

Marshall Memo 842

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 22, 2020

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Quotes of the Week

“It is a profound experience for a person of color to hear a white person address racism.”

A Taking It Up participant (see item #8b)

“You must let students talk about what they feel, encourage them to write about their emotions, and create space for students to emote – even as all of that will have to be done virtually. This is an emotionally fragile time for many black students and other students of color. For many students, the fear is real, their anger is palpable, anxiety is high, and sadness is running deep. Do not expect that you will have all the answers. Just listen to and affirm your students.”

Tyrone Howard in [“How to Root Out Anti-Black Racism from Your Schools”](#) in *Education Week*, June 10, 2020; Howard can be reached at thoward@gseis.ucla.edu.

“If fourth graders are taught from a second-grade book, when will they have the opportunity to confront the language and ideas of fourth-grade books? This is a cruel math problem that tells students they are best served by books that don’t match their interests, their curiosity, or their social aspirations.”

Timothy Shanahan (see item #6)

“Analogy is the engine of thinking.”

Douglas Hofstadter, quoted in [“Teaching That Activates and Leverages Background Knowledge Is an Equity Issue”](#) by Larry Ferlazzo in *Education Week Teacher*, June 16, 2020

“There is no such thing as critical thinking apart from a critical mass of knowledge.”

Dave Stuart Jr. in the *Education Week Teacher* article just above

1. Racial Justice 101

“I’m tired of the lip service toward racial injustice,” says Funmi Haastrup in this *Education Week* article responding to a pro-forma letter she received from her daughter’s suburban school superintendent about the current crisis. “I need the district to change its practices and policies to root out the inequities and racial biases that permeate schools and spill over into our communities.” Here’s what Haastrup suggests:

- *Regularly audit policies, procedures, and practices with an equity lens.* “In most districts,” she says, “inequities in student opportunities and performance result despite the best intentions of the school district community.” This happens because some people have more connections, political clout, buying power, and wealth than others. It takes a deliberate effort by policymakers and front-line educators to level the playing field and get equitable outcomes for all students.

- *Hire a diverse team.* “My 4th-grade daughter has never had a teacher of color, and I fear she never will,” says Haastrup. School staffing matters, and it’s equally important that district decision makers represent key racial/ethnic groups.

- *Provide anti-racist training and support.* Ideally, says Haastrup, all educators and staff “feel responsible and empowered to act against racist behaviors and policies.”

- *Partner with families and communities.* “The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing school closures have starkly exposed the need for strong school, family, and community partnerships that prioritize access and equity,” says Haastrup. “In whatever form schools reopen in the fall, schools cannot go back to the surface-level engagement that characterized most family interactions.”

- *Move beyond the heroes and holidays curriculum.* Rather than being relegated to February, May and September, the history, literature, and culture of people of color should be “seamlessly” woven into the curriculum throughout the year, says Haastrup.

[“I Need More from Schools than Lip Service About Racism”](#) by Funmi Haastrup in *Education Week*, June 17, 2020

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2. Implicit Bias in Schools

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Jordan Starck, Travis Riddle, and Stacey Sinclair (Princeton University) and Natasha Warikoo (Tufts University) report on two large national studies, one in 2008 and one in 2014, comparing U.S. teachers with the general population. It turns out that teachers have almost the same degree of implicit racial bias as non-

teachers. “These findings,” say the researchers, “challenge the notion that teachers might be uniquely equipped to instill positive racial attitudes in children or bring about racial justice, instead indicating that teachers need just as much support in contending with their biases as the population at large.” The key is effective professional learning experiences that foster educators’ awareness of specific instances in classrooms, hallways, and adult interactions where implicit bias emerges.

Starck, Riddle, Sinclair, and Warikoo have another insight: that bias is most likely to emerge when educators are overloaded and under stress. They suggest coupling implicit bias PD with professional learning on classroom management and time management.

[“Teachers Are People Too: Examining the Racial Bias of Teachers Compared to Other American Adults”](#) by Jordan Starck, Travis Riddle, Stacey Sinclair, and Natasha Warikoo in *Educational Researcher*, May 2020 (Vol. 49, #4, pp. 273-284); Starck can be reached at psych@princeton.edu.

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3. Keeping Male Teachers of Color on Board

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Travis Bristol (University of California/Berkeley) asks why teachers of color, especially African-American males, are leaving U.S. schools at a higher rate than other teacher subgroups. Bristol interviewed black male teachers in a number of Boston Public Schools and came to several conclusions:

- Professional working conditions were a key factor in deciding to stay in a school, especially administrative support.
- The teachers interviewed spoke of frequent microaggressions and insensitivity on the part of their non-black colleagues.
- Surprisingly, African-American male teachers were more likely to leave schools that had three or more black male teachers on staff.
- Conversely, in schools with only one African-American male teacher, that teacher was more likely to stay, despite negative interactions with colleagues.
- Interviews revealed two reasons that the singleton teachers stayed: administrative support that made it possible to teach effectively, and a belief that leaving would deprive students of color of an important role model and mentor.

Bristol concludes that school leaders need to nurture professional working conditions for all colleagues and orchestrate effective PD to reduce insensitive and biased interracial interactions.

[“A Tale of Two Types of Schools: An Exploration of How School Working Conditions Influence Black Male Teacher Turnover”](#) by Travis Bristol in *Teachers College Record*, March 2020 (Vol. 122, #3, pp. 1-41); Bristol can be reached at tjbristol@berkeley.edu.

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4. A Critical Look at Curriculum Standards on Financial Literacy

In this article in *Teachers College Record*, Agata Soroko (University of Ottawa) reports
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on her analysis of high-school financial literacy courses launched in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. Soroko was interested in what the standards and programs had to say about:

- The nature of wealth and poverty;
- Explanations for why some people are rich and some are poor;
- The justifications for unequal financial outcomes;
- How unequal financial outcomes might be changed.

Soroko found that that most financial literacy standards and courses said (or implied) that accumulating wealth was the direct result of education, training, knowledge, skills, and a work ethic. “The subtext,” she says, “signaled that in order to reach the top of the income distribution, one must possess the appropriate mindset, abilities, and behavior. To land at the bottom implies a personal deficiency.”

Only a few curriculums mentioned other factors such as recessions, globalization, new technologies, unions, political influence, personal connections, inherited wealth, tax policies, changing demographics, gender, geography, race, and discrimination. “Anchored in the ideology of merit,” she says, “the standards advanced that society is fair and anyone with enough willpower, work ethic, and financial smarts has an equal chance to succeed. Those who have failed, proceeds this meritocratic line of thinking, have only themselves to blame.”

It’s certainly important for high-school students to learn specific lessons about money management and financial savvy, Soroko concludes. But she believes that teachers and curriculum policymakers need to supplement or replace these very limited standards and curriculum packages with two questions in mind: “Does financial literacy education mean teaching students to look out for their own interests in a deeply unequal financial system benefiting those at the top with little regard for those at the bottom? Or does it mean engaging students in critical analysis of the social, political, and economic conditions affecting individuals’ life chances so that they develop the skills to act – in concert with others – improving economic outcomes for all citizens?”

[“Buying Into Dominant Ideas About Wealth and Poverty: An Examination of U.S. and Canadian Financial Literacy Standards”](#) by Agata Soroko in *Teachers College Record*, March 2020 (Vol. 122, #3, pp. 1-50); Soroko can be reached at agata.soroko@uottawa.ca.

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5. Key Questions for School Reopening

In this *Education Week* article, Madeline Will reports on what she learned in interviews with more than a dozen experts and public health officials on a number of questions that must be answered before schools can safely reopen. See the article link below for expert opinions:

- Should students wear masks?
- Should staff wear masks?
- Should schools check students’ temperatures before letting them enter?
- Should schools conduct Covid-19 testing?
- Are there enough places for students and staff to wash their hands?

- Are there enough school nurses?
- Will schools be sufficiently cleaned?
- Is there a plan to protect high-risk teachers and staff?

[“Keeping Students and Staff Healthy and Safe When Schools Reopen”](#) by Madeline Will in *Education Week*, June 10, 2020

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6. Does Reading at the “Instructional Level” Accelerate Learning?

In this article in *American Educator*, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) remembers that when he became a teacher 50 years ago, he was told to organize students into groups based on their instructional reading levels. This was based on a 1946 textbook by Emmett Betts that presented the idea of independent, instructional, and frustration levels for reading. Betts’s solution to the perennial problem of a whole class reading a text that was too difficult for some students was to create groups by reading level and have each group read texts at its instructional level. Betts’s criteria for the “just right” level for small-group instruction: a student’s ability to read a text with 95-98 percent accuracy and score 75-89 percent on comprehension questions.

This idea caught on, and soon most elementary schools are were teaching students by instructional level, often in groups named with variations on redbirds, bluebirds, and buzzards.

Leveled reading texts went through a “readabilized” stage of carefully controlled basal reader vocabulary (*Oh. Oh. Oh. Look, Jane, look*). In this period, texts tended to be too easy for most students, not to mention stilted and boring. In the 1980s, California pioneered Whole Language, using authentic texts that were much more demanding for elementary students. This did not go well because California also deemphasized phonics and small-group instruction, taking away supports that would have helped students decode and make sense of unfamiliar words.

Then in 1986, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell published *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*, in which they advocated a return to leveled groups, but with two big differences: first, dropping textbooks in favor of high-quality children’s books, which were much more abundant by then; and second, moving from quantitative measures of readability (based on algorithms using vocabulary and sentence complexity) to a qualitative A-to-Z scale of reading difficulty using ten criteria (genre/forms, text structure content, themes and ideas, language and literary features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, words, illustrations, and book and print features). Fountas-Pinnell guided reading is the most commonly used approach to reading in U.S. elementary classrooms today, using the F&P readability gradient and Betts’s criteria for establishing students’ instructional level.

The big question, says Shanahan, is whether those criteria for determining a student’s instructional level set students up for optimal learning. Subsequent research has questioned Betts’s theory, suggesting that he set the bar too low. A recent study found that second graders made the most progress working with texts at 85 percent accuracy and 50 percent comprehension level. Other studies have found that students learn more with texts above their

instructional levels (with scaffolding and support from a teacher or peer). Additional research has come to similar conclusions, showing that working with instructional-level texts either does no good or actually sets students back. The strong conclusion is that students make greater progress in reading when they work with their teachers and peers on more-challenging texts.

“Basically, what this research reveals,” says Shanahan, “is that limiting students to texts they can already read well reduces their opportunity to learn – by limiting their exposure to sophisticated vocabulary, rich content, and complex language.... If fourth graders are taught from a second-grade book, when will they have the opportunity to confront the language and ideas of fourth-grade books? This is a cruel math problem that tells students they are best served by books that don’t match their interests, their curiosity, or their social aspirations. Leveled reading emphasizes students’ current limitations, rather than increasing their possibilities, especially for the least advantaged of our students. We can do better.”

Shanahan has four caveats. First, in the primary grades, giving students texts that are well above their current reading level is not productive. However, he says, kindergarten and first-grade teachers should read more-challenging texts aloud and lead discussions that build students’ vocabulary and background knowledge.

Second, simply mandating the use of more-difficult texts won’t work. Many states that adopted the Common Core State Standards took to heart the ELA component of having all students work with grade-level texts, even if they were reading below that level. “States may have thought they had accomplished something pretty big by adopting those standards,” says Shanahan, “and likewise district administrators may have thought they had dealt successfully with the complex text requirements.” But surveys have shown that when many students struggled with too-difficult texts, teachers reverted to instructional-level teaching, getting students working with below-grade texts for reading instruction.

Third, as the Common Core stumble suggests, challenging texts will work only if teachers provide support and scaffolding in reading skills, strategies, vocabulary, and background knowledge. “With knowledge of the research on effective reading instruction,” he says, “skilled teachers can facilitate students’ productive interactions with harder texts.”

Finally, Shanahan believes students should be exposed to a wide range of reading material, with really demanding texts in small groups, when the teacher is close by to provide support and encouragement, and less-demanding texts when students are on their own or the teacher is less available.

[“Limiting Children to Books They Can Already Read”](#) by Timothy Shanahan in *American Educator*, Summer 2020 (Vol. 44, #2, pp. 13-17, 39); Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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7. A Better Personality Inventory than Myers-Briggs and Enneagram

In this article in *Psychology Today*, Jennifer Fayard (Ouachita Baptist University) describes taking the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) when she was a freshman in college.

She was smitten by the “type” it delivered and by Carl Jung’s complex theory of personality. “I began to use my type to explain to myself and others why I did a particular thing or thought a particular way,” she says. “Everything suddenly seemed to make sense – I had a language to describe differences between people.” She learned that Myers-Briggs is widely used in the corporate world for hiring, promotion, and team-building workshops. Fayard also dove into the social media world of the Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, and other measures; on the Harry Potter MBTI chart, she was Draco Malfoy.

But as a graduate student, Fayard learned that personality psychologists don’t use Myers-Briggs and have concerns about personality tests like it. Among them:

- Modern research on personality contradicts Jung’s idea that individuals fall into distinct categories like “thinkers” or “intuitionists.”
- By forcing binary choices (between introvert and extrovert, for example), the MBTI assessment doesn’t accurately describe people who score close to the middle on each scale.
- A person’s MBTI type can change within a few weeks, and can be different when the test is taken in different work settings.
- Many of the personality descriptions in the Myers-Briggs and Enneagram are quite general and could apply to almost anyone (for example, *Enjoys material comforts and style*).
- With the Enneagram, several types can describe the same person.

Given these flaws, why are tests like Myers-Briggs so popular, and why do many people take the results seriously? Fayard offers four reasons: (a) we’re always seeking hidden information about ourselves; (b) we want to feel understood and normal; (c) we want simple ways to understand other people; and (d) confirmation bias – we latch onto insights that confirm our hunches (searching for labels for her Myers-Briggs type (INTJ), Fayard came across *The Mastermind*. “I’ll take it!” she says).

Is there a better way to describe personality? Yes, says Fayard. Most psychologists use inventories that measure the Big Five (or OCEAN) traits on a continuum; each one has a cluster of closely associated characteristics:

- *Openness to experience* – enjoy trying new things, have a variety of interests, and are intellectual and imaginative.
- *Conscientiousness* – persistent, hard-working, self-controlled, responsible, organized;
- *Extraversion* – sociability, assertiveness, activity level, cheerfulness, excitement-seeking;
- *Agreeableness* – trusting, kind, cooperative, sympathetic, humble, generous;
- *Emotional stability* (neuroticism) – worry little, not moody or self-conscious, low levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility;

Big Five personality inventories correlate somewhat with Myers-Briggs, but often with more than one MBTI type; importantly, emotional stability is not included in the Myers-Briggs.

Fayard gives several reasons Big Five inventories are superior to Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, and others like them:

- Big Five traits were identified through careful scientific observation; psychologists have demonstrated that each is distinct and operates independently of the others.
- Continuums are better than categories. Each Big Five trait is measured on a scale from low to high (versus multiple-choice questions with MBTI), and each measures traits and their subcomponents with greater nuance.
- They can show change over time. For example, you may notice that you’ve become more emotionally stable, assertive, agreeable, and conscientious than you were ten years ago. “The ability of personality types to account for such meaningful changes is dubious,” says Fayard.
- OCEAN assessments predict things that personality should predict. “The Big Five,” she says, “have been shown to predict satisfaction with life, education and academic performance, job performance and satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and divorce, physical health, how long people live, and more.”

So why does the Big Five approach have less cachet and visibility than Myers-Briggs and Enneagram? Fayard believes it’s because academic psychologists aren’t good at marketing: “Testing companies have been very successful in selling their models because they are for-profit businesses.”

Fayard closes on a humble note. Personality inventories, she says, “do not account for everything that makes us unique – our tendency to stop and move turtles out of the road, our particular brand of wit, our love of all things autumn, or other quirks. But no test can do so. Nor do the Big Five capture motivations, emotions, values, beliefs, talents, and ‘dark’ traits such as psychopathy and narcissism, although personality psychologists study these variables too.” Finally, most of the research in this area has been done in Western countries, and it’s not clear to what extent they apply to other cultures. But the Big Five “can give you a language to talk about who you are – and what makes you similar to and distinct from the complicated people around you.”

[“False Portraits”](#) by Jennifer Fayard in *Psychology Today*, January/February 2020; Fayard can be reached at fayardj@obu.edu.

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8. Short Items:

a. Video on Reconstruction – This 6-minute rapid sketch artist [presentation](#) by Tera DuVernay, illustrated by Molly Crabapple, shows in vivid detail what happened during Reconstruction.

“Reconstruction in America, 1865-1876,” narrated by Tera DuVernay, illustrated by Molly Crabapple, from EJI (Equal Justice Initiative), June 15, 2020; a full EJI report on Reconstruction is available [here](#).

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b. Responses to Racially Insensitive Comments – This [list](#) from the Oregon Center for Educational Equity suggests ways to push back when someone says something racist. “It is a profound experience for a person of color to hear a white person address racism,” said a *Taking It Up* participant.

“What Did You Just Say? Responses to Racist Comments Collected from the Field” created collectively by CFEE graduates across Oregon, 2018

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c. Anti-Racist Resources – Brea Baker has compiled [a list](#) of 40 movies, TED Talks, documentaries, books, and other sources to address racial justice.

“The Anti-Racist Starter Pack: 40 TV Series, Documentaries, Movies, TED Talks, and Books to Add to Your List” by Brea Baker, June 2, 2020

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d. When Will We Be Able to...? – This *New York Times* [article](#) reports the results of a survey of more than 500 epidemiologists with their predictions on when they’ll be able to bring in mail without precautions (most say this summer), attend a small dinner party (later this year), hug or shake hands with a friend (a year or more), and 15 other everyday activities.

“When 511 Epidemiologists Expect to Fly, Hug, and Do 18 Other Everyday Activities Again” by Margot Sanger-Katz, Claire Cain Miller, and Quoctrung Bui in *The New York Times*, June 8, 2020

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e. Updated Media Bias Chart – The 6.0 edition of the [Ad Fontes media bias chart](#) is available, laying out all major media sources on two axes: veracity and left-right bias; by Vanessa Otero

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*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 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
ASCD SmartBrief
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
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine