Marshall Memo 799

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 19, 2019

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"For as long as there have been students, there have been lazy methods for getting work done."
Amy Cavanaugh (see item #3)

"Sometimes written feedback is not the best or most effective strategy for improving student learning."
Andrew Miller (see item #2)

"The key question when giving feedback is: Will it be actionable and useful?"
Andrew Miller (*ibid*.)

"When we're in the presence of someone who intimidates us, it gets a lot harder to speak up publicly, especially if there's a chance that what we say might be wrong or different from the norm in any way. This is about a thousand times more true if you're around 13 years old and your whole goal in life is to fit in."
Jennifer Gonzalez (see item #4)

"If you say to a group, 'Does that make sense?' most people are going to act like it does, even if it doesn't, because they assume everyone else in the room totally gets it and they don't want to look like the lone dummy."
Jennifer Gonzalez (*ibid*.)

"School improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice."
Judith Warren Little, 1990

1. Instilling a Growth Mindset in Ninth Graders

In this article in *Nature*, David Yeager and 24 colleagues (including Ronald Ferguson, Angela Duckworth, and Carol Dweck) report on the National Study of Learning Mindsets. Researchers examined the effect of a short online intervention with ninth graders designed to activate a growth mindset. The first year of high school is an especially good time for this nudge, say the authors, because it's the most perilous time for at-risk students. In addition, educating students about growth mindset is key because we live "in a society that conveys a fixed mindset (a view that intelligence is fixed), which can imply that feeling challenged and having to put in effort means that one is not naturally talented and is unlikely to succeed."

In the study, students in 76 urban, suburban, and rural public high schools sat for 25-minute online sessions. Students in the control group read and responded to information about the functions of the brain that didn't address beliefs about intelligence. Students in the intervention group interacted with material that aimed to reduce their negative beliefs about effort (that having to try hard or ask for help means you lack ability), about fixed-trait attributions (that failure stems from low ability), and about performance avoidance (trying to never look stupid).

The intervention pushed back on these negative beliefs and introduced students to the basic idea of growth mindset: that a person's intellectual abilities can be developed in response to effort, taking on challenging work, improving one's learning strategies, and appropriately asking for help. Students were then invited to think about how the idea applied to their lives. "Notably," say the researchers, "students were not told outright that they should work hard or employ particular study or learning strategies. Rather, effort and strategy revisions were described as general behaviors through which students could develop their abilities and thereby achieve their goals." The material featured stories about growth mindset from older students and admirable adults. Finally, students were asked to reflect on their own learning in school and how they could communicate the ideas to a struggling ninth grader.

What did the researchers find? Compared to the control group, lower-performing students in the intervention group developed a stronger growth mindset, had slightly higher grade-point averages in core academic subjects at the end of that year, and were more willing to take challenging classes in tenth grade. Higher-performing students in the intervention group didn't improve their GPAs, but were more willing to take advanced courses the following year.

The most striking thing about the study, say the researchers, is the potential of a brief, psychologically strategic intervention to boost student achievement and narrow persistent gaps – at very low cost.

"A National Experiment Reveals Where a Growth Mindset Improves Achievement" by David Yeager, Paul Hanselman, Gregory Walton, Jared Murray, Robert Crosnoe, Chandra Muller,

Elizabeth Tipton, Barbara Schneider, Chris Hulleman, Cintia Hinojosa, David Paunesku, Carissa Romero, Kate Flint, Alice Roberts, Jill Trott, Ronaldo Iachan, Jenny Buontempo, Sophia Man Yang, Carlos Carvalho, Richard Hahn, Maithreyi Gopalan, Pratik Mhatre, Ronald Ferguson, Angela Duckworth, and Carol Dweck in *Nature*, August 7, 2019, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1466-y, spotted in an *Education Week* summary by Sarah Sparks on August 7, 2019, available at https://bit.ly/2ZgMrTE; Yeager can be reached at dyeager@utexas.edu.

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2. Giving Students Effective Feedback without Burning Out

In this *Edutopia* article, Andrew Miller affirms the power of giving students feedback (John Hattie's meta-analysis found a very impressive effect size of 0.7), but acknowledges the workload involved in grading papers, writing comments, and conferring with students. Miller suggests these ways for teachers to use their time well giving feedback:

• *Individual feedback isn't always necessary*. "Sometimes written feedback is not the best or most effective strategy for improving student learning," he says. For example, a teacher might notice a recurring error in students' responses and address that with the whole class. "This is instructional feedback," says Miller, "using student assessments as a tool to reflect on our teaching and reteaching the content in a new way."

• *Get students doing the work*. An example of not following this suggestion is laboriously correcting every usage error in students' essays. The alternative: saying "I'm noticing many capital letter and punctuation mistakes" and then handing papers back for students to identify and fix the errors.

• *On summative assessments, give detailed feedback only to students who will redo the assignment.* Miller's rationale: "The key question when giving feedback is: Will it be actionable and useful?" If students won't have a chance to put feedback to use on a revision or re-take, it's not a good use of a teacher's precious time.

• *Give feedback when requested*. One teacher Miller worked with offered brief feedback conferences to students when then asked for them. She was concerned that students who most needed help wouldn't ask, and this was true, but as word got around that everyone could get just-in-time help, all students took advantage of it.

• *Focus on self-assessment and peer feedback*. Provided with assessment criteria, students can fine-tune their own work, saving lots of teacher time. Students can also be the best explainers, and a collaborative classroom culture is highly desirable. But Miller cautions that clear protocols and modeling are necessary for this to work well.

• *Don't wait for the final product*. "Instead of spending hours in epic sessions of writing feedback on a full draft," says Miller, "provide it in smaller ways that are spread out over time. This is not only more efficient but better for students, who get more digestible feedback that is actionable and timely."

"6 Tips for Managing the Feedback Workload" by Andrew Miller in *Edutopia*, July 3, 2019, https://edut.to/2JH8U3H

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3. Helping Students Use Online Resources without Plagiarizing

"For as long as there have been students, there have been lazy methods for getting work done," says Illinois high-school teacher Amy Cavanaugh in this *English Journal* article. But according to recent surveys of students, plagiarism has escalated in recent years, largely because of what's available on the Internet and how easy it is to cut and paste other people's work. Cavanaugh polled her own ninth graders and almost all of them fessed up to taking answers from classmates or the Internet in the previous month. "I'm just so stressed out," said one, "and if someone has the answers to a stupid worksheet, I'll take them." "It's just sort of normal," said another; "I'm not a cheater but I share."

That student's lack of shame stems from a youth culture that engages in wholesale sharing of music, photos, videos, memes, tweets, posts, and more. The line between harmless interpersonal communication and violation of the traditional norms of intellectual property is fuzzy because authorship of lots of online material is unclear and kids get used to the idea that sharing a tweet credits the source. A 17-year-old German author who was accused of copying large chunks of her best-selling book defended her use of "mix and match" by saying, "There's no such thing as originality anyway, just authenticity." Students who are immersed in this culture know that sharing schoolwork and online material is against the rules, but they don't see it as a serious transgression.

Educators do, but Cavanaugh believes their response is ineffective. "If students do not feel ashamed of what they're doing," she says, "our current, mostly punitive, strategies for deterring plagiarism are useless, and so are our assessments." Here's her example of an approach that doesn't work – and how to tweak it so it does:

Early in her career, Cavanaugh assigned the following essay prompt as her class read *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "What does the mockingbird symbolize in the novel?" Students who Googled "mockingbird symbolism" found a wealth of information: other kids' essays on that exact topic, a comprehensive SparkNotes analysis with cited evidence, and impressive critical articles by scholars who had thought through the question and come up with top-notch answers. Teachers can't expect students to ignore such a treasure trove of material, says Cavanaugh: "When the questions that are proposed ask them to regurgitate the ideas of those that came before them, we can guess what the outcome will be…"

One student said to her, "It's just a matter of working smarter, not harder. If the answer is out there, it's kinda dumb not to look." But there's a big downside: "Students often work harder to avoid getting caught 'stealing' ideas than they do thinking meaningfully about the question, or even about the answers they find, and they don't have opportunities to improve." Clearly, mockingbird symbolism-type essay questions are a problem and don't advance the deeper mission of the English curriculum.

Cavanaugh decided to take a different approach, making "the devil into my ally": she asked students to do an Internet search for credible material on that question, analyze and evaluate the reasoning, and defend, qualify, or refute what they found. "This assignment," she says, "requires the same kind of literary analysis, but minimizes the incentive to plagiarize and

better acquaints students with using outside sources *effectively*." She tries to orchestrate assignments and discussions that aren't "busywork."

Over the years, Cavanaugh has also focused on classroom culture, developing relationships with students, and creating a community that is trustful and in which students feel they can take risks and make mistakes. She also minimizes high-stakes homework assignments and has expanded her use of in-class discussions, weekly in-class essays; group inquiry; and questions that require original thinking, for example: *Is Atticus justified putting his kids at risk? Should we pity Mayella?*

Cavanaugh also believes it's important to go beyond what current ELA standards call for – citing sources to support arguments – and explicitly teach students how to find and examine good evidence and determine when citation is necessary. "Students might read numerous blogs or tweets or documents before coming to a conclusion about an idea," she says. If students come up with what they believe is an original thought, should the sources be cited? Is that synthesis or plagiarism? And how can teachers get away from being "thought police constantly skeptical of students' ideas" and move toward being "facilitators of critical thought"?

One avenue is to teach students what a good academic discussion looks like. In the first week of school, Cavanaugh has students read "A Rose for Emily" and practice using notecards with conversation stems:

- *While I agree with [student's name], I also think…*
- *What I think [student's name] is suggesting is that…*
- *So, [student's name], are you saying…?*
- *I disagree with [student's name] that…*
- *[Student's name], what do you think about…?*

This gets students practicing "citing" and "retweeting" each other's ideas, giving credit where it's due, and establishing habits that carry over to their written work. "By encouraging them to credit each other in discussion," says Cavanaugh, "I am helping them to see how ideas evolve, change, and are challenged by a community of learners."

Another cause of plagiarism, she says, is students' insecurity about their own thinking. Frequent in-class essays with low stakes and quick feedback help build confidence – "the development of a critical vocabulary that feels personal, relevant, and helps eliminate the will to cheat. It introduces students to other communities of thought and invites them to add to, rather than take from, the conversation. If we can keep the secrecy out of what students are doing with homework, if we can get students to communicate their insecurities with the content, experiment with using the Internet as a tool in the light of day, and get them to trust us to guide them in doing so ethically and without punishment, then we can show them that we are more concerned about what they're learning than whether they get the 'right' answer."

"Cultivating Critical Thought in the Gen-Z Culture of Sharing" by Amy Cavanaugh in *English Journal*, July 2019 (Vol. 108, #6, pp. 32-38), https://bit.ly/2Zch7p0 for members; Cavanaugh can be reached at acavanaugh@lw210.org.

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4. Jennifer Gonzalez on What to Do When an Audience Doesn't Respond

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez analyzes the awkward moment when a teacher or speaker asks a question and gets crickets. "If you feel like you're doing all the talking up there," she says, "and you want to get more from the people listening to you, you might just need to make a few small changes to your delivery to turn a one-way lecture to a much better conversation." First of all, some possible reasons for an unresponsive audience:

• Your question is heard as rhetorical. Asking, "How's everybody doing?" is clearly not intended for every person, so only the most extraverted will respond – if anybody.

• They think everyone else gets it. "If you say to a group, 'Does that make sense?' most people are going to act like it does," says Gonzalez, "even if it doesn't, because they assume everyone else in the room totally gets it and they don't want to look like the lone dummy."

• You're asking for too much. Better to ask people for a song they really like than their absolute favorite song.

• People are intimidated by someone in the room. "When we're in the presence of someone who intimidates us, it gets a lot harder to speak up publicly, especially if there's a chance that what we say might be wrong or different from the norm in any way," says Gonzalez. "This is about a thousand times more true if you're around 13 years old and your whole goal in life is to fit in." A super-popular student, or an overbearing teacher, can cause this dynamic.

• They don't know what the heck you're talking about. Usually confusion will be evident on people's faces, and that's a cue to slow down and reexplain.

Gonzalez goes on to suggest some ways to increase participation by student and adult audiences:

• *Explain what kind of response you want*. For example, "In a minute, I'm going to ask a question. What I want you to do first is think quietly about your answer. Then I'm going to ask for three volunteers to share their answer with the group."

• *Ask for a show of hands*. This works when asking about something that at least some people can say "yes" to – for example, "How many people watched a sporting event this weekend?" Then you can ask one hand-raiser for specifics, says Gonzalez, "and you're off and running."

• *Ask one person a direct question*. Questions asked of the group are likely to be met with silence, but a good question to an individual can get the ball rolling: "Hey Sadie, tell me something about that movie we watched yesterday that made an impression on you."

• *Have everyone write a response first*. When one or two people quickly respond to a teacher's question, the rest of the group is robbed of the opportunity to articulate an answer. "If this happens over and over again in the same group," says Gonzalez, "many participants won't even think about their own response, because they'll know one of the more talkative people is going to answer anyway." An effective way to forestall this dynamic is to ask everyone to jot down a response and then call on a couple of people to share theirs. Even if only a few people talk, everyone is thinking about the question, you're getting participation beyond the usual suspects, and shy people are more likely to speak up.

• *Do a think-pair-share*. Everyone turns to a partner and shares their answer. "This can be useful for meaty, content-heavy questions," says Gonzalez, "where participants are processing something they've learned, or just your basic conversational ones" – for example, how's everyone doing?

• *Do a better check for understanding*. Asking "Is that clear?" or "Does everyone understand?" is not an effective way to find out if a class or an audience is with you. Better to use some kind of response device or ask, "What questions do you have?"

"When You Get Nothing But Crickets" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *The Cult of Pedagogy*, August 18, 2019, https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/crickets/

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5. A Study of "Flipped" Instruction at West Point

In this paper from SEII (School Effectiveness Inequality Initiative) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Elizabeth Setren, Kyle Greenberg, Oliver Moore, and Michael Yankovich report on their randomized controlled study of flipped instruction in two classes at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point: Principles of Economics and Introduction to Calculus. The researchers believed these courses were an ideal testing ground for flipped instruction because students were randomly assigned to several sections, assessments and grading policies were standardized, and the curriculum called for extensive problem solving. Twenty-nine instructors, 80 class sections, and 1,328 students took part in the study, with all instructors teaching both flipped and traditional classes.

Students in the flipped classes were asked to view a video of a lecture beforehand and then engaged in in-depth discussion and application of the concepts through practice problems, group work, and lots of interaction with the instructor. Students in the control group got business-as-usual lectures in class (with the identical content as the flipped video) and solved the same problems outside class. Here's what the researchers found:

- Students in the flipped math class scored 0.3 standard deviations above the mean on a unit quiz compared to the control group.
- This may be partly explained, say the researchers, by the fact that West Point math instructors generally use a more interactive pedagogy than the economics department and were more confident adjusting to the flipped model.
- Math instructors reported that students were more engaged in the flipped classes; economics instructors saw no difference.
- Students in the flipped economics class scored the same as the control group.
- In the math classes, female, African-American, and Hispanic students and those with lower baseline achievement did not experience gains; in fact, the achievement gaps between these students and white males and higher-achieving students widened.
- The flipped classes' math gains faded by the final course exam, but the achievement gaps persisted.

"Our findings demonstrate that it's feasible for the flipped classroom to induce large gains in student learning in a short period of time," conclude the researchers, "but that the effects vary

by subject, student characteristics, and teacher motivation for the flipped classroom technique. The exacerbation of the achievement gap, the fade-out of effects, and the different effects by subject suggest that educators should exercise caution when considering the flipped classroom."

"Effects of the Flipped Classroom: Evidence from a Randomized Trial" by Elizabeth Setren, Kyle Greenberg, Oliver Moore, and Michael Yankovich in SEII (School Effectiveness Inequality Initiative), August 2019, https://bit.ly/2zacyNq

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6. Survival Tips for Teachers Who "Float"

In this article in *Education Week Teacher*, Madeline Will empathizes with teachers who don't have their own classroom and must travel with everything on a cart – "an exercise in patience and organization." Will gathered tips from teachers who've been there and from Elizabeth Randall's book, *The Floating Teacher: A Guide to Surviving and Thriving*:

• *Make nice with host teachers*. "Those relationships can make or break your experience," says Will. If teachers' rooms are left tidy, they often reciprocate by sharing shelf space, leaving board space for lessons, and even allowing early arrivals to set up.

• *Improvise an independent reading library*. Some options: ask for shelf space in each classroom and rotate "featured" books among them; create a virtual library where students can read a synopsis about the full collection and request their choices; and take photos of books and create a poster or photo collage to hang in each room for student "shopping."

• *Provision the cart with the right stuff*. That includes a file folder for each class, note cards, sticky notes, paper, pens and highlighters, binder clips, handouts, and an extension cord. Anything that can be scanned should be in the laptop.

• *Accessorize the cart*. Consider painting it a bright color (one English teacher called her pink cart "my shadow, my personal assistant, my little fashionista"); installing a bicycle bell to prevent running over toes in crowded corridors; and having holiday decorations like Easter rabbits and light-up shamrocks.

For all the challenges, there are benefits to floating. "You really get to know the faculty, the campus, and the students," said Randall; "you're out a lot, the students see you. It's a sociable thing if you make it one." Teacher Josh Caldwell writes about the benefit of seeing what's going on in many classrooms and "serendipitous collaboration that comes from having another teacher in the room. We should all step out of our comfort zones a little more often."

"Tips for 'Floating' Teachers: How to Survive Without a Classroom of Your Own" by Madeline Will in *Education Week Teacher*, August 8, 2019, https://bit.ly/31YLey7

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7. The Core Beliefs of Highly Effective Teachers

In their book *10 Mindframes for Visible Learning,* John Hattie and Klaus Zierer argue that what teachers believe about instruction drives what happens in their classrooms. Here are the "mindframes" Hattie and Zierer found in highly effective teachers:

- I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning.
- I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps.
- I collaborate with my peers about my conceptions of progress and my impact.
- I am a change agent and believe all students can improve.
- I strive to provide my students with challenge and not merely have them "do their best."
- I give feedback and help students understand it, and I interpret and act on feedback given to me.
- I engage as much in dialogue as monologue.
- I explicitly inform students from the outset what success looks like.
- I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur, where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others.
- I identify and build on my students' prior experiences and initial learning levels.

10 Mindframes for Visible Learning by John Hattie and Klaus Zierer (Routledge, 2018); see Jenn David-Lang's detailed summary of this book at www.themainidea.net.

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8. What's on the Stage in High Schools?

In this *NPR Ed* article, Elissa Nadworny reports the 2019 rankings of musicals and full-length plays performed in U.S. high schools:

FULL-LENGTH PLAYS	MUSICALS
Almost, Maine	*The Addams Family*
A Midsummer Night's Dream	*Mamma Mia!*
Peter and the Starcatcher	*The Little Mermaid*
Our Town	*Beauty and the Beast*
Alice in Wonderland	*Mary Poppins*
Clue	*Newsies*
She Kills Monsters	*Little Shop of Horrors*
Radium Girls	*Seussical*
= The Crucible	*Into the Woods*
= 12 Angry Jurors	*= Shrek The Musical*
	= The Wizard of Oz

The monthly magazine for theater students and teachers, *Dramatics*, has been publishing rankings since 1938, and agreed to share them with *NPR Ed.* Over the past 78 years, the most popular plays have been *Our Town* and *You Can't Take It With You*. Among the musicals, *Bye*

Bye Birdie and *Oklahoma!* have been performed most often. See the link below for the rankings in each decade.

"The Most Popular High-School Plays and Musicals" by Elissa Nadworny in *NPR Ed*, July 31, 2019, https://n.pr/2T7sBVf

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9. Short Item:

The 1619 Project – This first installment of a *New York Times* series is a major classroom resource for thinking through the history and legacy of slavery in the U.S.: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

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.

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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
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