genuinely thrive," conclude Redding, James, and Gardner. "In time, if there are enough students who can walk the ethical talk, the entire society will ultimately benefit."

"Nurturing Ethical Collaboration" by Alexis Brooke Redding, Carrie James, and Howard Gardner in *Independent School*, Winter 2016 (Vol. 75, #2, p. 58-64), no e-link available

Back to page one

If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 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).

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
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
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest