# Marshall Memo 844

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 6, 2020

## In This Issue:



## Quotes of the Week

"It's a mistake to spend class time doing things that can be done just as well remotely."
Rick Hess (see item #2)

"The key is to develop a coherent vision of what gets done where and why."
Rick Hess (*ibid*.)

"This virtual environment has provided us the opportunity to break down those walls, to break down those silos. Our schedules and time constraints that we may have had before will come down. We may have more opportunity to partner with people that we didn't have the time or the space to be able to do before."
Melanie Kitchen (see item #1)

"Even small interruptions erode instructional time more than you think… Allowing external interruptions to go unchecked communicates an implicit disregard for the value of teachers' work and students' learning time."
Matthew Kraft (see item #6)

"Distracting hundreds of students to call one to the front office is educational malpractice."
Matthew Kraft (*ibid*.)

"Our biggest problem as humans is ignorance, not malevolence. Ignorance is an entirely curable disease."
"Jon Stewart Is Back to Weigh In": an interview with David Marchese in *The New York Times Magazine*, June 21, 2020

## 1. Looking Ahead to Online Instruction in the Fall

"It's a pretty safe bet that most teachers will be doing some form of online teaching in the coming year," say Jennifer Gonzalez and Melanie Kitchen in this *Cult of Pedagogy* article. They list what effective teachers will continue to do when they teach remotely, and then suggest nine things we've learned this spring that will maximize learning online.

What should continue:

- Clear and consistent communication;
- Creating explicit and consistent rituals and routines;
- Using research-based instructional strategies;
- Deciding whether digital or non-digital tools are best for a particular assignment;
- Focusing on authentic learning, with students having voice and choice in assignments and creating products that have meaning for them.

"All of those things that we know are really good practices can still be done virtually," says Kitchen. "It just might look a little bit different."

What we've learning about making online instruction effective:

• *Start by building community and digital competency*. Helping students feel emotionally connected to teachers and each other is the number one priority in the opening weeks of school. Equally important is students becoming proficient and confident with the technology they'll be using. Curriculum content will build on this foundation.

• *Improve communication with families*. If parents and other family members are going to be partners in supporting children's learning, messages from the school must be thorough, streamlined, and predictable. Parents need access to tech training and support, as well as knowing where and when to get information, the boundaries, and backup plans for off hours.

• *Teachers need to connect with each other on a regular basis*. All-faculty meetings and team time are vital for checking in on well-being, sharing instructional ideas, and grade-to-grade curriculum connections.

• *Teacher team collaboration is more important than ever*. From the student's viewpoint, will curriculum experiences be coherent and avoid duplication from class to class? One thing we've learned during the pandemic is that collaborating online is often easier and more effective than in-person meetings. "This virtual environment has provided us the opportunity to break down those walls, to break down those silos," says Kitchen. "Our schedules and time constraints that we may have had before will come down. We may have

more opportunity to partner with people that we didn't have the time or the space to be able to do before."

• *Synchronous "face-to-face" time should be used for interactive, engaging work*. It's challenging, if not impossible, to corral all 30 students in a class for simultaneous online instruction. Kitchen suggests convening four-student "campfire groups" that meet regularly and stay together over time, which greatly simplifies the logistics. Of course the quality of learning activities for these groups is vital, says Kitchen: "If we want students showing up, if we want them to know that this is worth their time, it really needs to be something active and engaging for them. Any time they can work with the material, categorize it, organize it, share further thoughts on it, have a discussion, all of those are great things to do in small groups." The full article (linked below) has details on several suggested activities.

• *Content needs to be simplified and slowed down*. Kitchen suggests that teacher teams ask themselves these questions to slim down the curriculum:

- What knowledge and skills have real leverage and staying power for students?
- What do students need to know and be able to do when they move to the next grade?
- Which practices transfer to other content areas? – for example, constructing arguments, analyzing, building knowledge through texts, oral presentation.
- Which tech tools (Padlet, for example) and non-tech tools can serve multiple purposes?

Once the curriculum is pared down, pacing is important. Direct instruction works best with brief asynchronous video lectures and readings with frequent checking for understanding via embedded questions and exit slips.

• *Instructions need to be explicit, easy to find, and multimodal*. Not being in the same classroom with students means that step-by-step guidance and assignments must be in a consistent digital location, at a consistent time, crystal clear, and, if possible, providing students with a choice of written, audio, or video format.

• *Traditional grading should take a backseat to feedback*. When students get a grade for an assignment or task, they may not pay attention to teachers' comments. Platforms like Google Classroom have built-in features that make it easy to give detailed feedback, and tools like Floop can be used to give on-the-spot feedback. The key is avoiding grades for formative work.

• *Summative assessments should focus on creation*. With online instruction, says Kitchen, "there are so many ways that students can cheat, so if we're giving them just the traditional quiz or test, it's really easy for them to be able to just look up that information." The way around this is final assessments that ask students to create videos, podcasts, digital or physical art, essays, comics, and more. What students produce can be scored with a rubric that emphasizes learning goals and is transparent about assessment criteria.

To improve the quality of online assignments, Bill Ferriter suggests what online work should help students accomplish:

- Raising awareness;
- Joining conversations;
- Finding answers to their questions;

- Discovering new questions worth asking;
- Imagining new possibilities;
- Driving change;
- Taking action;
- Making a difference.

"9 Ways Online Teaching Should Be Different from Face-to-Face" by Jennifer Gonzalez and Melanie Kitchen in *Cult of Pedagogy*, July 5, 2020

*Back to page one*

## 2. What's Best Handled Online and What Works Better In Person

In this *Education Week* article, Rick Hess says teachers perform countless tasks every day: "They lecture. They facilitate discussions. They grade quizzes. They fill out forms. They counsel distraught kids." Clearly these don't have equal value, nor do they all lend themselves to "hand-on-shoulder interaction." Hess believes that now more than ever, teachers need to "unpack what they do each day in order to focus energy on the things that matter most."

Why now more than ever? Because remote and hybrid instruction makes it even more important to use each instructional venue thoughtfully and efficiently. "It's a mistake to spend class time doing things that can be done just as well remotely," says Hess. "If teachers only have limited time in classrooms – or in online chats with students – it's vital that the time be used wisely and for things that really benefit from face-to-face intimacy." Two examples:

• Math:
- Assessing a student's mastery of operations can be done remotely;
- Figuring out where a student is stuck requires direct in-person interaction;
- A student who is frustrated learning a tricky concept – again, in-person.

• Language arts:
- Reading a novel can be done remotely;
- Taking a quiz and getting it graded – remote is fine;
- Writing, critiquing, and discussing essays – one-on-one, ideally in-person conversation.

"The key," says Hess, "is to develop a coherent vision of what gets done where and why."

When schools reopen, teachers who are vulnerable to Covid-19 will need to work from home. This suggests a division of labor – for example, higher-risk teachers work as homework coaches while lower-risk teachers do in-person lesson delivery; vulnerable counselors handle scheduling, CTE requirements, and routine paperwork while those with less risk work in person with students dealing with emotional trauma.

"The Key to Getting Hybrid Schooling Right" by Rick Hess in *Education Week*, June 29, 2020

*Back to page one*

## 3. High-Quality Videos for Flipped Lessons

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Samuel Otten, Wenmin Zhao, and Zandra de Araujo (University of Missouri/Columbia) and Milan Sherman

(Drake University) say that during the pandemic, there's been an increase in the use of flipped pedagogy, with students viewing content videos for homework and following up with discussion, collaboration, and individualized support in class. The challenge for teachers is the time it takes to create (or find) good videos. Otten, Zhao, de Araujo, and Sherman suggest what to look for in two types of flipped-lesson videos:

• *Lecture videos* – These are designed to deliver information to students or demonstrate how to solve certain kinds of problems. Some key criteria:

- Mathematical quality – Using conceptually clear and precise language, appropriate to students, acknowledging errors when they occur, and flagging likely misconceptions;
- Multimedia design – Judicious use of relevant graphics, juxtaposing graphics with text, using audio that goes beyond reading material aloud, and maintaining a conversational tone.
- Interactivity – Students interact with virtual manipulatives or solve a problem and submit answers digitally before proceeding. Here's an example of a vertical line test applet created by Irina Boyadzhiev using Geogebra.

Another consideration with videos is appropriate length, which also applies to…

• *Setup videos* – Rather than explaining mathematical ideas, these pose a problem or describe a situation that will intrigue students, creating curiosity about what will happen the next day in class. Some examples:

- A video of a basketball freethrow showing the point of release and the ball's trajectory and asking whether it will go through the hoop;
- A video about Disney cartoon princesses that focuses on the ratio of waistline to head size;
- A video of a music concert setting up a lesson the next day on concert tickets.

The goal of flipped lessons is to begin lessons with students sharing their thoughts about the homework video versus teachers lecturing and explaining concepts. "It also allows students to think individually about how they might approach a problem," say the authors, "leading to greater diversity of solutions than if they were shown worked examples first."

"Evaluating Videos for Flipped Instruction" by Samuel Otten, Wenmin Zhao, Zandra de Araujo, and Milan Sherman in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, June 2020 (Vol. 113, #6, pp. 480-486); the authors can be reached at ottensa@missouri.edu, wz2mb@mail.missouri.edu, dearaujoz@missouri.edu, and milan.sherman@drake.edu.

*Back to page one*

## 4. Toward a Saner and More Equitable College Admission Process

In this collective statement from over 330 colleges admissions deans released by the Making Caring Common project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Rick Weissbourd, Trisha Ross Anderson, and Brennan Barnard present these colleges' admissions priorities during the pandemic:

• *Self-care* – "We encourage all students to be gentle with themselves during this time," says the statement.

• *Academic work* – Understanding the extraordinary circumstances many students are currently facing, applicants will be assessed mainly on performance before and after the pandemic.

• *Service and contributions to others* – The deans encourage students to contribute to others if they are in a position to do so. "This pandemic has created a huge array of needs," says the statement, "whether for tutoring, contact tracing, support for senior citizens, or assistance with food delivery… We also value forms of contribution that are unrelated to this pandemic, such as working to register voters, protect the environment, combat racial injustice and inequities or stop online harassment among peers."

• *Family contributions* – "Many students may be supervising younger sibling, for example, or caring for sick relatives or working to provide family income," says the statement, "and we recognize that these responsibilities may have increased during these times." The statement underscores that it's vital for students to report these responsibilities and other challenges they're facing in their applications. Admissions deans want to know this information and it will only positively affect the review of applications.

• *Extracurricular and summer activities* – It's understood that many of these activities have been curtailed by the pandemic and students won't be disadvantaged by not engaging in them.

"Care Counts in Crisis: College Admissions Deans Respond to Covid-19" by Rick Weissbourd, Trisha Ross Anderson, and Brennan Barnard, Making Caring Common, June 2020

*Back to page one*

## 5. Countering Three Misconceptions About Cultural Proficiency

In this article in *Independent School*, educator/consultant Rosetta Eun Ryong Lee suggests applying growth mindset thinking to three beliefs about cultural proficiency that are rooted in a fixed mindset:

• *Myth #1: It's all or nothing*. This is the notion that some people are "with it" and others are not, and people who understand racism or sexism, for example, are naturally hip to the other "isms" as well: *As a woman, I understand oppression; I know what it must be like to be poor in this world*. The all-or-nothing belief keeps people from acknowledging privilege, and can also lead them to see a cultural faux-pas as evidence that they're not culturally competent after all. "This myth keeps us from asking questions when we don't know," says Lee, "and we spend more energy protecting our competency status rather than listening, learning, and growing."

With a growth mindset, she believes, "we understand and accept that there is always room to grow. No one can fully master all aspects of cultural competency for all cultural identifiers, and mistakes are inevitable. With humble curiosity, we seek to better understand ourselves, understand others, develop cross-cultural skills, and work toward equity and inclusion."

• *Myth #2: Mistakes are a sure sign of bigotry*. A statement like *You are such a sexist pig for saying that* reveals the fixed-mindset assumption that a hurtful comment is intentional and stems from deep-seated qualities that won't change. A person who thinks this way might react defensively, saying *I'm a good person – what I said was not sexist*. "This myth," says Lee, "leaves us afraid to speak our mind for fear of public shaming. It keeps us focusing on our intentions rather than on our impacts."

With a growth mindset, she contends, "we understand that good people can make mistakes. Mistakes do not define us." We acknowledge saying something hurtful, apologize, and try to make amends. And when others engage in negative behaviors, we respond with patience and teaching, "understanding that it's possible to dislike an action without disliking the person."

• *Myth #3: Biases are like tonsils.* The idea here is that we can have a bias or prejudice removed: *I took a workshop on ageism last year; what else is there to learn? I have lots of friends who are immigrants; I'm not xenophobic*. "This myth leaves us slipping into complacency and clinging to a false sense of mastery," says Lee, "reluctant to look for authentic understanding and growth." It makes educators think that if they just read the right book or get the right presenter or assembly speaker, the problem will be solved.

With a growth-mindset approach, we realize that bias and prejudices are more like plaque on our teeth. "There is so much misinformation in the world reinforced by history, systems, and media," says Lee; "if we are to keep the myths at bay, we must get into a regular practice, much like brushing and flossing every day. And just as good oral hygiene does not guarantee that we will never have bad breath or have food stuck in our teeth, regular questioning, learning, and engaging across differences can only decrease how much our bias and prejudice show up in our daily thoughts, words, and actions. We accept this reality and keep practicing."

"What's Missing from the Conversation: The Growth Mindset in Cultural Competence" by Rosetta Eun Ryong Lee in *Independent School*, National Association of Independent Schools, August 31, 2015

*Back to page one*

## 6. Learned Optimism 101

In this article in *Edutopia*, psychologist Maurice Elias (Rutgers University) reports that he and his colleagues interviewed urban middle-school students and found them quite pessimistic about their futures. Half didn't expect to graduate from high school or college, and fewer than half expected to lead healthy and happy lives. "What is the likelihood," asks Elias, "that kids with these expectations will dedicate themselves to academic pursuits or focus on positive health habits like avoiding tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, or eating nutritious foods?" The antidote, he believes, is for educators and parents to build "optimistic future-mindedness" in students, counteracting the negative experiences and forces in their lives. Here are some steps:

• *Show exceptions to the rule*. Students need to be exposed to people in multiple fields who overcame odds similar to those students are experiencing – for example, Greta Thunberg, Maya Angelou, Cesar Chavez, Malala Yousafzai, Franklin Roosevelt.

• *Provide service opportunities*. "Particularly for children whose lives are beset by trauma," says Elias, "knowing their actions can create some good in the world is a more powerful source of optimism than most of us realize. It can be a lifeline for some students." Their service might be orienting new students, engaging in cross-age tutoring, or taking care of the environment in their neighborhood.

• *Help students notice strengths and see themselves in the most positive way*. Elias suggests having students write ten times, *I am someone who…* with a positive quality after each one, or writing an essay on how they can contribute to their class, school, or the world.

• *Teach respectful debate*. Student teams might argue different sides of each of these Marian Wright Edelman quotes, and then make the case for the opposite side:

- *Don't be afraid to stick your neck out, to make mistakes, or to speak up. Communicate well and proudly.*
- *When you have been wronged by others, don't hold a grudge. Show compassionate forgiveness. You will feel much better than if you focus on revenge.*

After the dual debates, the whole class reflects on what they saw happening. What did they learn? What were the strongest arguments? What, if anything, made them think differently?

"How to Boost Students' Sense of Optimism" by Maurice Elias in *Edutopia*, June 23, 2020; Elias can be reached at RUTGERSMJE@aol.com.

*Back to page one*

## 7. Unnecessary Intrusions to Classrooms: What Can Be Done?

(Originally titled "The Hidden Cost of Classroom Interruptions")

"Even small interruptions erode instructional time more than you think," says Matthew Kraft (Brown University) in this article in *Educational Leadership*. "Allowing external interruptions to go unchecked communicates an implicit disregard for the value of teachers' work and students' learning time… Distracting hundreds of students to call one to the front office is educational malpractice."

Observing classes and surveying teachers in several Providence, RI schools, Kraft and his colleagues found the average classroom had 15 interruptions a day: students arriving late or returning to class in a disruptive manner, intercom announcements, calls on the classroom phone, knocks on the door by school staff. After each interruption, teachers had to refocus students; they lost momentum, had to re-teach material, and saw student learning evaporate. Even brief interruptions could snowball, says Kraft: "A short intercom announcement about the honor roll led to a debate about which students had earned honors; a birthday wish by a visiting teacher led to a long debate among students about how old their teacher was."

The time adds up: teachers estimated that they lost six and a half minutes of instructional time each hour, which comes to 10-20 school days a year. "This is enough time to

categorize every student in the district as truant or even chronically absent," says Kraft, "all while they are in school."

Why weren't principals dealing with this? Interviews revealed that they significantly underestimated how often learning was disrupted in their schools. Kraft suggest that faculties gather data on classroom interruptions and have a schoolwide discussion on what should be done. The good news is that schools have direct control over a lot of this. Here's what the researchers observed in some schools:

- Drastically limiting intercom calls during instructional time;
- Using assemblies and advisory periods for announcements and messages to students;
- Using e-mail or text messages (versus classroom phones) for non-urgent messages;
- Establishing clear, schoolwide norms for classroom visits, including empowering teachers to quickly deflect an interruption;
- Establishing classroom procedures for late-arriving students so they can quickly get up to speed;
- Working with families and community agencies to improve attendance and reduce tardiness.

"The Hidden Cost of Classroom Interruptions" by Matthew Kraft in *Educational Leadership*, June 2020 (Vol. 77, pp. 30-34); Kraft can be reached at mkraft@brown.edu.

*Back to page one*

## 8. At What Grade Should Algebra 1 Be Taught?

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, math education guru Zalman Usiskin (University of Chicago) reviews a century of research on when algebra 1 was taught in U.S. schools. In the 1890s, the Committee of Ten established nationwide high-school standards for college-aspiring students and recommended that algebra begin at age 14 and be studied five hours a week (with symbols and simple equations introduced earlier and more algebra after that). In 1899, the College Entrance Examination Board recommended one year of algebra and one year of geometry for all students in ninth and tenth grades.

For years, the percentage of students graduating from high school was quite small, but it steadily increased. In 1940, a commission recommended a two-tier math curriculum, with the top track taking algebra in ninth grade, the lower continuing with more arithmetic. "It seems for the most part," says Usiskin, "that the tracks separated those students who graduated from high school from those who did not."

In the 1960s, the Advanced Placement program influenced schools to offer a full algebra course in eighth grade for students interested in majoring in science or engineering in college. Increasingly students gearing up for AP calculus exams took algebra before ninth grade, including many who were not headed for technical careers. Usiskin estimates that today about 45 percent of U.S. students are taking a full algebra 1 course before ninth grade. He believes there are six reasons for algebra's migration from ninth to eight grade (and earlier):

- Students are encountering more algebra in grades 4-6, removing some of the fear of the subject.

- The Common Core and other current eighth-grade standards contain a substantial amount of algebra that was previously taught in ninth grade.
- Algebra in eighth grade "is perhaps the most visible middle-school signal of a successful student," says Usiskin, "and allows a student to have an easier pathway to the AP calculus courses that college admissions people encourage taking."
- High-achieving East Asian countries routinely teach algebra and geometry to almost all students in seventh and eighth grades – and students from those countries outperform those in the U.S.
- Students see their friends taking eighth-grade algebra classes and don't want to miss out (the same goes for their parents).
- As more students enter ninth grade with algebra under their belts, high schools have adjusted their courses, while still accounting for the fact that some students haven't fully mastered the subject.

All this has occurred, says Usiskin, "without a decrease in the sophistication of the first-year algebra course." Given these trends, he believes that taking algebra in eighth grade should no longer be considered acceleration; rather, taking algebra in ninth grade might be described as deceleration.

"Then: The Timing of Algebra I" by Zalman Usiskin in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, June 2020 (Vol. 113, #6, pp. 480-486); Usiskin can be reached at z-usiskin@uchicago.edu.

*Back to page one*

## 9. Short Items:

***a. Frederick Douglass Speech*** – This video has direct descendants of Frederick Douglass reciting seven minutes of his July 5, 1852 speech to an abolitionist group, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

National Public Radio, July 3, 2020

*Back to page one*

***b. Should Black Be Capitalized?*** – In this article in *The Atlantic*, Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York University) weighs the pros and cons of capitalizing black, white, and brown when referring to cultural and racial groups. He comes to an interesting conclusion.

"The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black" by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2020; Appiah can be reached at Anthony.Appiah@nyu.edu.

*Back to page one*

***c. School Reopening Surveys*** – Panorama Education has made available free surveys of staff and families for schools to gather information over the summer in preparation for reopening.

*Back to page one*

***d. Summer Webinars*** – Panorama Education is offering this series of free webinars to prepare for the coming school year. Here are the topics and dates (click the link for details):

- July 6-10 – Reimagining Tier 1 Supports
- July 13-17 – Adult Social-Emotional Learning and Equity
- July 20-24 – MTSS for Back-to-School
- July 27-31 – Building Anti-Racist Schools

*Back to page one*

***e. Details on All-Remote Schooling*** – In this *Education Week* article, Denisa Superville provides specifics for schools planning on fully distant instruction in the fall.

"The All-Remote Schedule: No Risk to Health, High Risk to Learning" by Denisa Superville in *Education Week*, June 24, 2020

*Back to page one*

***f. Scheduling Student Rotations for the Fall*** – This *Education Week* article by Denisa Superville lists the features and pros and cons of weekly, alternating daily, and once-a-week rotations for hybrid school scheduling.

"Building a Schedule Around Student Rotations" by Denisa Superville in *Education Week*, June 24, 2020

*Back to page one*

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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 50 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: Learning & Teaching PK-12
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