Marshall Memo 797

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 5, 2019

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"We want to be around people with good hearts, who feel for those who are suffering, who are faithful friends, whose daily lives are marked by kindness."

David Brooks (see item #1)

"Actually, in the real world, there are no A's… When their formal education is over, students will have to come up with some other way to think about their performance, their progress, and what success looks like in their work and lives."

Beckie Supiano (see item #3)

"Reading is incredibly complex and involves, and is affected by, a variety of factors."

Kelly Cartwright and Nell Duke (see item #6)

"We must be cautious about removing difficulty entirely. Students will not become skillful, strategic readers if they do not encounter complexities and problems as they read."

Sandra Webb, Dixie Massey, Melinda Goggans, and Kelly Flajole in "Thirty-Five Years of the Gradual Release of Responsibility: Scaffolding Toward Complex and Responsive Teaching" in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2019 (Vol. 73, #1, pp. 75-83), https://bit.ly/2KhVYla; Webb is at swebb4literacy@gmail.com.

"A student-centered approach does not require us to ditch all things 'teacher directed.' Sometimes the most authentic, student-centered approach might just be a quality direct instruction mini-lesson."

John Spencer (see item #7)

1. David Brooks on Rebuilding Our "Moral Infrastructure"

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks lists the basic values he believes need to be at the center of our national discourse [and, it would seem, in every school]:

- Honesty – There must be respect for the truth.
- Pluralism – "Human difference makes life richer and more interesting," says Brooks.
- Sympathy – "We want to be around people with good hearts, who feel for those who are suffering, who are faithful friends, whose daily lives are marked by kindness."
- Opportunity – "We want all children to have an open field and a fair chance in the great race of life."
- Unity – "We are one people."

"Listen to Marianne Williamson" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, August 2, 2019, https://nyti.ms/2T5L3NV

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2. Teachers' Views on School Discipline Reform

In this paper from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, David Griffith and Adam Tyner report the results of their national survey on school discipline, with a particular focus on the results of recent efforts to reduce out-of-school suspensions, address racial disparities, and introduce preventive policies. These were the major findings from a 1,200-person sample of white and African-American U.S. teachers working in grades 3-12:

• Teachers in high-poverty schools report higher rates of verbal disrespect, physical fighting, and assault, with most saying a disorderly or unsafe environment makes learning difficult.

• Most teachers say discipline is inconsistent or inadequate and that the recent decline in suspensions is at least partly explained by higher tolerance of misbehavior or an increased incidence of underreporting.

• Although many teachers see the value of new disciplinary approaches (e.g., PBIS and restorative justice), most also say that suspensions can be useful and appropriate in some situations.

• Most teachers say the majority of students suffer because of a few chronically disruptive peers, some of whom should not be in a general education setting.

• Despite the likely costs for students who misbehave – and the belief that disciplinary consequences are racially biased – many African-American teachers say suspensions, expulsions, and other forms of exclusionary discipline should be used more often.

Among other recommendations, Griffith and Tyner suggest assigning more teaching assistants and mental health professionals to embattled schools to prevent misbehavior and address the needs of high-risk students. The report also cautions against including suspension rates as a measure of school quality and as part of school accountability systems (as some states are doing). Why? Because this approach, says the report, "incentivizes them to misreport serious incidents and/or issue across-the-board bans or limits on suspensions, all of which will do more harm than good."

"Discipline Reform Through the Eyes of Teachers" by David Griffith and Adam Tyner, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, July 2019, https://bit.ly/2MHv87h

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3. College Professors Rethink Conventional Grading

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Beckie Supiano reports that a University of Notre Dame anthropology professor, Susan Blum, underwent a "slow and sometimes painful epiphany" about grades over her 30-year teaching career. Blum finally concluded that grades were meaningless, even harmful, and considered resigning from her tenured position because she objected so strongly to the requirement that she submit grades.

But then she read a book by a New York high-school teacher that showed her a middle way. Now she gives no grades until the very end of her courses. Instead, her students reflect about each piece of work they do, conduct a detailed self-assessment mid-semester, and, at the end of the course, tell Blum in a one-on-one conference the grade they believe they deserve (in most cases, that's the grade the professor submits). Here are some of the questions Blum asks along the way: *Did you learn something you hadn't expected to learn? What work of yours is especially strong? Why? Explain its positive features*.

Decades of research, says Supiano, undercut the rationale for grades: feedback, motivation, and measuring learning. A study of schoolchildren by Ruth Butler (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) found that students who receive comments and a grade remember the grade and not the comments. Only when students receive *only comments* are the teacher's suggestions heard and acted on. Other studies have documented a range of negative effects of grades:

- Reducing students' interest in what they're learning;
- Making students less curious and more risk-averse;
- Focusing students more on their performance than the task at hand;
- Tempting students to cut corners and even cheat;
- Positioning students and instructors as adversaries;
- Making it harder for students to think for themselves.

But won't students game the system, saying they deserve high grades when they don't? And might "ungrading" result in lower expectations for some students? Finally, will this approach prepare students for the real world?

"Actually," says Supiano, "in the real world, there are no A's… When their formal education is over, students will have to come up with some other way to think about their performance, their progress, and what success looks like in their work and lives. Ungrading can give them an early start."

That said, instructors who deemphasize grades must do so with wisdom and care, says Supiano.

"Grades Can Undermine Learning. What Should Professors Use Instead?" by Beckie Supiano in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2019 (Vol. LXV, #38, pp. A12-A15), e-link for subscribers only

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4. Energizing Students from Day One

In this article in *AMLE Magazine*, teacher/consultant/author Rick Wormeli bemoans the fact that students' eager and receptive frame of mind at the beginning of each school year is often deflated by the endless succession of going-over-the-rules, filling out forms, and stale getting-to-know-you activities. "Students grow increasingly disillusioned," says Wormeli. "We've missed a golden opportunity for them to dive into the subject material with neurons firing on all thrusters. It's probably the most significant time of the year to hardwire students' minds to embrace our subjects, and we don't want to miss it."

He recommends mixing mandatory stuff with lively activities, so students learn something new about your subject every day. Wormeli believes teachers need to develop a "diligent awareness" of their students as people, and suggests eight ways to do that:

• *What's the best way you learn?* On the first day of school, students jot down how they learn best in your subject area. Here are some comments Wormeli has received from students:

- *Give me lots of examples; I don't get ideas without examples.*
- *If you write it on the board, can I get a copy?*
- *I need to see it, don't just tell me.*
- *Online assignments are a problem because my brother hogs our Internet connection.*
- *Speak slowly; I get confused with a lot of noise and fast talking.*

The medium might be index cards, a Google Doc, or individual e-mails.

• *Students write how they learn best, taking the role of their own parents* – "Pseudonyms can be freeing," says Wormeli. "Looking through the lens of how they think their mothers, fathers, or caregivers see them, students have deeper insights and are more honest." They might bring up things like babysitting responsibilities, religious school schedules, or hobbies.

• *Asking parents* – In 2003, educator Deb Bova came up with the idea of asking parents, "In a million words or less, tell me about your child." With a touch of humor, this request

recognizes parents as the prime experts on their children and opens the door for all kinds of insights that will help "dimensionalize" students for the teacher.

• *Interest surveys* – Students might be asked about a favorite book from childhood; the farthest point they've traveled from home; a recent movie they enjoyed and why; favorite foods, music, and sports; organizations, teams, and clubs to which they belong; people they admire and why.

• *Crowdsourced learner profiles* – Some schools create a password-protected folder for each student, and teachers contribute insights over the course of the year – for example, the English teacher learns that a student is interested in dance, dirt bikes, and Fortnite; the physical education teacher learns about strong political views and a brother with muscular dystrophy. "If anything is truly confidential or private," says Wormeli, "we can keep that in a separate folder housed in an alternative and secure location."

• *Specific learning autobiographies* – Ask students to tell the story of how they learned to read, or code, or play the drums, or speak Spanish, including the earliest and smallest moments. "Every time I've done this with students," says Wormeli, "and no matter the subject I teach, I find out more about my students than I do from typical autobiographies."

• *Six-word memoirs* – This time-honored literary technique has strict rules: six words exactly! Some examples:

- For sale: baby shoes, never worn. (Ernest Hemingway)
- My greatest ideas involve duct tape.
- Books. Music. That's all I need.
- Hobby became job. Seeking new hobby.

Students might write about how they feel about something important in their lives, how they felt last year as a student, as an American, or as part of their culture. Wormeli says the most interesting thing about six-word memoirs is how students elaborate on them.

• *Group tasks requiring problem-solving and collaboration* – These might include building structures with playing cards, using 20 straws and 10 inches of masking tape to build the highest tower, or lining up in ascending order of birthdays without talking. "In each of these," says Wormeli, "there's a lot of give and take, problem-solving, initial frustration, listening (and not listening), risk-taking, leadership/follower behavior, and more."

(More next week on getting to know students throughout the school year)

"Getting to Know Our Students" by Rick Wormeli in *AMLE Magazine*, August 2019 (Vol. 7, #3, pp. 31-35), no e-link available; Wormeli is at rick@rickwormeli.onmicrosoft.com.

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5. Stories People Tell Themselves When They Don't Hear from the Boss

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Deborah Grayson Riegel (The Boda Group and University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School) lists what sometimes goes through the minds of employees when they don't get feedback from their superiors:

• *As long as I'm not creating trouble, I'm okay*. "If your bar for satisfactory performance is 'not a problem employee,' then your bar is way too low," says Riegel. This

attitude can also be part of a culture in which people don't bring important information to the boss for fear of "creating trouble." Both are good reasons for giving frequent feedback to colleagues, and also clarifying what's unacceptable "trouble" (inappropriate remarks, repeatedly showing up late, not following through) versus okay "trouble" (not knowing how to do something, or needing a personal accommodation).

• *My boss doesn't think I can handle feedback*. This is a sign of a dynamic in which the boss is pulling punches and not doing the vital work of giving thoughtful and constructive guidance. Or it could be that the boss is scarier that his or her self-perception. It might be time for a talk about how people receive feedback, or on whether people's fears are reasonable. The goal is a psychologically safe culture in which people believe they can make mistakes and will get honest feedback at every stage.

• *My boss doesn't believe I can change*. This is an example of the manager's fixed mindset, and it can very well be a self-fulfilling prophecy. A growth mindset will raise expectations for performance and result in more-frequent feedback and continuous improvement. "And if you hold a growth mindset about yourself," Riegel concludes, "you'll be more comfortable giving feedback because you trust that *you* will welcome the challenge."

"The Assumptions Employees Make When They Don't Get Feedback" by Deborah Grayson Riegel in *Harvard Business Review*, June 24, 2019, https://bit.ly/2xcAM8G

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6. Driving as a Metaphor for Reading

"Reading is incredibly complex and involves, and is affected by, a variety of factors," say Kelly Cartwright (Christopher Newport University) and Nell Duke (University of Michigan/Ann Arbor) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "This complexity is difficult to convey to parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders." Cartwright and Duke suggest a metaphor that captures what we do when we read: driving a car. Their DRIVE metaphor is not a model of how people learn to read, nor is it a template for reading instruction. Rather, it describes "reading as an active, strategic process that is influenced by multiple, interacting internal and external factors, as is driving."

The DRIVE model assumes an active reader, a purpose for reading, a worthwhile text, many contributors to reading, and interactions among the various factors. Buckle your seatbelt: here's how the metaphor rolls out:

- The driving destination = the reader's purpose (e.g., entertainment, information)
- Types of roads = different text types (e.g., narrative, informational)
- Traffic patterns = text structure (e.g., well-structured, loosely structured)
- Road signs = organizational signals (words like *next, suddenly, so in contrast*)
- Other road features = other text features (unfamiliar vocabulary, poor writing)
- The route = text content (e.g., topics addressed, scenes depicted)
- Number of lanes = the number of texts (e.g., the need to access more than one text)
- The driver and vehicle = the reader (this is the reader's "headspace")
- Automobile literacy = concepts of print and graphics (e.g., where to start reading)

- The ignition and gas pedal = reading motivation and engagement (*Why read this?*)
- The wheels = knowledge of decoding and word recognition (foundational to reading)
- The tires = decoding and word recognition strategies (especially with unfamiliar words)
- Tire treads = phonological awareness (as above)
- The axles = reading fluency (enables readers to devote bandwidth to comprehension)
- Struts and shock absorbers = vocabulary and morphological knowledge (as above)
- The chassis = syntactic knowledge (e.g., word functions and order for comprehending)
- The seats = discourse knowledge (what to expect and how to process different genres)
- Knowing traffic patterns = knowing text structure (e.g., description, compare/contrast)
- Route knowledge = content knowledge (it's easier to read familiar material)
- The driver's emotional state = how the reader feels (e.g., anxious, pleased)
- Road reviews = critical reading (*Was that a satisfying ending? Who was excluded?*)
- The dashboard = comprehension monitoring (e.g., slowing down, rereading)
- Strategic driver = strategic reader (e.g., predicting, making inferences, visualizing)
- Multitasking driver = executive function skills (managing multiple thoughts)
- Rearview mirror and headlights = past and upcoming context
- Weather conditions = reading conditions (e.g., music, distractions, poor lighting)
- Scenery for driving = setting for reading (e.g., a classroom versus at home)
- Rules of the road = culture of reading (e.g., empowerment, various restrictions)

"The DRIVE Model of Reading: Making the Complexity of Reading Accessible" by Kelly Cartwright and Nell Duke in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2019 (Vol. 73, #1, pp. 7-15), https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/trtr.1818; the authors can be reached at kelly.cartwright@cnu.edu and nkduke@umich.edu.

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7. Six Roles for Direct Instruction in Project-Based Learning

In this article on his website, John Spencer remembers launching a project-based learning unit with inadequate explanation and watching it flop. His naïve assumption, he says, was that "students would learn everything through exploration and discovery. I would remain the guide on the side observing the process and helping out only when necessary." Two days into the project, he realized his mistake and rethought the role for direct instruction in project-based learning. "A student-centered approach does not require us to ditch all things 'teacher directed.' Sometimes the most authentic, student-centered approach might just be a quality direct instruction mini-lesson." Here's Spencer's list:

• *To build background knowledge and conceptual understanding* – This one has an important equity dimension, because some students have had fewer opportunities than others to build stores of knowledge.

• *To reduce cognitive load* – Students who lack background knowledge can have difficulty because of the strain new information and action puts on their bandwidth.

• *To facilitate skill development* – Students may need to learn research, problem-solving, brainstorming, and peer assessment skills to be successful with their projects, and it's

unrealistic and inefficient to expect them to figure things out for themselves. Some skills might be taught via a video.

• *To facilitate guided inquiry* – Spencer lists four levels, from more structured to truly open inquiry, and says students may need more scaffolding before doing inquiry on their own.

• *As an embedded intervention* – "When project-based learning runs smoothly, you will have students working independently," says Spencer. But there may be students who need explicit guidance at certain points.

• *To reduce project fatigue* – Even in a highly engaging project, students may need a break from the routine, and an engaging, interactive mini-lecture can provide that, while also filling in background knowledge and brushing up skills.

"Direct Instruction Is Still Necessary in a PBL Classroom" by John Spencer, July 29, 2019, https://bit.ly/2MKLHzz

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8. Improving Students' Ability to Argue from Scientific Evidence

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Jonathan Osborne (Stanford University) and seven colleagues report on their study of a professional development initiative. It was designed to improve teachers' facilitation of how their grade 3-5 students engaged in argumentation about scientific ideas, grappling with questions like these:

- Are day and night caused by a spinning Earth or a moving sun?
- Is a seed alive or dead?
- What is the best way to measure how the amount of sugar dissolved in water varies with temperature?

"Argumentation is not something that comes naturally to students," say Osborne et al. "Hence, building student facility with argumentation requires teachers to create opportunities to facilitate students' interactive dialogue to foster argumentation, sense-making, and the construction of meaning."

In addition, students' prior knowledge and likely misconceptions need to be surfaced, and teachers must shift from traditional approaches emphasizing knowledge-transmission to getting students much more actively discussing the science. That involves teachers posing provocative questions, introducing an element of uncertainty, and using techniques like think-pair-share, listening triads, jigsaws, and accountable talk. In the PD, teachers worked on pressing their students with follow-up questions – *How do you know? Can you tell me more about that? Why?* – and linking contributions from different students and creating a chain of understanding that all students could follow.

Osborne and colleagues trained teachers using the PRACTISE model, which included exposing teachers to exemplary teaching approaches and giving teachers lots of opportunities to try them out in a low-stakes setting with other students. There were four basic goals:

- Recognizing that argumentation is a fundamental component of science;
- Getting students to argue from evidence, and in the process: sharing, supporting, comparing, evaluating, and revising their ideas;

- Developing a respectful culture of academically productive talk;
- Planning instruction aligned with Common Core ELA Standards, California ELD Standards, and the Next-Generation Science Standards.

While teachers got better at leading science discussions, the researchers ended with two caveats. First, they were surprised that adding a practicum to one week of summer training and several follow-ups during the school year didn't make a positive difference. Second, there were no measurable gains in student learning after the training. The bottom line: getting teachers to be skillful and nimble at leading classroom science discussions is a long-term endeavor, and it's hard to measure the deeper student learning in this area.

"Impacts of a Practice-Based Professional Development Program on Elementary Teachers' Facilitation of and Student Engagement with Scientific Argumentation" by Jonathan Osborne, Hilda Borko, Even Fishman, Florencia Gomez Zaccarelli, Eric Berson, K.S. Busch, Emily Reigh, and Ania Tseng in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2019 (Vol. 56, 4, pp. 1067-1112), available for purchase at https://bit.ly/2Kso6AH; Osborne can be reached at osbornej@stanford.edu.

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9. Is Increased Academic Focus in Kindergarten Bad for Children?

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Vi-Nhuan Le, Kristen Neishi, Marc Hernandez, and Rolf Blank (NORC at the University of Chicago), and Diana Schaack (University of Colorado/Denver) note that in recent years, kindergarten has morphed from a "semi-structured transitional program" bridging early childhood and the academic grades to something more like an "academic preparation program." This has led many educators and parents to worry that introducing content traditionally covered in first grade might compromise the social-emotional development of kindergarten children.

Why the ramp-up of kindergarten academics? Studies have shown that introducing more math and reading content in kindergarten improves academic achievement down the road. In addition, an increasing number of children are entering kindergarten with more-advanced preparation in preschools, pushing kindergarten teachers to up their game.

Why the concerns about more academics in kindergarten? First, it's argued that students at this level aren't developmentally ready for the kind of content they're being asked to learn. Second, beefed-up reading and math instruction takes time away from developing and practicing skills through creative, child-chosen play. And third, academically focused kindergarten classes reduce the amount of time students communicate and collaborate with each other, stunting their social-emotional development.

What did the researchers find? Looking at ECLS-K:2011 data from 18,200 children in nearly 1,000 schools, they conclude:

- Exposure to advanced ELA and math academic content in kindergarten had a positive downstream effect on academic achievement.
- Advanced ELA content in kindergarten had no impact on students' subsequent social-emotional development.

- Advanced math content in kindergarten had a significantly positive impact on downstream social-emotional development, including positive associations with learning, attentional focus, and interpersonal skills, and negative associations with externalizing behaviors.
- To the researchers' surprise, students who entered kindergarten with less academic preparation benefited the most from advanced kindergarten content.

This means that advanced kindergarten content can help address inequities in achievement, giving a leg up to students who enter kindergarten with disadvantages without harming their social-emotional development.

"Advanced Content Coverage at Kindergarten: Are There Trade-Offs Between Academic Achievement and Social-Emotional Skills?" by Vi-Nhuan Le, Diana Schaack, Kristen Neishi, Marc Hernandez, and Rolf Blank in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2019 (Vol. 56, 4, pp. 1254-1280), available for purchase at https://bit.ly/2FcY2JA; Le can be reached at le-vinhuan@norc.org.

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10. Short Items:

a. Finding quality curriculum materials – The K-12 Instructional Materials Dashboard https://qualitycontent.setda.org/dashboard/ was developed by the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA). It's a searchable database of 450 vetted curriculum products from 12 state websites. The states currently included in the dashboard are Alabama, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.

"A New Tool for Searching Out 'High Quality' Curricula" by Michele Molnar in *Education Week*, July 23, 2019, https://bit.ly/2OqyRsE

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b. A video on the origins of GPS – This video tells the Cold War origins of GPS: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQxQ5QlVCVs.

"How the Cold War Gave Us Google Maps" from Bloomberg, October 18, 2018

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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