Marshall Memo 900

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 30, 2021

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"There is nobody more dangerous than one who has been humiliated, even when you humiliate him rightly."
Nelson Mandela (quoted in item #3)

"At least half of what people need in conflict is to be heard, even if they don't get their way in the end."
Amanda Ripley (*ibid.*)

"It now appears that electronically mediated social interactions are like empty calories."
Jonathan Haidt and Jean Twenge (see item #1)

"… an outrage machine that made life online far uglier, faster, more polarized, and more likely to incite performative shaming."
Jonathan Haidt and Jean Twenge on the impact of social media (*ibid.*)

"Writing is an incredibly complex task. It involves the instant integration of several components – handwriting and letter formation (and later typing), spacing and formatting on the page, spelling, grammar, sentence formation, adding punctuation – all while holding your ideas, and some sort of organizational scheme for those ideas, in your memory."
Sarah Riggs Johnson (see item #6)

"The biggest impact a school leader can make in the quality of instruction for all learners is to give co-teachers common planning time."
Sarah Riggs Johnson (*ibid.*)

1. Mitigating the Impact of Smartphones and Social Media on Adolescents

In this *New York Times* article, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt (NYU's Stern School) and psychologist Jean Twenge (San Diego State University) say that in 2012, the incidence of teenage loneliness, depression, self-harm, and suicide began to rise sharply. "By 2019," they say, "just before the pandemic, rates of depression among adolescents had nearly doubled."

In a time of relative prosperity, what could explain these troubling statistics? Smartphones and social media, say Haidt and Twenge; 2012 was the first year that most Americans owned a smartphone, and by 2015, two-thirds of teenagers had one, and most were hooked on social media. Facebook had added a *Like* button, Twitter a retweet button, and algorithms were jiggered to amplify content that triggered emotions, creating what the authors call "an outrage machine that made life online far uglier, faster, more polarized, and more likely to incite performative shaming." Instagram had an especially strong impact on girls and young women, "inviting them to 'compare and despair' as they scrolled through posts from friends and strangers showing face, bodies, and lives that had been edited and re-edited until many were closer to perfection than to reality."

These effects are echoed around the world, operating at the individual and group level. "The smartphone brought about a planetary rewiring of human interactions," say Haidt and Twenge. "As smartphones became common, they transformed peer relationships, family relationships, and the texture of daily life for everyone – even those who don't own a phone or don't have an Instagram account. It's harder to strike up a casual conversation in the cafeteria or after class when everyone is staring down at their phones. It's harder to have a deep conversation when each party is interrupted randomly by buzzing, vibrating 'notifications.'"

The result is "an incredibly isolated group of people," said a Canadian college student a year before the pandemic. "We have shallow friendships and superfluous romantic relationships that are mediated and governed to a large degree by social media." He described walking into a lecture hall before class and seeing everyone silently on their devices, a manifestation of isolation and weakened self-identity and confidence.

Can't phones and social media be used to connect people and foster meaningful and playful communication? They can, but for many teens, it hasn't worked out that way, say Haidt and Twenge: "It now appears that electronically mediated social interactions are like empty calories."

What is to be done? Clearly we can't put the genie back in the bottle, but the authors suggest two "reasonable steps to help teens get more of what they need:"

• During the school day, lock phones up "so students can practice the lost art of paying full attention to the people around them – including their teachers."

• Kids shouldn't be allowed to use social media before high school. Since there's tremendous peer pressure for elementary- and middle-school students to get a phone, enforcement would need to come by requiring social media companies to implement third-party identity verification for all new accounts, preventing younger children from joining.

As students emerge from the pandemic, during which they became even more reliant on digital communication, Haidt and Twenge believe this is the ideal time to implement these policies, helping young people wean themselves from an unhealthy dependency and enjoy better relationships – and mental health.

"The Smartphone Trap" by Jonathan Haidt and Jean Twenge in *The New York Times*, August 1, 2021; the authors can be reached at jh3390@stern.nyu.edu and jtwenge@sdsu.edu.

Back to page one

2. Some Kids Did Better with Remote Learning. What Now?

In this article in *Education Week*, Alyson Klein says that although many students struggled during remote and hybrid instruction, some thrived. For example, in an Arizona high school, three students on the autism spectrum "blossomed," according to their teacher. Liberated from the difficulty of dealing with social distractions, they were able to focus on their work and excel academically. Teachers report that this was true for a number of students with learning and thinking differences, anxiety, and mental health conditions. In addition, some high-performing students enjoyed the autonomy made possible by remote instruction.

Now that most schools are once again in-person, how can all students be successful in an environment that wasn't effective for many of them in the past? Klein reports that some schools are conducting surveys, asking students what worked and what didn't during remote and hybrid instruction. Insights from these surveys can help improve in-person instruction. "You might find they really benefited from the freedom to use their time more flexibly or focus without interruption," says Claire Schu at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Klein lists ideas from interviews with Schu and other educators:

- Explicitly teaching social skills: "Even the most extroverted kids may need help getting back into the swing of things socially after an extended period of relative isolation at home," says Klein;
- Allowing some students to work alone during lunch and unstructured parts of the day rather than forcing them into unwanted social activities;
- Sticking to a consistent, predictable sequence of activities in each lesson;
- Not rushing instruction (despite the pressure to cover unfinished learning at a rapid pace) and having students periodically do meditative breathing;
- Providing more opportunities for one-on-one, personalized interactions;
- Using apps like Kahoot to "gamify" lessons, increasing student engagement and allowing teachers to make immediate corrections to errors and misconceptions;

- Encouraging students to go over material – for example, watching videos of teacher lectures several times;
- As much as possible, giving students choices on projects and the sequence in which they do their work – for example, deciding to do the "worst first" or waiting till the end of the day to tackle difficult assignments.

"Virtual Learning Was Better for Some Kids. Here's What Teachers Learned from Them" by Alyson Klein in *Education Week*, August 25, 2021 (Vol. 41, #2, p. 9)

Back to page one

3. Skillfully Handling Hot-Button Issues in the Months Ahead

In this *Education Week* article, author/journalist Amanda Ripley says many U.S. schools are experiencing a "superstorm" of fraught issues, including masks, vaccinations, and what parts of American history should and should not be taught. "Having studied high-conflict elections, divorces, gangs, and even civil wars," says Ripley, "I can say that the behavior is chillingly predictable. People become very certain of their own moral righteousness, and they make a lot of mistakes" – which can end up harming children.

But bad outcomes are not inevitable, she says, if we realize the ways in which high conflict is a trap and take these steps:

• *Avoid polarization*. Ripley quotes Nelson Mandela: "There is nobody more dangerous than one who has been humiliated, even when you humiliate him rightly." Leaders need to avoid binary characterizations of others, she says, lower the temperature, and think about stakeholders "as complicated human beings who can change."

• *Articulate the hidden agenda*. Under the surface in high-conflict situations, says Ripley, is often fear. "Sometimes it is justified, sometimes not. Either way, it will just metastasize until it gets surfaced." Leaders need to be curious, ask questions, engage in active listening, acknowledge their own uncertainty, and keep the focus on the kids. "At least half of what people need in conflict is to be heard," she says, "even if they don't get their way in the end."

• *Don't be afraid of "good conflict."* This kind of disagreement can be heated and stressful, says Ripley, but if it's built on a foundation of relationships, it's often productive: "Questions get asked. We experience flashes of anger and frustration – alongside flashes of humor and curiosity. That is the kind of conflict that pushes us to be better people." That will happen only if there's rapport and trust – over time, a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative interactions. Ripley has a few suggestions:

- School leaders standing outside in the morning warmly greeting every student and chatting with parents;
- Inviting the head of the teachers' union to lunch;
- Giving positive feedback to a reporter who wrote a thoughtful article about schools (with a copy to the editor);
- Buying masks with students' favorite sports team logo and giving them out free.

"These fleeting moments matter," concludes Ripley, "and we've had precious few of them for the past 17 months. Think of each connection, no matter how simple, as an investment in your own future sanity."

"Schools Are Facing a High-Conflict 'Superstorm'" by Amanda Ripley in *Education Week*, August 25, 2021 (Vol. 41, #2, p. 24)

Back to page one

4. Strategies to Get Equitable Student Participation in Math Classes

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Marcy Wood (University of Arizona/Tucson) and six colleagues say that in math classes, it's common that some students see themselves (and are seen by others) as less intelligent in that subject. Students might say:

- *I'm not good at math.*
- *I can't do this.*
- *Ask Daniel what this means. I copied it from him.*

Teachers find these students frustrating (and disruptive), may label them *struggling*, *slow*, and *low-achieving,* and give them less-challenging tasks so they won't be overwhelmed. Another approach is putting students in groups in hopes that less-confident students will get more air time.

But these strategies are not effective, say the authors, because they don't get at the root cause of unequal participation. "In particular," they say, "we need to address perceptions of intelligence that mean some students are seen as more entitled to participate than others." Those students are seen as "smart" at mathematics – and it's not necessarily because of what they do in math class: "Students may judge one another's intelligence on the basis of physical attractiveness, popularity, reading ability, social skills, race, gender expression, or first language."

These perceptions are part of a self-perpetuating cycle that leads some students to overparticipate and others to underparticipate. When "smarter" students' contributions are recognized by the teacher and by peers, their confidence gets a boost and they contribute more frequently. They may also call out answers, interrupt, and tell other students what to do. Watching these behaviors, lower-achieving students often hold back and contribute less and less. "As a result," say Wood and colleagues, "high-status students spiral up in status and participate more as low-status students spiral down and participate less."

The authors believe this dynamic can be turned around. First, they say, teachers need to embrace the belief that "*all* students can solve complex mathematical problems, and that each student brings important mathematical strengths to the table." Second, students (working in groups) need to be presented with complex and challenging tasks with multiple entry points and paths to solutions; the problems must challenge students to use a diverse set of abilities, and individual students shouldn't be able to solve them without help from their teammates. Third, teachers need to consistently implement the following "teaching moves":

• *Level the participation playing field*. By calling on students equitably, shutting down overparticipation by some students, and encouraging equal contributions within groups, teachers can change the classroom dynamic and shift students' invidious perceptions of their peers. "These moves," say the authors, "bring more-diverse ideas into the open, providing a more-complex and enriching mathematical problem space."

• *Expand what counts as mathematical competence*. There's a common misconception that students who are quick to solve standard algorithms and equations are mathematically smart, and that often leads to them dominating group interactions. By assigning complex problems and making sure different approaches to solving problems are heard, teachers can change the way students think about math ability – and encourage the participation of students who never thought of themselves as good at the subject.

• *Make "yet" the norm*. When students say they can't solve a problem, the teacher quickly adds, *Yet*. "This additional word," say the authors, "prevents students from using claims about current incompetence as an excuse for nonparticipation. In fact, the word *yet* quietly reinforces a classroom expectation that all students (regardless of status) will become more capable over time." Students may begin prompting each other when a classmate sounds negative while solving a problem.

• *Give students responsibility for managing work*. Wood et al. believe teachers need to have students do many of the tasks that teachers have traditionally shouldered: managing materials, keeping track of the time remaining, reminding teammates to stay on task, ensuring equitable participation, relaying questions to the teacher, making sure the group's ideas are recorded, and checking off completed work. By delegating these tasks and training students to carry them out (being careful not to let overparticipators dominate), teachers build students' self-reliance and free themselves up to focus on students' math learning and progress.

• *Don't hover*. The authors suggest that teachers move around the classroom and observe unobtrusively, not standing so close to a group that students ask for help, but close enough to hear discussions and intervene if students are really off track.

• *Highlight good thinking*. "Once teachers have noticed students' mathematical strengths," say the authors, "they can use this information to raise student status." The best way to do this is publicly recognizing a specific academic contribution from a student who is not regarded as a math whiz. Standing across the group from the student with the idea, the teacher might say, "I think Andrea has an idea that might help you. Andrea, can you explain what you wrote on your paper?"

• *Take only group questions*. Students should understand that when groups are working on problems, the teacher will only answer questions that the group can't answer through its own deliberations. If called over to a group by a student, the teacher should ask a different student, "What is your group's question?" If that student doesn't know the question, the teacher says, "It sounds like you need to talk as a group first. If you still have a question after that, call me back," and walks away. Students learn they need to rely on each other and involve the teacher only if they are truly stuck.

• *Establish the norm that a group isn't finished until everyone understands.* Before presenting their problem solution, one student goes around and makes sure that every student grasps the solution. When the teacher is called over to hear a group's solution, the teacher calls on a student who typically underparticipates, and stops overparticipators from butting in: "Pat, I asked Terry to respond, and I would like to hear from him." If the student called on is explaining the solution well, the teacher should interrupt and call on another student to continue. If a student can't answer the teacher's questions, the teacher walks away, conveying that students need to quiz each other and make sure everyone really understands.

"8 Teaching Moves Supporting Equitable Participation" by Marcy Wood, James Sheldon, Mathew Felton-Koestler, Joy Oslund, Amy Noelle Parks, Sandra Crespo, and Helen Featherstone in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, August 2021 (Vol. 114, #8, pp. 646-651); Wood can be reached at mbwood@email.arizona.edu.

Back to page one

5. Using Dry-Erase Whiteboards in Middle- and High-School Social Studies

In this *History Tech* article, educator/consultant Glenn Wiebe suggests five ways that dry-erase whiteboards can make students' thinking immediately visible to the teacher and classmates and engage them in critical thinking, gathering new information, and activating prior knowledge. You don't have whiteboards? "I can almost guarantee," says Wiebe, "that somewhere in your building is a set of boards in a closet or shelf that someone ordered years ago and isn't being used anymore."

• *Making connections* – The teacher gives students two events or terms and asks them to write phrases on their whiteboards that connect them. Some examples:

- Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis
- The 13th Amendment and the 1965 Voting Rights Act
- The New Deal FDIC and the 2008 Great Recession
- The 1783 Treaty of Paris and the Treaty of Ghent
- The 1868 Japanese Meiji Restoration and the 1300s rise of European merchant guilds

This might be a think-pair-share or a small-group activity, or students might write their answers and then roam around the room comparing and contrasting their ideas with others. For closure, there might be an all-class debate on which answers make the most sense and have the best evidence.

• *A timeline activity* – The teacher shares a series of events in a random sequence and has students use their whiteboards to put them in the correct order. Students could also look at a political cartoon, primary source, or an image of an artifact and jot sentences to explain their significance.

• *Agree/disagree* – The teacher shares a statement – for example, *The judicial branch of the U.S. government is the most powerful of the three* – and students write whether they agree or disagree and why.

• *Make like an archivist* – After viewing an artifact, political cartoon, or primary source, students write captions on their whiteboards indicating how the items should be catalogued by source and context.

• *Rank the importance* – The teacher lists 3-5 primary sources on a topic and students use their whiteboards to sequence them from the most to the least important, with a short phrase by each giving their reasoning.

Of course all these activities can be implemented with digital whiteboards like Jamboard or with a new product – Whiteboard.fi – which allows the teacher to create digital student whiteboards that the teacher can monitor.

"Whiteboards. The Old-Fashioned Dry-Erase Kind. And Yes, They Still Work" by Glenn Wiebe in *History Tech*, August 26, 2021; Wiebe can be reached at glennw@essdack.org.

Back to page one

6. Key Elements of an Elementary ELA/Special Education Teacher Team

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, learning specialist Sarah Riggs Johnson says that writing is especially challenging for her elementary special needs students as she pushes in to ELA classes and pulls students out for intervention time. "Writing is an incredibly complex task," she says. "It involves the instant integration of several components – handwriting and letter formation (and later typing), spacing and formatting on the page, spelling, grammar, sentence formation, adding punctuation – all while holding your ideas, and some sort of organizational scheme for those ideas, in your memory." For students with language-based learning disabilities, it's no wonder that writing can be a "cognitive bottleneck."

For these students to become proficient writers, Johnson believes a two-person teaching team is essential. She suggests eleven key elements for successful ELA/specialist collaboration:

• *Time to plan* – "The biggest impact a school leader can make in the quality of instruction for all learners," she says, "is to give co-teachers common planning time." When she first became a learning specialist, Johnson was lucky to work in a school where she and the three humanities teachers she worked with had 55 minutes together each week. They used the time to plan writing workshops, design social studies lessons, analyze student work, and make sure all students' needs were met.

• *An equal partnership* – "I like to think of it as a psychologist and a sociologist working together," says Johnson. "One is focused more on how an individual is functioning; the other needs to be focused on the good of the group… As a learning specialist, I am not an island in knowing what's best for students, even students with learning differences. It works best when there is shared ownership; when we can see their growth as 'our' shared goal." One way to accomplish this is the two teachers rotating groups, so each works with the full range of student abilities and the special education teacher is not pigeon-holed in one role. It's also important for the learning specialist to take part in class competitions, field trips, and celebrations.

• *Reading student work together* – This gives both members of the team insights on how to respond to "the good, the bad, and the ugly of students' writing," says Johnson, and cuts in half the workload of giving written feedback.

• *Practicing 'less is more'* – "When it comes to feedback," she says, "many students are overwhelmed by too many comments, just as they used to be with too much red ink." It's best to focus on "one chunk, one scene, one paragraph at a time," giving strategic suggestions and specific praise, some in writing, some face to face.

• *Using models* – Students can learn a lot from exemplars of good writing – opening paragraphs, building suspense, descriptions of a setting, a fight scene, explaining an expert's quotation. Teachers should be constantly on the prowl for first-rate prose and poetry, including from other students (de-identified).

• *Scanning word lists* – Finding more-vivid synonyms for overused words like *walked, blue, big,* and *sad* helps students improve their writing – even feel like poets. It's especially important for students with special needs to be exposed to new ways of expressing thoughts and understand the nuanced differences among words.

• *Staying together* – Johnson believes in keeping students with disabilities in regular classes as much as possible, especially for writing instruction. "Students who struggle learn more than you think from their peers," she says, "even if their writing skill is not comparable."

• *Letting ELA work guide intervention* – Johnson loved it when one of her students said, *Wait a minute, we just talked about this in a writing workshop today!* "There is magic," she says, "in teachers working together to reinforce the same knowledge and skills."

• *Showing progress* – Students and teachers can track and celebrate growth toward IEP and SMART goals via a sequence of writing samples. Seeing a record of incremental improvement is highly motivating to students.

• *Taking revising and editing one step at a time* – Students might start by re-reading a draft, then checking the spelling, then revisiting the whole piece. Johnson sometimes has students read a composition backwards; after doing this, one student said, "Oh yeah, this is definitely too long to be one sentence!"

• *Combatting anxiety and perfectionism* – "Some students struggle with writing because, subconsciously, the fact that they cannot *write* on the level of the books they love to *read* frustrates them," says Johnson. Bridging this gap is a constant challenge for teacher teams as they instill in students an ethos of continuous improvement and an appreciation of the work they create each day.

"How ELA and Special Ed Collaboration Can Produce Great Student Writing" by Sarah Riggs Johnson in *Cult of Pedagogy*, July 25, 2021

Back to page one

7. Recommended Readaloud Books for the Primary Grades

In this *School Library Journal* article, Rachel Mulligan (Rutgers University) says that with most schools back for in-person instruction, readalouds can be even more dramatic and engaging, "letting listeners interact with the book, its elements, and fellow audience members,

and opening communal space for queries, laughter, observations, and discussions…" Mulligan recommends ten picture books that blend "complexity, diversity, and artistry" (click the link below for brief summaries and cover images):

- *Scribble Stones* by Diane Alber (2019), grade K-2
- *The Paper Bird* by Lisa Anchin, (2021), grade K-2
- *I Dream of Popo* by Livia Blackburne, illustrated by Julia Kuo (2021), grade K-2
- *Three Ways to Be Brave* by Karla Clark, illustrated by Jeff Ostberg (2021), grade P-K
- *A Life Made by Hand: The Story of Ruth Asawa* by Andrea D'Aquino (2019), grade 2-5
- *Little Red Writing Book* by Joan Holub, illustrated by Melissa Sweet (2013), grade 2-5
- *The Smile Shop* by Satoshi Kitamura (2020), grade K-2
- *Goodnight, Ganesha* by Nadia Salomon, illustrated by Poonan Mistry (2021), grade P-1
- *Diner Dogs* by Eric Seltzer, illustrated by Tom Disbury (2021), grade P-K
- *Untitled* by Timothy Young, (2021), grade K-3

"Great Books, Live and in Person" by Rachel Mulligan in *School Library Journal*, August 2021 (Vol. 67, #8, pp. 40-42)

Back to page one

8. Short Items:

a. An Amazing Collection of Challenging Math Problems – After decades working with middle- and high-school students, Ohio educator Rudd Crawford is launching the Stella's Stunners website, with scores of intriguing, non-routine math problems, organized by difficulty and genre. Enjoy!

"Stella's Stunners" by Rudd Crawford, 2021; Crawford is at ruddac@hotmail.com.

Back to page one

b. A History Website to Build Critical Internet Skills – The All About Explorers site challenges students to spot bogus information on the Web – for example, about Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan. The site even lists two bogus authors with humorous names, and then reveals who the authors really are.

"All About Explorers" by Gerald Aungst and Lauren Zucker

Back to page one

© Copyright 2021 Marshall Memo LLC, all rights reserved; permission is granted to clip and share individual article summaries with colleagues for educational purposes, being sure to include the author/publication citation and mention that it's a Marshall Memo summary.

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 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.

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

Website:

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a running count of articles)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (bio, writings, consulting)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 16+ years

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
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
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
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
Teaching Tolerance
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