Marshall Memo 946

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 25, 2022

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Unless you are extremely disciplined about how and when you use it, social media is very likely affecting your ability to concentrate for substantial periods of time on endeavors that are challenging and meaningful."

Irina Dumitrescu (see item #2)

"You can't see the entire field while you're playing the game."

Manya Whitaker (Colorado College) in "Is It Worth Getting Professional Coaching?" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 22, 2022 (Vol. 68, #23, pp. 48-50); Whitaker can be reached at mwhitaker@coloradocollege.edu.

"The movements of the hands are a co-equal partner with speech. When we don't attend to gesture, our own or others, we're missing out on half the conversation."

Annie Murphy Paul (quoted in item #4)

"Traumatized brains cannot learn effectively. Hypervigilant brains cannot learn effectively… Children are not primed for optimal learning in a reflexive state. Brains in pain do not learn… Under psychologically and physically safe conditions, however, the brain can focus most of its energy on learning."

Amanda Dettmer and Tammy Hughes in "The Cognitive Toll of Gun Violence" in *Education Week*, July 13, 2022 (Vol. 41, #37, p. 21)

"There is an abundance of evidence that standardized test scores are strongly related to knowledge, skills, and later opportunities in life and work. Test scores may not tell us everything, but they are highly predictive of things that matter."

Dan Goldhaber, Andrew McEachin, and Emily Norton in *Education Week*, July 13, 2022, (Vol. 41, #37, p. 20) "The Pandemic's Toll on Academic Growth Wasn't Uniform. Recovery Efforts Can't Be Either"

"New leaders cannot initiate any change until they understand the norms, traditions, and practical drifts of the group or department that is being taken over. To learn what is going on,

the leader must become an inquirer to establish helping relationships with the employees and build trust. Groups are notorious in their ability to hide actual practices from visiting bosses; so leaders who really want to change things must involve themselves in the culture of the group, gain enough trust to be told what is going on, and then build mutual helping relationships."

Edgar Schein (M.I.T.) in *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help* (Berrett-Koehler, 2011)

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1. Defining Educational Equity

In this Center for Curriculum Redesign paper, Dirk Van Damme (Innovation and Measuring Progress Division, OECD) says K-12 education has historically been seen as the great equalizer. "More than any other field of social life and public policy," he says, "equity and social justice are incredibly important in education. This is because the intrinsic purpose of education is to uplift and emancipate individuals, social groups, and entire nations from ignorance… No other social institution has that purpose." Education was once reserved for the elite, but it's now become "the main modernizer and the main equalizer in human history."

However, two decades into the 21st century there are still major inequities between the advantaged and less fortunate. Nordic countries have made the most progress in narrowing opportunity gaps, attributable to their social-democratic tradition. There's much less movement toward equity in many other countries, says Van Damme, including the U.S. – a sad situation given our rhetoric about social justice in schools. "Opportunities for a fulfilling life are distributed through education," he says, "so every opportunity for excellent education missed signifies a reduction in opportunities in life later on."

To be sure, there are forces outside schools – social and income inequality, poverty, racism, discrimination and exclusion, inequitable funding, insecure labor markets, residential segregation, disadvantaged neighborhoods, worsening social conditions, and other forms of injustice – and all these affect children's educational opportunities. Given significant outside forces, can schools make a positive difference for kids – or do they reproduce social inequities, or even intensify them?

When schools were in the business of providing basic literacy, it was easier for them to narrow achievement gaps and act as a social equalizer. Now, with the mission of schools extending to higher-order skills and extensive knowledge, the gap-closing mission is much more challenging.

What exactly do we mean by equity? It can be measured in a number of ways, says Van Damme – social class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability,

geography, migration status, and other aspects of personal identity. These may be in competition with each other when it comes to equitable outcomes.

There's a second complicating factor: in addition to schools' aspirational equity role, they have another purpose: selection. This involves acting as a pipeline to fill a limited number of top positions in the economy, politics, the military, universities, and more. "The function of selecting the most talented ones is controversial in the education space," says Van Damme, "but from a societal point of view, completely legitimate." The key, he says, is that "selection, and the resulting social mobility, happens on the basis of ability, merit, and achievement, and not on the basis of family background, gender, race, religion, or whatever other irrelevant factor."

Van Damme believes there are eleven ways of looking at equity and social justice in schools, pointing out the key features and concerns with each:

• *Equality of outcomes* – This is the most radical approach to equity – seeking the virtual elimination of variations in student learning. Given huge differences in family backgrounds and individual talent, the only way to achieve equality of outcomes is by addressing and compensating for the inequalities with which students enter school, maximizing the uniformity and cohesion of the curriculum, and postponing tracking and selection. Concerns: unrealistic ambitions and accepting the "least common denominator" on goals at the expense of high-performing students.

• *Equality of opportunity* – The idea is that by removing barriers, minimizing the impact of social background, and compensating for resource inequalities, all students will have a chance to succeed. This is a more realistic agenda for schools, recognizing the importance of cultural preferences and individual effort. Concerns: personal effort is in itself a function of social background and therefore vulnerable to inequality; policies are often narrowly focused on access and financial barriers, neglecting the structural barriers that exist in schools.

• *Social mobility* – Schools remove impediments to success and provide incentives for talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds to climb the social ladder; they flourish and society benefits from their contributions. Concerns: students' success occurs more as a result of selection than the efforts of students and teachers; there's also the risk of downward mobility for others, with the overall level of inequality staying the same.

• *Meritocracy* – The best and brightest, regardless of social background, are able to reach the highest social positions because discrimination based on irrelevant individual characteristics has been eliminated – with schools defining the credentials and skills necessary for success. Concerns: it's not always clear what "merit" means, and whether it's influenced by social background; the ethos here is highly individualistic, at the expense of the social group and community, and this approach legitimizes, even increases, social inequality.

• *Social cohesion* – Schools create a "common core" of knowledge, skills, and social norms (á la E.D. Hirsch) that is shared by all. This aims to protect against fragmentation and polarization among social groups divided by wealth and poverty, ethnicity and race, and geography. The role of schools is fostering social cohesion by instilling shared ideas of citizenship, interdependence, and mutual interest. Concerns: there's more emphasis on social

stability and protecting the existing order than on justice and eliminating inequality; diversity might be seen as a threat rather than a positive force.

• *Social integration* – Schools provide opportunities for disadvantaged and disempowered groups (especially migrants and refugees) to be successful in schools, the job market, democratic institutions, and social life by sharing the dominant values of the society into which they will integrate. Concerns: this approach accepts the dominant culture instead of engaging in cultural interaction; it also preserves the unequal balance of power among diverse social groups.

• *Affirmative action* – Schools proactively address inequalities by giving a leg up to disadvantaged populations, leveling the playing field. Concerns: this approach can create resentment among those who don't get similar treatment, as well as weakening the concept of achievement.

• *Segregation* – Providing separate "safe spaces" for perceived victims of discrimination and injustice (for example, girls in some societies) to protect them and allow the full development of their identities. Concerns: this might limit students' full development, mutual understanding, and interdependence. "It is difficult to see how a strategy of segregation," says Van Damme, "can foster the knowledge and competencies needed for peaceful coexistence on this planet."

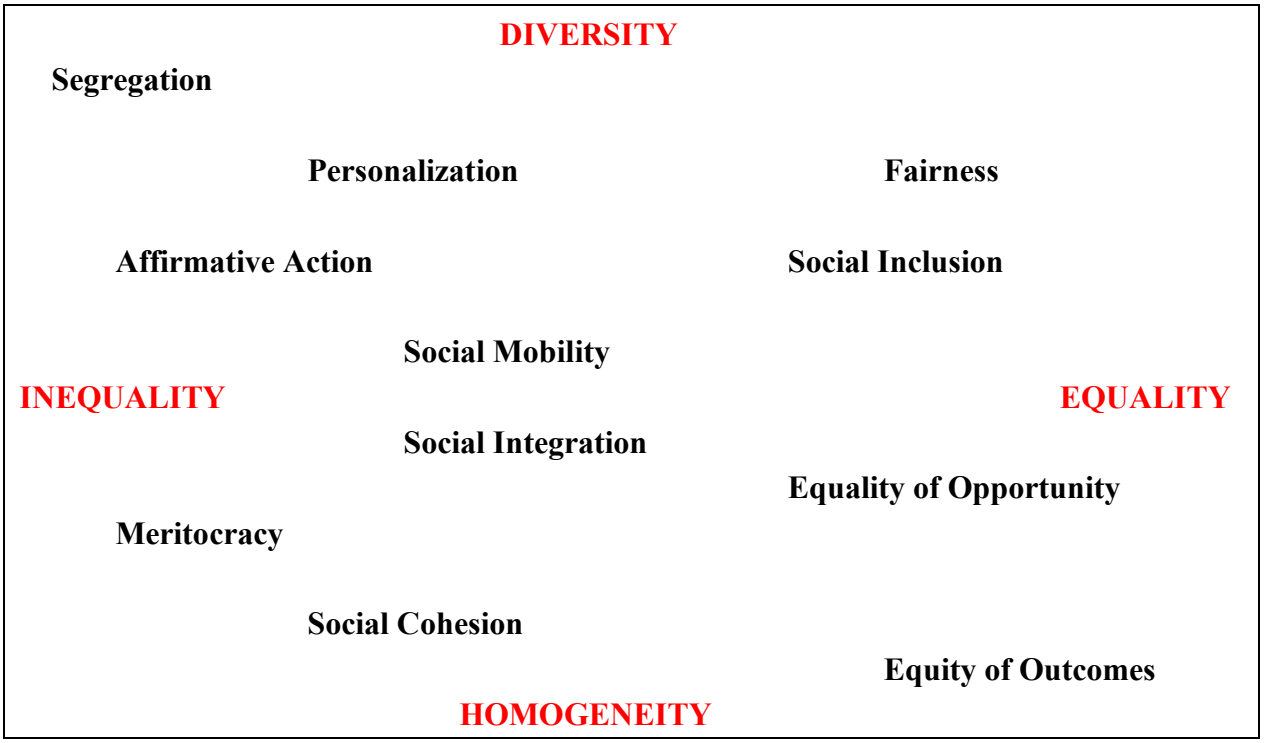
• *Personalization* – Eschewing a "one size fits all" approach, flexible, highly differentiated learning plans take advantage of new technologies and cater to the individual backgrounds and abilities of different learners. Concerns: there is the risk of fragmentation at the expense of social interaction and the common good.

• *Social inclusion* – This approach aims to counter social exclusion based on poverty, skin color, sexual identity, religion, and other factors – not by special treatment (affirmative action), excessive personalization, or segregation, but by bringing students together around shared human needs and connecting them to the collective good. Originally developed for learners with disabilities and special needs, the concept of inclusion has expanded to include other marginalized populations. It is compatible with an excellence agenda, says Van Damme, even if not all students achieve the highest levels of achievement. Diverse students are recognized for their positive qualities and specific needs, engaging in an adaptive but socially interactive learning environment. Concerns: the appreciation of diversity can take priority over the goal of reducing inequality; also, pursuing social inclusion might not involve questioning power imbalances in society.

• *Fairness* – This concept, says Van Damme, is more ambitious than equality of opportunity, which limits social justice to securing chances for disadvantaged students to succeed. Fairness goes beyond eliminating discrimination and prejudice and isn't content with providing the same educational opportunities to a child from a poor family and one who is more fortunate. "It is not just about the absence of barriers," he says, "but about ensuring that all learners in the end have a 'fair' chance to succeed. The concept of fairness is at the same time general and very specific, because what is fair for one individual or social group might not

be for another." Concerns: views of fairness can be subjective and easily influenced by social and cultural beliefs.

Van Damme maps the eleven approaches to equity on a grid, with the horizontal axis from Inequality to Equality and the vertical axis from Homogeneity to Diversity.



"In order to come to a vision on equity and social justice in education," he says, "one has to take a position with regard to the various concepts." He believes the upper-right quadrant, combining Diversity with Equality, is the most ambitious sector. "Focusing on equality alone," he says, "leads to fruitless egalitarian approaches, which have not been successful in the past and which might disrespect the legitimate views of minorities and specific social groups. Focusing on diversity alone risks… fragmentation and the loss of the common good."

The two equity approaches in the upper right-hand quadrant are Fairness and Inclusion. Van Damme believes they are the best guiding principles for educators who seek equity and social justice. He highlights four "neighboring" approaches – Equality of Opportunity, Social Integration, Social Mobility, and Personalization – which he believes "can offer additional insights and value, if integrated with Inclusion and Fairness."

"Curriculum Redesign for Equity and Social Justice" by Dirk Van Damme, Center for Curriculum Redesign, April 2022, (pp. 1-28); Van Damme is at dirk.vandamme@oecd.org.

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2. Reasons to Take a Break from Twitter

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Irina Dumitrescu (University of Bonn) precedes her critique of Twitter by saying, "If your time on social media is a net good in your

intellectual, professional, and personal life; if it has given you a supportive community, irreplaceable intellectual resources, and a chance to find your voice; if you have done the reckoning, and its benefits continue to outweigh its costs for you, then please stop reading this piece now." That said, Dumitrescu gives these reasons for rethinking Twitter:

• *Attention* – "Unless you are extremely disciplined about how and when you use it," she says, "social media is very likely affecting your ability to concentrate for substantial periods of time on endeavors that are challenging and meaningful." Twitter is cleverly engineered to keep people checking their accounts and following targeted content, tags, direct messages, shares, and "likes" – and there's no bottom.

• *Depth* – Twitter and other platforms offer a "fast-food version of thinking," says Dumitrescu: short, fast, entertaining, shareable without context, disposable, and sometimes provocative, incendiary, and outrageous. "The more time we spend each day on social media," she continues, "the more we are habituated to think in the forms it has given us. We might share a nascent idea before it is ripe or offer a quick reaction to an issue before thinking it through."

• *Truth* – Some people who tweet are reputable journalists, officials, and academics bringing real-time wisdom to a topic. Others are unreliable or deliberately deceptive, and material is sometimes retweeted without being read. "Consider the efforts to which you go to teach your students how to base their research on reliable data and sources," says Dumitrescu. "Now ask yourself how much of your day you spend taking in questionable data from questionable sources, and what that is doing to your judgment."

• *Harassment* – Social media is notorious for facilitating bullying, says Dumitrescu, "which disproportionately affects marginalized people," Digital platforms reproduce and amplify racial and gender biases.

• *Independence* – "People instinctively want to fit in with their peers," she says, "to be seen as supporting the right causes, adopting the correct interpretation, supporting the right people." Twitter can pressure us to declare immediate support without taking time to think through the evidence, with silence taken as agreement. Algorithms are designed to elicit strong emotions and boost the most extreme views.

• *Community* – It's tempting to use social media to connect with kindred spirits outside one's own organization, but there's a cost, says Dumitrescu: "the negative emotions that social-media algorithms foster and reward undermine the very bonds these platforms once helped create." Envy is an emotion that seems to be turbocharged on social media, along with pushing one's brand. Connecting in person, at professional gatherings, and by e-mail allows us to get to know colleagues as people.

"Time for a Long Pause" by Irina Dumitrescu in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 22, 2022 (Vol. 68, #23, pp. 37-39); two other articles included in this link express different views on Twitter. Dumitrescu can be reached at idumitre@uni-bonn.de.

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3. Making Mathematics Accessible to Multilingual Students

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Sarah Roberts (University of California/Santa Barbara), Zandra de Araujo (University of Florida), Craig Willey (Indiana University-Purdue University/Indianapolis), and William Zahner (San Diego State University) suggest three ways to help multilingual students be more successful in math classes:

• Using multiple representations, including graphs, tables, equations, diagrams, and verbal explanations;

• Thinking through language obstacles that make math difficult for these students – for example, technical terms and words that have multiple meanings;

• Contextualizing math concepts and problem-solving activities by giving background information and offering real-life scenarios.

Roberts, de Araujo, Willey, and Zahner suggest seven things to avoid so math language is more understandable to multilingual students:

- Low-frequency terms – For example, use *looking* instead of *perusing*.
- Multiple meanings – Explain, for example, that *table*, which can refer to what dinner is served on, is also a way of presenting data.
- Conditional clauses – Shorter, more-direct statements can make the meaning clearer, for example, instead of, "If Peyton bought four chicken nuggets, then he wouldn't be hungry", use "Eating four nuggets makes Peyton less hungry."
- Passive verb tenses – Instead of "The nuggets were bought for Peyton," say "Marissa bought the nuggets for Peyton."
- Relative clauses – Instead of "Peyton bought four chicken nuggets, which cost $0.75 each", say "Peyton bought four chicken nuggets. The nuggets cost $0.75 each."
- Abstract references – Instead of "They bought four chicken nuggets" (it's unclear who *they* are), say "Peyton bought four chicken nuggets."
- Long nominals – Instead of "The short, brown-haired child named Peyton, who loves to eat chicken nuggets, bought four chicken nuggets", say "Peyton bought four chicken nuggets."

"Three Ways to Enhance Tasks for Multilingual Learners" by Sarah Roberts, Zandra de Araujo, Craig Willey, and William Zahner in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, July 2022 (Vol. 115, #7, pp. 458-467); the authors are at sroberts@education.ucsb.edu, zdearaujo@coe.ufl.edu, cjwilley@iupui.edu, and bzahner@sdsu.edu.

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4. Tapping Movement and Gesture in the Classroom

"In our brain-centric culture, we often equate thinking with quiet focus," says Deborah Farmer Kris in this *Mind/Shift* article. "Sit down, sit still, and use your head." But the brain is only part of the story. Kris quotes Annie Murphy Paul's new book, *The Extended Mind*: the brain has "firm limits," says Paul, "on what it can do in terms of paying attention, remembering, staying focused, staying motivated, and grasping abstract concepts." When

students' brains aren't meeting classroom demands, kids can feel inadequate and blame themselves.

To overcome natural limitations and extend the capacity of the brain, says Paul, we need to capitalize on other body systems, our surroundings, and relationships with others. Two of the best ways of doing this are movement and gesture:

• *Movement* – "It takes a fair amount of mental bandwidth to keep our bodies still," says Paul, "because we're meant to be in a kind of state of constant motion." A number of notable scholars – including Henry David Thoreau – did their best thinking while they moved. The benefits of building purposeful movement into classroom lessons are well documented: improving student focus, comprehension, memory consolidation, retention, creativity, mental sharpness, and mood. This is especially true for students with ADHD. Some examples: elementary students creating a number line with their bodies; physics students holding and tilting a spinning bicycle wheel to experience torque; ELA students role-playing characters in a novel.

• *Gestures* – "The movements of the hands are a co-equal partner with speech," says Paul. "When we don't attend to gesture, our own or others, we're missing out on half the conversation." Research suggests that our most advanced ideas sometimes show up first as gestures, before we can put them into words. For teachers and parents, this has direct implications: make full use of our own gestures to explain and dramatize, and pay closer attention to what students' hands and arms and bodies are communicating.

"How Movement and Gestures Can Improve Student Learning" by Deborah Farmer Kris in *Mind/Shift*, June 29, 2022

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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 52 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than 150 articles each week, and selects 8-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD Express
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
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Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
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Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education