Marshall Memo 950

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 29, 2022

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Repetition is the mother of retention."
William Borders recalling an old saying (quoted it item #4)

"At the end of the day, what each of us really wants is for our children to be cherished, seen, understood, and supported fully through mistakes, successes, and quirky individuality. The unconditional love that teachers bestow on students is the ingredient that makes the rest possible."
Raechel Barone and Karen Engels (see item #1)

High-school history teachers quoted in "What's Actually Being Taught About U.S. History" by Kassie Bracken, Jacey Fortin, Mark Boyer, Rebecca Lieberman, and Noah Throop in *The New York Times*, August 22, 2022:

"I think it's the job of a history teacher to tell the full, complex story of U.S. history."
Karalee Wong Nakatsuka, Arcadia, California

"I want my kids to win. And winning is passing the AP exam."
Michael Hjort, Round Rock, Texas

"That line between the divisive subjects. That's where the learning takes place. That's where you want to be."
Shane Phipps, Indianapolis

"I'm not teaching black history for black students. I'm teaching all history."
Valencia Abbott, Wentworth, North Carolina

"I tell them that there are three causes of the Civil War. The first cause is slavery. The second cause is slavery. And the third cause is slavery."
Mike Klapka, Largo, Florida

1. The Pillars of a Truly Good Education

In this *Washington Post* article, veteran elementary teachers Raechel Barone (South Burlington, Vermont) and Karen Engels (Cambridge, Massachusetts) suggest six "pillars for successful classrooms" as we enter a new school year:

• *Love, trust, and belonging* – At the end of the day," say Barone and Engels, "what each of us really wants is for our children to be cherished, seen, understood, and supported fully through mistakes, successes, and quirky individuality. The unconditional love that teachers bestow on students is the ingredient that makes the rest possible… Love is also the ingredient that allows families to develop trust in educators."

• *Emotional safety and well-being* – Children cannot make academic progress if their emotional needs aren't met, say Barone and Engels. In our concern to catch up on unfinished learning, we must not skimp on the parts of the school day where students learn (or re-learn) the core skills of being with each other – and that includes playtime, recess, lunch, and snack.

• *Affirmation of full identity* – "The cultural and linguistic knowledge, as well as the breadth of experiences that children bring with them, enhances classroom learning exponentially and cannot be underestimated," say the authors. "We know that it is relationships with people whose world views and experiences are different from our own that lead to empathy and understanding. This has to move beyond shallow efforts to celebrate multiculturalism…"

• *Agency and power* – Far too many adolescents feel hopeless about the future, they say, which is a sign that they feel powerless in the face of climate change, mass shootings, racial tensions, economic inequality, and other problems. Sheltering students from all this – trying to prevent them from feeling uncomfortable – only feeds their lack of efficacy. We need to raise children, say Barone and Engels, who believe in their ability to make positive change, and this comes from engaging in projects that have direct, meaningful impact in their communities – planting vegetables in a school garden, a "kindness club," creating public service announcements on how families can reduce their carbon footprint, singing to elders at a nursing home.

• *Unstoppable curiosity* – "Truly encouraging children's curiosity requires allowing time for discoveries that could have been 'taught' and accepting unexpected outcomes," say Barone and Engels. "It requires the flexibility to spend more time on a particular topic that captivates a class's passion, and to deviate from the pacing guides that tend to march from one idea to the next without sufficient time for learning that's 'sticky.' For inspired learning to

occur, teachers must be trusted to make timely curricular decisions about breadth vs. depth, whole-class vs. small-group learning, and assessing through different modalities."

• *Opportunity to master core skills* – "Of course any successful school must ensure that students master rigorous skills," say the authors. "We know that children who struggle to master these skills in elementary school are at great risk for poor academic achievement in later years. The stakes are high."

But a relentless focus on math and reading proficiency measured by high-stakes tests neglects the other five pillars of a good education: love, emotional safety, identity, agency, and curiosity. "The good news," conclude Barone and Engels, "is that educators already know intuitively what's necessary to create classrooms where students, and teachers themselves, can experience the magic of learning and community."

"Six Things Kids Need in School in Today's Politicized World" by Raechel Barone and Karen Engels in *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2022

Back to page one

2. Teaching Students to be Assertive About Boundaries

In this *Education Week* article, Hawaii elementary teacher Lory Walker Peroff describes attending an outdoor bluegrass festival with her father and two daughters. As the girls frolicked around, Peroff noticed a man in his fifties approaching her 10-year old. He held out his hands and asked her to dance. "She, like many kids her age, is being raised to value kindness," says Peroff. "She has been taught to be polite to adults but also to be wary of strangers. I could see her mind racing. What should she do? Be kind and accept this offer or run away in stranger danger?"

Peroff didn't wait; she walked over and pulled her daughter away. As they left, the man said, "You are a very beautiful little girl." True enough, thought Peroff, but her 10-year-old is also innocent; the parent's dilemma is how and when to broach the subject of predators and other dangers.

In light of this incident, and other events of the last year, Peroff decided that her usual beginning-of-the-year routine with her fourth graders needs to go beyond creating a kind and respectful classroom environment. "This year, I would like to highlight the importance of awareness and self-advocacy," she says. "Whether it be an unwanted advance, an offensive comment, or an uncomfortable situation, students should be equipped to define their boundaries and keep themselves safe." Here's what she plans:

• *Set up a "Yuck it" bucket*. Students will be able to anonymously share anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, in school or elsewhere. There will be another bucket for things that make students smile.

• *Practice assertive I-statements*. Having identified a situation where they feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or bullied, students learn a three-part response: *I feel… When you… Could you please…*

• *Role-play*. Peroff suggests using hypothetical situations, ones pulled from the *Yuck it bucket*, and sentence starters to get students acting out effective responses. Students can

experiment with the best tone of voice and body language to confidently convey an assertive response.

"I will never know the true intentions of the man at the concert," she concludes. "But I do know that it is my responsibility to teach students not only to be kind but also to be safe. I hope that students, like my daughter, will not be at a loss for words when an unsafe person approaches them at a concert, on the street, in their neighborhood, or even at school. Every student leaving my classroom will have the confidence to say, 'Your behavior is making me uncomfortable. Leave me alone.'"

"Don't Let Kindness Stand in the Way of Safety" by Lory Walker Peroff in *Education Week*, August 17, 2022 (Vol. 42, #1, p. 23)

Back to page one

3. Core Activities of Effective Teacher Teams

In this article in *Edutopia*, Paige Tutt draws on the work of consultant Elisa MacDonald to recommend three activities for grade-level and subject-area teams as they try to have productive meetings in jam-packed school days. "There's no need to make it overly complicated," says Tutt. "By keeping the work lean and focused on just a few discrete areas, teachers can benefit in spite of time constraints." It's also a good idea to start small and build momentum over time.

• *Reading and listening together* – Discussing an article [perhaps a Marshall Memo summary], a cartoon, a controversial quote, a video, or a podcast with colleagues has more impact than solo reading, says Tutt. It provides "a rich opportunity for team members to broaden their thinking and deepen their understanding of the content as they hear new ideas and challenge their own perspectives." MacDonald is not a fan of discussion protocols, which she believes can be "time-consuming or restrictive." Instead, she suggests a well-formulated prompt to structure and direct the conversation and encourage thoughtful contributions from all members.

• *Observing colleagues' classes* – MacDonald believes this is like "seeing a movie with friends, catching a bite afterwards, and talking about what you saw together" – compared to seeing the movie alone. With clear, streamlined goals for peer observations – what to look for, how to take notes and gather data, whether to observe live or via video, how and when to debrief – teachers feel less nervous about being observed and overwhelmed with feedback and can get valuable insights from having other pairs of eyes in their classrooms.

• *Looking together at student work* – There's great value in teacher teams looking at kids' writing, problem-solving, and common assessments. MacDonald says these meetings are most productive when work samples are authentic (they reflect a genuine issue or challenge), relevant (linked to the team's inquiry goals), and current (so teachers can immediately "reteach, intervene, or enrich when students need it").

"3 Habits of Highly Effective Teacher Teams" by Paige Tutt in *Edutopia*, August 19, 2022

Back to page one

4. Adam Grant on the Power of Repetition

In this online article, Adam Grant (University of Pennsylvania) says that repeating important messages "is vital to effective communication." But people tend to err on the side of saying too little; an analysis of thousands of 360-feedback assessments showed that leaders were much more likely to be criticized for under-communicating than the opposite; another study found that people who under-communicated were seen as unqualified to lead because they lacked empathy.

"The greatest barrier to communication," says Grant, "is the illusion that it occurred. Reinforcing a message makes it more familiar and more memorable… When you hesitate to repeat your ideas, you don't just fail to get your point across – you also come across as if you don't care." Of course it's possible to overdo it and become redundant and tiresome, but that's not often the problem.

Grant cites a famous example: Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 speech at the March on Washington. Conferring with his aides the night before, King was advised against using an "I have a dream" cadence that had become a regular part of his church sermons. "It's trite, it's cliché," said one advisor. "You've used it too many times already."

But as he delivered the speech on the Mall in front of 250,000 people, King felt something was missing. A little over halfway through, he put aside his prepared text and ad-libbed the rest of the speech, repeating "I have a dream…" eight times. That, of course, was what everyone remembered, and it was a watershed moment in the civil rights movement.

"Great communication is like a song," says Grant. "It isn't enough to hear it once. You don't know the melody until you hear it multiple times. You don't know the chorus by heart until you've repeated it many times. If you want to be heard, it helps to spell out your idea more than once. If you want to move people, you have to say it more often. If people aren't telling you you're repeating yourself, you might not be communicating enough."

In an online comment on this article, William Borders said he remembered hearing as a young man, "Repetition is the mother of retention."

"Why Repeating Yourself Is a Good Thing" by Adam Grant in *Meta Bulletin*, July 31, 2022; Grant can be reached at adam@giveandtake.com.

Back to page one

5. Orchestrating First-Rate Classroom Discussions (continued)

In the second part of his *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Jay Howard (Butler University) says every teacher's challenge with discussions – once students know what's expected and are ready (although not necessarily eager) to dive in – is "keeping the conversation focused, fair, and inviting for all students." Here are his suggestions:

• *Slow down the dominant talkers*. Classmates have an ambivalent relationship with the eager beavers. On the one hand, those who immediately raise their hands and get into a dialogue with the teacher take the load off others, making it less likely they'll be cold-called.

"On the other hand," says Howard, "students can be annoyed by those who talk too much or share too much tangential, personal information." Dominant talkers are usually extroverts who are comfortable thinking on their feet, whereas more-introverted students want to gather their thoughts before sharing. To them, being cold-called can feel like a hostile act. Howard suggests:

- Have students think/pair/share.
- Say, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet" or "I've heard a lot from the front of the room; now I want to know what those of you in the back are thinking."
- Have students collect three poker chips as they enter the class and put one in a basket each time they speak; everyone is limited to using three chips, and everyone has to use all three.
- Have students hold a Nerf ball when they speak and choose who to pass it to for the next comment.

• *Strategically use assessments*. At the beginning of class, the teacher might ask all students to write an answer to a question on the reading and then randomly call on students to share their responses, creating a natural segue to the main part of the class. Alternatively, students could be required to take an online assessment an hour or two before class; the teacher quickly reviews the responses and shares several answers (anonymously), asking what made it a particularly good response – or how it could be improved.

A variation: students get questions on the reading before they do it, which helps them focus on the most important content and ideas. This works best when the questions make connections to students' lives and get at the lesson's big ideas. Eliciting students' responses and then using them to summarize key points is also a good way to improve long-term memory. "The goal here is to help make the learning more obvious," says Howard. "But in the process, you can also keep the discussion focused."

• *Shine a light on the "muddiest" point*. In the last few minutes of class, have students write a brief summary of the idea that was least clear to them. The teacher collects and reads the responses, providing insights into gaps between the intended, the taught, and the learned curriculum, and starts the next class with an improved explanation.

• *Encourage comments from students of all genders and backgrounds*. Of course it's important not to ask anyone to speak on behalf of their group, but broad participation in class discussions is important. One technique is to mention ideas a marginalized person has voiced in a test, paper, or previous class. Providing discussion questions ahead of class is especially helpful to students who might be hesitant to participate or suffer from "imposter syndrome" – believing they don't belong or don't have a right to speak up. Another technique is having students discuss a question in pairs before asking them to share with the whole class.

Howard concludes by sharing his suggestions on several common dilemmas with class discussions:

• *Grading class participation* – The argument against this is that some students are painfully shy and raising the stakes on speaking in class can cause great anxiety and be seen as unkind and unreasonable. "What's more," says Howard, "it's inherently unfair to judge the

quality of students' fleeting comments in the midst of a class discussion. The task becomes impossible as the number of students increases." The result can be that extroverted students get an unfair grading boost based on their personality type rather than the quality of their ideas.

The argument *for* grading class participation, says Howard, is that teachers routinely "ask students to do a variety of things that may make them uncomfortable" – for example, taking multiple-choice or essay tests, doing extensive written assignments, reading difficult texts, discussing sensitive subjects, and engaging in quantitative reasoning. "Sometimes being uncomfortable is necessary to facilitate learning," he says. "Why should we treat class discussions differently?"

But grading class discussions is inherently "a highly subjective endeavor," says Howard. "It's hard enough to track who speaks and how often, let alone assess the quality of the contributions." He suggests an alternative: having students use a rubric to assess their own participation at the end of each class – or three or four times each semester – and comparing students' self-assessments with the teacher's impressions. This has the dual advantage of getting students thinking critically about their own role in discussions and setting up an interesting dialogue with the teacher.

• *What if a student's remark is incorrect or misguided?* This is going to happen at some point in class discussions, says Howard, and although harshly correcting off-base comments is, of course, a bad idea, "you don't want those to be the ones that other students remember from the discussion." He suggests these strategies:

- Affirm, then correct. Look for something that can be appreciated and then address what's incorrect – for example, "You got the first step correct but then ran into a common misunderstanding," or "Okay, that's one strategy. But it's not as effective as others. What's another approach?"
- Play devil's advocate. This is especially appropriate when a student shares an opinion without evidence. "That summarizes one position. If you wanted to rebut the position Josh just articulated, what evidence would you present?" or "Josh, assume for a moment that you believed the opposite. How would you challenge the argument you just made?"
- Be respectful but clear when a student is out in left field. "You've lost me. Sorry, I am slow on the uptake today. Explain the connection for me." Or ask others in the class: "We're not on that subject yet. It is easy to get off track here. Who can help us out and redirect us to finish what we were discussing?"

• *Handling current news and controversial topics*. If it's germane to the curriculum, these should be open for discussion, says Howard. "In fact, such topics may be an ideal means of teaching students how to engage in reasoned dialogue, critique, and critical thinking." But there are potential land mines. His suggestions:

- Relevance to course content is the best criterion – without distorting the curriculum in order to be cool and relevant.
- Be cautious about taking a position as the teacher – although there is an argument for doing this.

- Be clear about the ground rules established up front about civility, depersonalized debate, and kind-but-committed disagreement. "Ground rules are also helpful when a student – intentionally or unintentionally – makes a racist, sexist, or homophobic comment," says Howard. The teacher reminds the class of prior agreements about unfair generalizations about groups. Of course this is easier when the person doesn't realize the comment could be heard as offensive; an intentionally hurtful comment is more difficult to handle. At that point, Howard says, the teacher might name the ground rule and move on to another subject.
- Ask students to take sides – and then switch. Have students huddle with those who hold a similar view, develop a list of arguments for their position, and share them with the class. Then groups are asked to take the opposite position: *Imagine you are an advocate for the other view. How would you challenge your initial position? Where are the weaknesses in your argument?* Groups once again report to the class. This approach, says Howard, helps "soften some strident views."

"Effective class discussions rarely occur by chance," he concludes. "They happen because (a) you've structured your course to ensure that they happen, and (b) you've established from Day 1 that students will be expected to take part in discussions."

"How to Hold a Better Class Discussion" by Jay Howard in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 13, 2022; Howard can be reached at jrhoward@butler.edu; see Memo 949 for the first part of this article.

Back to page one

6. Unintended Consequences in a College-Focused High School

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Lori Noll (University of Pennsylvania) reports on her study of a urban charter high school of over 400 students with a strong "college-for-all" ethos. Dozens of college pennants hung above the school's vestibule, preparation for college was heavily emphasized in classrooms and counseling sessions, and the school's motto included the exhortation, *We Graduate Twice* – first from high school, then from college. The school's leaders "considered student achievement the civil rights issue of our time and their purpose for existing," says Noll, "assuming that improved test scores lead to college and thus increased opportunities throughout students' lives."

After a seven-month ethnographic study of the school and a follow-up a year later, Noll concluded that there are "critical gaps in this logic." The reason: students' track record once they got to college. A year after the dramatic "signing day" ceremony in which hundreds of students in this charter network were lauded for their college plans, 13 of the 35 "focal" students Noll studied most closely as seniors were no longer enrolled in a postsecondary institution, six had transferred from four-year to community colleges, two had moved from one four-year college to another, and only one had transferred from a community to a four-year college.

Why the discouraging results? True, students were accepted in the types of colleges the school thought they should attend, and their college persistence was better than for graduates of traditional public schools in the community. Noll believes there are seven reasons the school fell short of its lofty and well-intentioned aspirations for students:

• The school's commitment to test preparation and a heavily scripted approach to college admission resulted in heavy staffing in one area and fewer resources in others – for example, only one social worker for the secondary grades. In addition, college seminars crowded out electives in the curriculum. "Research demonstrates," says Noll, "that students' relationships with school staff, access to extracurricular activities, perceptions of school safety, and satisfaction with their schools also mediate their outcomes." Requiring students to follow one pathway toward college "meant acting against their own beliefs and preferences" – which undermined staying in college through graduation.

• The school's three full-time counselors for grades 10 to 12, says Noll, had "immense workloads as they were intimately involved in assembling and tracking hundreds of college applications in addition to their many other duties. As a result, they turned to mass counseling strategies, formulas for decision making, and standard definitions of 'fit,' which failed to help many students negotiate the nuances and dilemmas inherent to college choice." One result was that many students were steered toward colleges with poor retention rates.

• Teachers' and counselors' constant emphasis on college preparation and attendance worked for some students, but for those who remained unconvinced that college was for them, and for those with other interests, it did not. For example, one student wanted to investigate the effects of racism in higher education, but her "cultural resources," says Noll, "were dampened in the college choice process."

• The school promoted "a narrow conceptualization of the college choice process aligned with its ideology rather than helping students pursue the choices they wanted," she says. "Most students could not obtain support from their counselors to pursue nonsanctioned schools or noncollege options, limiting their potential pathways. While students were able to navigate higher education's bureaucratic processes with their counselors' help, many were unable to do so when they tried to pursue unapproved schools independently. This experience positioned students as passive and sometimes powerless to influence the inner workings of institutions, which may disadvantage them in future bureaucratic processes that gatekeep access to resources like jobs and housing."

• The school inadvertently conveyed contradictory messages about going to college. On the one hand, students were told they were all "college material" and heard about graduates' high college enrollment rates. But the school's "self-conscious and effortful college focus," says Noll, "… communicated that college attendance was so precarious that students and staff needed to attend to it at all times."

• When students became aware of graduates' low college persistence rates, they worried more about their own futures. "Rather than view themselves as inevitable college goers and graduates," says Noll, "most focal students considered college a feasible but risky option requiring vigilance to succeed."

• The school focused heavily on college admission but didn't develop "the types of interactional skills, attitudes, and dispositions that transfer to other contexts," she says. "Paradoxically, [the school's] college program undermined students' development of embodied forms of cultural capital like feelings of ease and entitlement characteristic of cultural capital in affluent students… Even in schools with caring and committed staff, college-going cultures are limited in their ability to advantage nondominant students by transmitting dominant cultural resources."

"For many middle- and upper-class students," concludes Noll, "high test scores and college-going are expected side effects of a well-rounded education rather than its purpose. Accountability systems task schools that serve minoritized students to promote similar educational achievement and college outcomes without the wealth of resources and structural advantages that facilitate outcomes in more-affluent groups. Policymakers may assume that any school accountability measures are a step in the right direction of more-equitable educational outcomes. However, this study suggests that the details of accountability policies can have unintended consequences and students' well-being and futures depend on careful decision making."

"Accountability and (In)Congruence in a No-Excuses School College-Going Culture" by Lori Noll in *American Educational Research Journal*, February 2022 (Vol. 59, #1, pp. 112-145); Noll can be reached at lorinoll@gse.upenn.edu.

Back to page one

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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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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
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
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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